



“We All Are Witnesses”

Acts 1-5

Dave LeFevre

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Introduction

Acts was written by the same author as the gospel of Luke, as a second part to his story about Jesus, and to the same person, Theophilus. While the gospel covers the life and teachings of Jesus, Acts continues that story into the early church, showing its growth and spread from Judea to Samaria to the Gentiles. Even so, there are several examples where a topic or concept introduced in the gospel of Luke is continued in Acts. It is likely that the two were divided because together they exceeded the standard length of a scroll—there was too much content for a single parchment document.

The book was possibly written during the time of Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome, about A.D. 57-59. Luke was clearly a companion of Paul (see Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 1:24) and had firsthand knowledge of his activities. Little is known about Luke himself, but a second-century source said that he was a “Syrian of Antioch, by profession a physician,” and that he followed Paul until the apostle’s martyrdom. “He died at the age of eighty-four in Boeotia [a region in central Greece], full of the Holy Spirit.”¹

Though it’s called “The Acts of the Apostles,” a better title might be “The Acts of Peter and Paul.” Acts is divided roughly in two, with chapters 1-12 having Peter as the main character (though with some good details about Stephen, Philip, James, and others), and chapters 13-28 mainly focused on Paul. The contents of Acts are generally not as well-known as those of the four gospels. We don’t have holidays that highlight events from Acts; there are not as many paintings covering these events; the places are often less familiar than those of the accounts of Jesus’ life; and while the story is about Jesus’ church, the book focuses on the activities of his apostles, not Christ himself. But the book does give us the only detailed look at the early days of the Church after the resurrection of Jesus, covering a period of about thirty years. It takes the gospel from provincial Galilee and Judea into the heart of the Greek and Roman world. And it introduces us to Paul, the enemy of the church turned bold messenger.

One characteristic of Acts is a shift in chapter 16 from second- and third-person narrative to first—the “we” chapters, as they are often called. This places the author as an eyewitness of most of the events starting at that point in the narrative, or at least drawing on eyewitness testimony.

An overall outline for the book of Acts is as follows (with this week’s lesson material in bold):

- **The Ascension (1:1-11)**
- **In Jerusalem and Judea (1:12 – 6:7)**
- From Jerusalem to Antioch (6:8 – 12:24)
- In Syria and Galatia (12:25 – 16:5)
- In Western Asia and Europe (16:6 – 19:20)
- Paul’s Imprisonment (19:21 – 28:31)

The Ascension (1:1-11)

Introduction – Acts 1:1-5

1:1 **The former treatise.** Or, ‘In my first word.’ This refers back to the gospel of Luke, that told “all that Jesus began both to do and teach.”

¹ Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:220.

1:1 **Theophilus**. This is the same person referred to in Luke 1:3, where Luke called him *kratistos* or “most excellent,” which is, usually applied to someone of the Roman equestrian order (a high social position, just under senators). He was perhaps a new Gentile convert who supported Luke during the writing of his works.² His name means ‘loved of God’ or ‘friend of God.’

1:2 **the day in which he was taken up**. Acts being a continuation of Luke, this story of Christ’s ascension was first told in Luke 24:51, then retold to start Acts in this chapter, tying the two books together.

1:3 **alive after his passion**. It is from this verse in the KJV that we get the term Christ’s “passion” (Greek *paschō*),’ referring to his suffering and death.

1:3 **being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God**. There is precious little in the New Testament regarding Jesus’ teachings during this period. Among apocryphal writings related to the New Testament, though, this is a period of intense interest. A host of gospels, acts, and letters attributed to many of the apostles give examples of things Jesus taught during this period. These works are generally considered fiction by most scholars, but Latter-day Saints are challenged to examine them closely in the spirit of D&C 91 to find those things which are true. Kent Brown and Wilfred Griggs note six themes that come out of these writings:³

1. A **focus on the creation story** found in Genesis, including the fall and expulsion from the garden. Some accounts also talk about a heavenly council, war, and expulsion of rebellious offspring.
2. The concept that those who purify themselves from all evil are going to be with the Savior while those who turn away from that knowledge or who don’t learn “to whom they belong” during mortality will go to a **spirit prison** where they can be taught and released by “being connected with another in whom the spirit of Life is.”
3. **Secrecy** is enjoined upon all those who receive these teachings, that they “not give these things for anything of the world.”
4. References to **rituals** are common, including baptisms, sacred meals, washings, anointings, and special clothing.
5. **Marriage** is a requirement to reach the highest of the three heavens. In some documents, Jesus himself gives the sacred teachings to his apostles and their wives.
6. A **gloomy future** is in store for true believers in this life. They will suffer and be persecuted, but that is necessary for them to become like Jesus. False teachers will do damage, defiling true religion while using Peter’s name to lead men astray. But they should keep hope for one day “immortal thought will be renewed” and righteousness will prevail.

1:4 **wait for the promise of the Father**. This refers to the gift of the Holy Ghost (see vv. 5 and 8) but also more. D&C 95:8-10 alludes to this event and ties “the promise of the Father” to the temple and the promised endowment of power from on high.

1:5 **ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost**. To be “baptized” is to be immersed, cleansed, and overwhelmed. The Spirit has the power to do all those things when it comes upon us.

The ascension of Jesus – Acts 1:6-11

1:6 **wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?** ‘Now that you’ve suffered and atoned, is this also when you’ll come as the powerful Messiah, establishing your kingdom and freeing us from Roman oppression?’ They wanted to know if it was time to establish a free Israelite nation. In verse 7 he basically answered, ‘Don’t worry about that right now.’

² Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:221.

³ S. Kent Brown and C. Wilfred Griggs, “The Postresurrection Ministry,” in Millet, *Acts to Revelation*, 20f; see also Hugh Nibley, “*Evangelium Quadraginta Dierum: The Forty-day Mission of Christ—The Forgotten Heritage*,” *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, 10f.

1:8 **ye shall receive power**. With the immersion of the Holy Ghost comes power (*dynamis*, strength or ability), which allows the disciples to witness of Jesus in all the earth.

1:8 **in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth**. This verse is a table of contents of sorts, showing the pattern of preaching that Luke demonstrates in the rest of the book, as outlined in this table:⁴

Reference	Period	AD (est.)
Acts 1:1 – 6:7	Period 1: Evangelism among Jews in Jerusalem and Judea	30-33
Acts 6:8 – 9:31	Period 2: Hellenistic and Samaritan outreach; conversion of Saul	33-37
Acts 9:32 – 12:24	Period 3: Gentile outreach in Cilicia, Caesarea, and Antioch	37-47
Acts 12:25 – 16:5	Period 4: Paul and Barnabas' work in Syria and Galatia	47-48
Acts 16:6 – 19:20	Period 5: Paul's ministry in Western Asia and Europe	49-53
Acts 19:21 – 28:31	Period 6: Events that led Paul to Rome	53-59

Each of these periods ends with a description by Luke of the progress of the work:

- Acts 6:7 – “The number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly”
- Acts 9:31 – “Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria”
- Acts 12:24 – “The word of God grew and multiplied”
- Acts 16:5 – “So were the churches established in the faith”
- Acts 19:20 – “So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed”
- Acts 28:30-31 – “And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house . . . teaching all those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ”

Though we have no scriptural record of the activities of most of the apostles, early Christian sources have them traveling and preaching from India to what is today western Europe, as well as north into Russia and south into Africa. They truly took the good news “unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

1:9 **a cloud received him**. This same word (*nephelē*) is used in the LXX to signify the *shekinah* or the divine presence as represented in the cloud that hovered over the tabernacle in the wilderness (e.g., Exodus 13:21) and Solomon's temple at its dedication (e.g., 1 Kings 8:10-11). In Luke 9:34-35, Jesus and the disciples were surrounded by a cloud when Jesus was transfigured, also representing the presence of God who spoke to them.

1:10 **two men stood by them in white apparel**. These angelic messengers could well have been the same two at the tomb forty days earlier (Luke 24:1-4), and based on the similarity of language, the same two at the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:29-31), Moses and Elijah. Moses represented the Law and Elijah the prophets, both of which were fulfilled in Jesus' ministry (Luke 24:44).

1:11 **shall so come in like manner**. When Jesus comes back to the earth to rule and be the conquering Messiah, he will come in the clouds of heaven (meaning, from the presence of God; see Matthew 24:30; 26:64; and Mark 14:62; compare Daniel 7:13).

⁴ McRay, *Paul*, 86.

In Jerusalem and Judea (1:12 – 6:7)

Matthias chosen as the new apostle – Acts 1:12-26

1:12 **a sabbath day's journey.** The Pharisees had decreed that one could travel two thousand cubits—about three thousand feet or just over one-half mile—on a Sabbath without violating that day.⁵ This means it they were likely on the back side of the Mount of Olives, toward Bethany.

1:13 **they went into an upper room.** The list of the Eleven compares to those in Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; and Luke 6:14-16, except that Judas Iscariot is missing, of course. Curiously, Luke's two lists have the same names but not in the same order (though still evidently organized in three groups):

Luke 6:14-16	Acts 1:13
Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John	Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew
Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas	Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew
James the <i>son</i> of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes, and Judas <i>the brother</i> of James, and Judas Iscariot	James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James

The difference in order in the first group does not appear to reflect anything more than Luke's desire to put John closer to Peter in the order since he is going to portray them together in several scenes. There is no apparent reason to switch the order of the second group.

1:14 **with the women.** "The women" refers to the same group Luke mentioned in his resurrection narratives (see Luke 23-24), another example of continuation between the two books.

1:14 **Mary the mother of Jesus,** Mary stayed in Jerusalem (with John, according to that gospel). This is the last mention of Mary in the New Testament. It seems fitting that she would be there united in prayer with Jesus' disciples.

1:14 **and his brethren.** Jesus' brothers appear to have accepted his messiahship (which they didn't before; see John 7:5). There were at least four: James (or more accurately, Jacob), who will figure prominently in Acts and Paul's letters; Joseph (or Joses); Judas (or Jude), who will write a New Testament letter; and Simon (see Mark 6:4).

1:15 **Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples.** This is the first of Peter's short recorded speeches in Acts (see 2:14 below). He may have stood up to be better heard in the large crowd, or because he was quoting scripture (Jews generally stood out of respect when reading scripture and sat to offer commentary).

1:15 **an hundred and twenty.** There may be more meaning here than just 'a lot of people.' One hundred twenty is the number required by Jewish law for a community to legally convene its own council or *Sanhedrin*.⁶ Luke is assuring us that the business the apostles transacted next was within their legal rights under Jewish law. In like manner, Joseph Smith had five other men join him in organizing the Church in 1830, per New York state law.

1:16 **David spake before concerning Judas.** With nearly two months of reflection, Peter had seen at least two psalms that he felt was an inspired prediction of Judas' betrayal (v. 20).

1:17 **obtained part of this ministry.** Judas shared in the labors and rewards of the ministry with the other apostles.

1:18 **this man purchased a field.** Matthew 27:7 indicates that the chief priests purchased the field with the money that Judas returned, while Acts points to Judas himself purchasing it. This seeming contradiction would be

⁵ The argument apparently was a cross-interpretation of Exodus 16:29, which prohibits leaving one's home on the Sabbath, and Numbers 35:5, which defines one's city ("home") as 2,000 cubits around the city. See *Mishnah*, Sotah 5:3.

⁶ Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:228; See *Mishnah*, Sanhedrin, 1:6, which says it should be 120 men. That may be a problem for Luke, which seems to include women as part of that count.

explained in that the chief priests purchased it in Judas' name, but it could also be that they simply told the story differently, as with many other scriptural accounts.

1:18 **all his bowels gushed out.** Matthew 27:5 says Judas hanged himself, creating a second contradiction in this verse in Acts. There is no JST change in this verse but the change in Matthew describes instead how Judas hung himself, then fell (presumably because the rope or branch broke), causing his bowels to gush out, as Luke says here. This harmonization agrees with the opinions of some scholars today, who postulate that Judas "manages to devise a way to hang himself, but the rope (or tree branch) breaks under his weight, which results in his body tumbling to the ground (presumably on a rocky surface) and suffering fatal trauma."⁷

1:19 **Aceldama.** This word means 'field of blood' in Aramaic, as the verse notes. The location of this field is not known, though some have tried to equate it with a section of the Hinnom Valley just south of Jerusalem. However, this was a cemetery even in Jesus' day, not a potter's field (Matthew 27:7, 10).

1:20 **written in the book of Psalms.** Peter quoted two Psalms together, 69:25 and 109:8b, which Luke cited from the LXX version more than the Hebrew.

1:20 **his bishoprik.** The Greek is *episkopē*, meaning 'overseer' or 'presiding officer.' The Hebrew word in Psalm 109:8 (*pequdah*), translated in the KJV as "office," has essentially the same meaning.

1:21 **these men which have companied with us all the time.** That they had many men to choose from is further evidence that there were many people at many events during Jesus' ministry, including some of those where we traditionally picture just the Twelve with him.

1:22 **from the baptism of John.** Peter marked the beginning of Jesus as did the gospels of Mark and John—with Jesus' baptism at the hands of John the Baptist. Many of Jesus' followers must have started the same way, hearing John and being converted by him, then turning to follow Jesus as John had directed them (Luke 3:16-17).

1:22 **one be ordained to be a witness.** The word "ordained" is not in the Greek; rather, as the footnote for this verse says, it is just 'become a witness.' They wanted someone who had been part of the movement from the beginning but knew that by virtue of this call, he would become a witness of the resurrection to the world.

1:22 **witness with us of his resurrection.** The Greek doesn't require the candidates to have already seen the resurrected Jesus, though that was entirely possible (see 1 Corinthians 15:6, where five hundred men saw him). Like apostles today, the allowance was made that they could also become witnesses of his resurrection after their call.

1:23 **Joseph . . . and Matthias.** Outside of this incident, these two are never mentioned before or after in the New Testament. Yet both were deemed worthy and able to be members of the Quorum of the Twelve. How little we know of so many marvelous men and women of the early church!

1:23 **Joseph called Barsabas.** "Barsabas" means 'son of the sabbath.' There was also a "Judas called Barsabas" mentioned in Acts 15:22. It is not known if these two were the same person or both just good Sabbath keepers.

1:23 **Matthias.** "Matthias" means 'the gift of God.' An early church tradition was that he was one of the Seventy mentioned in Luke.⁸

1:24 **they prayed.** This was not a decision by popular vote or political debate. They turned to God to lead them through this process, so the man chosen would be God's choice first of all.

1:26 **gave forth their lots.** Casting lots could have been at least two different kinds of activities. In some cases, it involved selecting between two stones which could answer 'either/or' or 'yes/no' questions (1 Samuel 30:7-8). But

⁷ Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:229. Fitzmyer notes that early Christians created their own third account, which harmonized the contradiction by having a wagon go by the land as Judas was hanging there. The wagon bumped him, knocking him down and causing his innards to gush out (Fitzmyer, *The Acts*, 219).

⁸ Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:230.

“lot” was also used to represent a vote, which seems to be the sense here, since they “gave forth their lots.” They could have used stone, wood, or potsherds (broken pieces of pottery), written one of the names on them, then given them to Peter or someone who was collecting them. When the votes were counted, Matthias was clearly God’s choice.

Similarly, today, when General Authorities come to reorganize a stake presidency, they ask leaders in the stake to nominate three men whom they consider to be good candidates for stake president. Each man ‘casts his lot’ on a piece of paper handed to the visiting authority during an interview, then the ‘lots’ are used to see whom the Lord has chosen, based on the collective inspiration of the stake leaders and the confirming revelation of the visiting authority. Prayer and typically fasting are also involved as the authority seeks confirmation and knowledge from the Lord but the ‘lots’ given forth by each person are very informative in the process.

The Day of Pentecost – Acts 2:1-47

The Holy Spirit – Acts 2:1-13

2:1 *day of Pentecost.* From the Greek *pentēkostē*, meaning ‘fiftieth,’ this harvest celebration happened fifty days after Passover. It was called various things in the Old Testament, including “first fruits” (Numbers 28:26), “feast of harvest” (Exodus 23:16), and “feast of weeks” (Exodus 34:22; see also Deuteronomy 16:9-12 and Leviticus 23:15-21). It was the second of three feasts that all Jewish males were supposed to attend, according to the Law (though curiously there is no record of this feast being kept in the Old Testament). It became associated with the giving of the Law to Moses (because, it was said, the children of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai and received the Law fifty days after the Exodus), and thus was an appropriate time to declare the New Law to the crowds in Jerusalem.⁹

2:1 *with one accord in one place.* The place where they gathered was not mentioned and is often portrayed as the upper room. However, subsequent events clearly take place at the temple, and there is no record of the group moving to the temple in the middle of the experience, so it’s likely that’s where they were gathered on the day of Pentecost and when they experienced their outpouring of the Spirit.

2:2 *a rushing mighty wind.* ‘Wind,’ ‘breath,’ and ‘spirit’ are all associated words in Greek. Wind and fire are both associated with God in the Old Testament (Ezekiel 37:1-14; Exodus 3:2-5; 19:18). The tongues of fire probably represented the gift of tongues that came with the manifestation.

2:3 *cloven tongues like as of fire.* “Cloven tongues” is a hard term to understand in English or the Greek. The NIV translation is helpful: “They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.”

This experience was similar to what the Saints experienced in answer to the Prophet Joseph Smith’s dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland temple in 1836. “Let the anointing of thy ministers be sealed upon them with power from on high. Let it be fulfilled upon them, as upon those on the day of Pentecost; let the gift of tongues be poured out upon thy people, even cloven tongues as of fire, and the interpretation thereof. And let thy house be filled, as with a rushing mighty wind, with thy glory. Put upon thy servants the testimony of the covenant” (D&C 109:35-38). For several days as meetings were held in the temple, people reported outpourings of the Spirit, speaking in tongues, a rushing mighty wind, and visions of angels.¹⁰

2:5 *dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men.* For the feast, thousands of visitors from all over the world came and stayed, most in tents in and outside of the city. Up to a million people could have been there, though more likely the number was 1/5 to 1/4 of that—200,000 to 250,000, still a huge crowd.¹¹ Though it says “men,” the reference is to both men and women.

⁹ *Life and Teachings*, 243-244; Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:231; Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 283.

¹⁰ *Life and Teachings*, 244.

¹¹ Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:231.

2:6 **the multitude came together.** As noted with verse 1 above, Luke doesn't say where this happened, but the most likely place for a multitude to gather was the temple courtyard. There thousands could be accommodated, and many would be gathered anyway because of the feast.

2:7 **are not all these which speak Galileans?** It's unclear how the crowd knew the disciples were from Galilee. Perhaps it was their dress or some other visible indicator. The surprise was that they were speaking languages from all over the Roman empire (v. 8).

2:9-11 **Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites.** Luke goes basically from east to west (except the last two), starting in what is Iran today (Parthia); then Iraq (Media and Elam); Jordan (Mesopotamia); Israel (Judea); Turkey (Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia); Egypt; Libya (Cyrene); Rome; Crete; and Arabia. This was only a representative list, as Jews were well-known in other locations, such as Galatia, Greece, and Cyprus (as is seen later in Acts).

2:10 **Jews and proselytes.** "Proselytes" are Gentile converts to Judaism who observe the whole Mosaic Law, including circumcision, baptism, and sacrifice. Nicolas, one of the seven, was such (Acts 6:5). Another group was "god-fearing" or "devout" Gentiles. These accepted the Jewish religion but were not circumcised (see Bible Dictionary, "Proselytes").

2:13 **These men are full of new wine.** Perhaps because there were so many languages being spoken, to many it sounded like gibberish and that the disciples were simply slurring their words, as a drunken person might.

Peter's first address – Acts 2:14-36

This was Peter's first long speech in Acts. He gave four more (3:12-26; 4:8-12; 10:34-47; 11:5-17) and three shorter ones in chapters 1, 5, and 13). This one can be summarized as follows:

- Speaking in tongues fulfills Joel's prophecy (14-21)
- Jesus is raised from the dead (22-24)
- He fulfills David's prophecy (25-31)
- The disciples are witnesses of his resurrection and divinity (32-36)

After hearing his speech, the crowd asked what they should do (v. 37) and Peter told them to repent, be baptized and receive the Holy Ghost (vv. 38-40). This is a new Peter. Wrote Robert Matthews, "When the Holy Ghost came upon the Twelve on the day of Pentecost, they spoke with new tongues. But even more significant, the Holy Ghost caused a great change in their hearts. This change is especially noticeable in Peter because we have more information about his activities than about the activities of the other members of the original Twelve. On the night prior to Jesus' crucifixion, Peter is characterized as fearful and hesitant (John 18:15-27). But after the day of Pentecost he is bold and forthright, not fearing the Jewish council, imprisonment, or death (Acts 2-4). This change can be attributed to the effect of the Holy Ghost, which purifies, emboldens, strengthens, comforts, and in every way prepares a servant of the Lord for the work that is required of him. He is born again."¹²

2:14 **Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem.** Or, 'Judean men and women, and those visiting.'

2:15 **these are not drunken.** Peter declared that the people speaking were not drunk, since it was only about 9am.

2:17 **I will pour out my Spirit.** In 2:17-21, Peter quoted Joel 2:28-32a, though differently than it is in our Old Testament today. The difference is that the quote comes from the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament. Peter's quote referred to them speaking in tongues and not to the signs in the heavens which did not occur in that day. He likely continued the quotation so he could get to the last statement: "whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." This is a doctrine of salvation that all in his audience could relate to and agree with.

¹² Millet, *Studies*, 6:28.

Note that Moroni quoted this same scripture to Joseph Smith when he first appeared to him, saying it “was not yet fulfilled, but was soon to be” (Joseph Smith-History 1:41).

2:18 **on my servants and on my handmaidens.** Or, ‘on my male and female slaves.’ The gospel is for all classes of society, even the lowest slaves among them.

2:22 **Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God.** This is not Peter’s opinion; Jesus’ miracles and signs were the proof that he was approved by God, which many of them had heard about or even seen.

2:23 **delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.** Or, “delivered over to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God” (NASB). Peter taught that Jesus’ path to crucifixion and Atonement were determined for him long before his sojourn on earth—it was God’s plan for his death to happen in that way.

2:24 **not possible that he should be holden of it.** Death could not maintain its hold on Jesus.

2:25 **David speaketh concerning him.** In 2:25-28, Peter quoted Psalm 16:8-11a, applying it not to David but to Jesus (verse 30-31) whose soul was not left in hell nor did his body see corruption (decay) because he was resurrected. Interestingly, the KJV uses the same language in Psalm 16:10 and Acts 2:27, “Holy One,” even though both the Greek (*hosios*) and the Hebrew (*chacyd*) might be better translated ‘faithful’ or ‘righteous’; they probably relied on Peter’s application of this to Jesus and used a translation and capitalization in the OT to reflect that.

2:29 **being a prophet.** Peter called David not a king but a prophet, alluding to his ability to see ahead to the coming of the Messiah and his resurrection in the Psalm just quoted.

2:32 **we all are witnesses.** Greek *martus* means someone who testifies of something known directly, by personal experience. They are willing to share their testimony as truth, even if the result is their death. They had all seen Jesus alive and so could testify that it was true, and were now willing to risk their lives declaring it.

2:33 **the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth.** Being exalted on the right hand of the Father, and having promised the Holy Spirit to the disciples, Peter declared that their speaking in multiple tongues was a visible sign that Jesus’ promised had been fulfilled.

2:34 **Sit thou on my right hand.** In verses 34-35, Peter quoted Psalm 110:1. Interestingly, Luke portrays Jesus as quoting these same verses to his critics in order to stump them (Luke 20:41-44).

2:36 **who ye have crucified.** Most of Peter’s audience here were not guilty of this charge, but certainly some of them listening were—perhaps the very Jewish leaders who had orchestrated Jesus’ death were listening to Peter preach to the crowd.

2:36 **both Lord and Christ.** Peter’s punchline was delivered after building a consensus about the Messiah based on scriptures his predominantly Greek-speaking Jewish audience knew. But his bold statement that “God hath made that same Jesus . . . both Lord and Christ” would have been a powerful surprise. He stated that Jesus was Lord (*kyrios*, the word used for Jehovah/Yahweh in the Old Testament) and Messiah (*christos*, the anointed one).

The first converts – Acts 2:37-47

2:37 **pricked.** Better translated ‘pierced’ or ‘stabbed.’

2:38 **Repent, and be baptized . . . receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.** Peter called upon the people to give up their sins and sinful ways of life, ask for God’s forgiveness, and strive to become like Jesus. Immersion (the meaning of the Greek word *baptizō*) was the symbol of the covenant and always required of new believers. After going through those covenant steps, they could receive the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands by authorized priesthood holders.

This pattern is first mentioned here in all of the NT but is repeated all through Acts and the NT, establishing the pattern of the early church and apostles in making converts and bringing people to faith in Christ. See Article of Faith 4.

2:39 **unto you, and to your children, and to all.** This promise of covenants and the Spirit was given to everyone, not just those present on that day. It would go forward in time (“your children”) and geography (“to all that are afar off”; compare Isaiah 57:19).

2:40 **untoward generation.** “Untoward” (Greek *skolias*) means ‘warped,’ or ‘perverse.’ The footnote renders it ‘crooked,’ which is valid, as is ‘dishonest.’

2:41 **three thousand souls.** There were no large rivers or bodies of water near Jerusalem to use for baptisms (in spite of a painting of this event in many church libraries), and especially for very large numbers like this. Perhaps the apostles and other disciples fanned out across the city to the various pools (such as Siloam and Bethesda) and ritual baths (*miqva’ot*), baptizing the crowds that followed. If they had sixty priesthood holders (half the number of disciples listed in 1:15), they would have to each baptize about fifty people (roughly eight people per hour for six hours) to do 3,000 that day, a very achievable number.

2:42 **fellowship.** Greek *koinōnia*, meaning ‘communion,’ or ‘community.’ It implies support, unity, and commonality, coming from the same phrase as *koinē*, ‘common.’ The willingness of the members of the early church to share and care for each other showed their *koinōnia*. Paul used the word many times, such as when the Jerusalem members gave him the right hands of *koinōnia* (Galatians 2:9), showing that the Jewish and Gentile saints were one.

2:43 **fear came upon every soul.** Meaning that they began to recognize the reality of God, potential judgment, and the need to repent and conform to God’s will. You cannot fear something you consider fictional.

2:43 **many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.** Luke will give some representative ‘wonders’ in his account, but he wants us to know that the stories he tells are only part of it—the apostles kept Jesus’ command to follow in his footsteps and do what he did.

2:44 **had all things in common.** From the beginning, the early church shared what they had “as every man had need” (v. 45). This is mentioned again in later chapters and especially in chapter 5. Interestingly, like the Church in our day, this idea of common and shared resources seems to fall away over time, for whatever reason; it is not mentioned in Paul’s writings but is replaced by charitable giving and generous sharing.

2:46 **continuing daily with one accord.** The unity of the early Church is evident in these chapters of Acts. It was only later that false teachers came in, refuting the teachings of the apostles, that schisms began.

2:46 **in the temple.** Early Christians were still Jews also, and continued to pray and worship God in the temple, according to the customs of their people.

2:46 **breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness.** This refers to the sacrament and the manner in which they met. They did not have church buildings and could usually not meet in the synagogues, so they met in homes. We see this pattern all throughout Acts. It also appears from many sources that the members of the Church met together for a full meal in conjunction with their meetings—in essence, recreating the Last Supper and the first giving of the Sacramental ordinance on a regular basis. It was also part of their having things in common—the rich brought food to feed the poor at the meals.

2:47 **having favour with all the people.** Joseph F. Smith noted: “Not one of the disciples possessed sufficient light, knowledge or wisdom, at the time of the crucifixion, for either exaltation or condemnation; for it was afterward that their minds were opened to understand the scriptures, and that they were endowed with power from on high; without which they were only children in knowledge, in comparison to what they afterwards become under the influence of the Spirit.”¹³

¹³ Robert L. Millet, “The Saga of the Early Christian Church,” in Millet, *Acts to Revelation*, 6:4-5.

2:47 **added to the church daily**. Luke points out that besides the three thousand convert jump-start they got on the day of Pentecost, they continued to baptize more people daily in Jerusalem. That kind of growth got the attention of the Jewish leaders and set the stage for persecutions in the next chapters.

Peter and John at the temple (3:1 – 4:22)

Peter performs a miracle – Acts 3:1-10

3:1 **the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour**. Peter and John went to the temple during the daily prayer, which was twice each day, in the morning and again at about 3:00 pm, “the ninth hour.” The Levites led the singing until the trumpets blew, then everyone would prostrate themselves and pray. This would be repeated several times until the drink, meal, and animal offerings were complete.¹⁴

3:2 **lame from his mother’s womb**. Like the man blind from birth that Jesus healed (John 9:1-7), this miracle will not be restoring something lost, such as from an injury or disease, but giving a man a thing he had never enjoyed in his life—the use of his legs.

3:2 **the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful**. There are contesting arguments for the location of this gate. One is that it was the main gate on the eastern side of the temple courtyard leading from the priests’ court into the Women’s Court, sometimes called the Nicanor Gate. It was covered with gold and silver, made of double doors about 45 feet high and 22-1/2 feet wide (Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, 5.5.3). Another is that it was the gate leading from the Gentile/public area into the Court of the Women on the east side, called the Shushan Gate. The third proposal is that it was the so-called Double Gate at the south entrance of the largest temple courtyard. The latter appears to match verse 8 as the man gets up and walks *into* the temple courtyards, indicating he was outside to start with. It’s also a great place to beg with the most traffic. The uncertainty exists because this is the only reference (scriptural or historical) to any gate by this name.

3:4 **Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John**. Peter and John are portrayed doing several things together in Acts, but in all cases, Peter speaks and John is silent.

3:5 **expecting to receive something**. The man was not looking to be healed, just to get a little money (v. 3). He had been doing this all his life (v. 2). Thus, his healing does not on the surface appear to be the result of the man’s faith, but a demonstration of the power of acting in the name of Jesus Christ. But see verse 16 for a statement about the man’s faith.

3:6 **In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk**. Acts 2:43 informs us that the apostles did “many wonders and signs,” so this is just one of a multitude of miracles. Luke includes this one because it leads to a whole series of other events in the next chapters.

3:7 **his feet and ankle bones received strength**. The sense is that his feet and ankles, which perhaps were deformed at birth or otherwise were weak and unusable, were suddenly normal, allowing the man to stand.

3:8 **walking, and leaping, and praising God**. Imagine never being able to walk, all your life. This man’s healing was so complete that he was leaping and jumped for joy at his good fortune.

Peter’s second address – Acts 3:11-26

This is Peter’s second address (see 2:14). It can be summarized as follows:

- The audience at the temple were complicit in Jesus’ death (12-18)
- Repent and God will send Jesus as the prophets have spoken (19-21)
- Moses and other prophets testified of Jesus, who came to bless them (22-26)

The reaction in chapter 4 is very different from the reaction to the first speech, where thousands of Jews from out of town were humbled and baptized. This speech was directed at the residents of Jerusalem and got the attention of

¹⁴ Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:241.

the local Jewish leaders who were angered, not humbled, and who now realized that Jesus' followers needed to be dealt with harshly, as they had dealt with him. It led directly to the arrest of Peter and John, and in Luke's broader narrative, was the trigger for the beginning of a period of persecution, including the stoning of Stephen and Saul's efforts to bring believers in Jesus to trial, or worse.

The contrast between the first speech in Acts 2 and this one is interesting to consider.

The Pentecost speech emphasizes Jesus' resurrection and exaltation but the temple speech recalls details of Jesus' trial. The Pentecost speech briefly refers to Jesus' earthly ministry, but the temple speech anticipates the Parousia [second coming]. The Pentecost speech emphasizes God's oath to David; the temple speech recalls God's promises to Abraham and refers to the Mosaic prophet. The Pentecost speech focuses on the titles "Messiah" and "Lord"; the Temple speech introduces other titles – "servant" (*pais*), "holy and just one," "leader of life." The Pentecost speech cites a prophetic book and the Psalms, but the temple speech cites the Pentateuch . . . Both speeches emphasize repentance and release of sins, but the wording is mostly different. Both speeches refer to the future participation of others in salvation (2.39; 3.26); again the wording is different. Thus the two speeches are complimentary, probably deliberately so . . . A much broader and richer understanding of Christian preaching to Jews emerges from hearing two speeches rather than one.¹⁵

3:11 ***the porch that is called Solomon's***. This public place on the east side of the temple's outer court was an enclosed colonnade about 300 yards long, with marble pillars running the length of it nearly four stories high. The ceiling was covered in cedar wood. This appears to have been the meeting and teaching place of the young church in Jerusalem (as seen in Acts 2:46).¹⁶

3:12 ***why marvel ye at this?*** Asking them why they all came running to see him may have been a way to draw more attention to he and John (to create a bigger audience for his message) or he may have truly been amazed at their reaction.

3:12 ***as though by our own power or holiness***. Peter knew the source of the man's healing, and it was not him or John.

3:13 ***denied him in the presence of Pilate***. Peter's audience for this speech was very different from that of the Day of Pentecost. In the first, the listeners, who were Jews from outside of the Jerusalem area, were invited to repent, be baptized, and receive the Holy Ghost. In this one, the audience was likely Jews from Jerusalem who called for Jesus' crucifixion, even though Pilate wanted to release him (see Luke 23:13-18). They were invited to repent in the hopes that their sins would be blotted out, but Peter made no offer of baptism to them. Could it be that their sin in rejecting Jesus during his early ministry caused a change in Peter's approach?

3:14 ***desired a murderer***. This refers to Barabbas who was released instead of Jesus by Pilate.

3:15 ***killed the Prince of life***. "Prince" is *archēgos*, which can mean a leader, a pioneer, an originator, or a founder. Jesus is the source of life for us all, both physically and eternally.

3:16 ***through faith in his name***. Peter's attributed the man's healing not to his own actions but to the faith of the man healed, indicating the conversation he had with the man in conjunction with the healing was likely longer than that which Luke recorded.

3:17 ***I wot that through ignorance ye did it***. Or, "I know that you acted in ignorance" (NRSV, NASB, NIV, ESV). Peter generously allowed that they didn't know who Jesus truly was when they killed him.

¹⁵ Tannehill, *Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 2:58, quoted in Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 177.

¹⁶ Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:243.

3:19 **that your sins may be blotted out.** The term “blotted out” (*exaleiphō*) means ‘erase,’ ‘wipe away,’ or ‘cover with whitewash.’ The sense is of a document where the writing is scraped away or writing on a wall that is painted over so it can no longer be seen.

3:19 **times of refreshing.** We might be tempted to see this term as the restoration of the gospel. The word used (*anapsuxis*) has the meaning of recovering breath or coolness that comes as a relief from heat. Bruce McConkie informed us that Peter is referring to the day “when the earth shall be transfigured . . . when Christ shall reign personally upon the earth,” meaning the Millennium.¹⁷ See also Matthew 19:28.

3:21 **times of restitution.** The word here (*apokatastasis*) means to ‘reconstitute’ or ‘restore,’ “the most intensive word possible for a complete restoration, meaning a re-establishment, just as things were originally.”¹⁸ This is the bringing of the gospel to the earth again after the apostasy.¹⁹

3:22 **Moses truly said.** In vv. 22-23, Peter quoted Deuteronomy 18:15, 19 (see also Leviticus 23:29), a scripture that is quoted or referenced in every standard work (see the footnote—1 Nephi 22:20-22; 3 Nephi 20:25-26; D&C 1:14-16; JS-H 1:40).

3:24 **all the prophets from Samuel.** In the Jewish scriptures, Samuel (in 1 Kings) was the first and oldest book of the section known as the Prophets. The prophets spoken of before Samuel were part of the Torah or five books of Moses, or the Writings (such as Joshua and the judges).

3:25 **saying unto Abraham.** The quotation is from Genesis 22:18, part of the Abrahamic covenant.

Peter and John arrested – Acts 4:1-22

4:1 **captain of the temple.** This was a priest, second only to the high priest in authority. He stood next to the high priest during the daily offerings and on the Day of Atonement. He had authority to make arrests and often had military training in addition to his priestly duties.²⁰

4:2 **Being grieved that they taught . . . the resurrection.** The Sadducees (v. 1) especially would be upset by this as they did not believe in the resurrection. The chief priest and most of the other priests were Sadducees.²¹

4:3 **put them in hold.** Peter, John, and the healed man (see vv. 9-10, 14) were tossed into jail for an overnight stay. The leaders hoped that pulling them out of the large and growing crowd would disband the group and negate their preaching and the attention the healing had drawn to Peter and John.

4:4 **number of the men was about five thousand.** This was only men (*anēr*, not ‘people’ which would be *anthrōpos*), so the number of members of the church was much higher, once women and children were also counted.

4:5 **rulers, and elders, and scribes.** The composition of the Sanhedrin.

4:6 **Annas . . . and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander.** Annas was the high priest during Jesus’ youth, though he was deposed, and Joseph Caiaphas, his son-in-law, was put in his place by Rome. Caiaphas was high priest when Jesus was crucified and during the opening chapters of Acts. John was likely the son of Annas who later became high priest. Nothing more is known about Alexander.

4:7 **By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?** They could not refute the act or result as there were too many witnesses, and the man healed stood before them. But they questioned the authority by which it was done.

¹⁷ *Life and Teachings*, 244.

¹⁸ Anderson, *Guide*, 7.

¹⁹ *Life and Teaching*, 244.

²⁰ Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:245-246.

²¹ Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 290.

4:8 **Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost.** Since the day of Pentecost in chapter 2, Peter and the other were filled with the Spirit that taught them, directed them, emboldened them, and gave them the words to say, as here.

4:9 **the good deed done to the impotent man.** Peter followed Jesus' example: when the Jews took up stones to kill him, he asked "for which of those [good] works do ye stone me?" (John 10:32).

4:10 **by the name of Jesus Christ.** Peter boldly proclaimed the name of Jesus before them, affirming that it was by his name that they were able to do this miracle, thereby affirming Jesus' very claims of who he was even after his death.

4:11 **the stone which was set at naught.** Peter quoted Psalm 118:22, which Jesus also applied to himself (Matthew 21:42), but adding "of you," making it apply directly to his audience's treatment of Jesus.

4:12 **there is none other name under heaven.** In v. 7, the leaders had asked them "by what name" they did these things. Peter's answer not only responded directly to their query but extended it to declare that the name of Jesus was the only one where any of could be saved.

4:13 **they were unlearned and ignorant men.** Peter and John were fishermen from Galilee. They were not taught in the rabbinical schools, nor trained in the other learning of the day. The Jewish leaders knew they lacked this type of education, so they called them "uneducated and ordinary" (NRSV). However, Peter's frequent quoting of scripture shows not only his understanding of those writings but the power of the Spirit to enlighten his mind to teach the truth from them.

4:13 **they took knowledge of them.** Or, "recognized them" (NRSV). The leaders may have not understood their preaching at first, perhaps thinking, 'Here is another false messiah.' But once they heard Peter declare that it was by Jesus' name that they acted, the leaders took immediate action, not wanting Jesus' name to continue to be used.

4:14 **beholding the man which was healed.** For being healed, the formerly lame man had been tossed into holding with the apostles and was now standing trial with them before the Sanhedrin. But his presence served to quiet the opposition—seeing him there as a living witness of what happened, it was impossible to compose a response.

4:15 **they conferred among themselves.** Having the three men removed from the room, the Sanhedrin debated what to do about them.

4:16 **we cannot deny it.** They could not deny the miracle that had happened right under their noses in the temple.

4:17 **let us straitly threaten them.** Enamored with their own power, they assumed that a severe chastisement from the council and a threat of additional action should Peter and John continue their preaching and healing in Jesus' name would be enough.

4:18 **commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.** This group of seventy-one men with great authority and power hoped that they could intimidate these two rural preachers to quit speaking of Jesus. That they could not shows how deep the conversion of the apostles had become.

4:19 **Peter and John answered.** Previously, the speaking was assigned solely to Peter, but now Luke credits them both with speaking. Perhaps John spoke up in this part of the conversation.

4:19 **hearken unto you more than unto God.** Peter and John boldly defied the authority of the Sanhedrin and asserted their right to obey God, a great insult to these men who claimed to speak for the God of Israel.

4:20 **we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.** This is the very definition of testimony, a personal knowledge of things we have seen and heard (and felt). The men proclaimed their testimony of Christ and could proclaim nothing more, because it would be outside of their personal experience.

4:21 **when they had further threatened them, they let them go.** The leaders had nothing against the two men, who had only done good things toward another man. And with thousands of supporters in the new followers of their teachings, the leaders feared rebellion, so let them go to assure the peace.

4:22 **the man was above forty years old.** Noting his age highlights that he was a credible witness.

The Early Church (4:23-5:42)

The prayer of Jesus' followers – Acts 4:23-31

4:23 **they went to their own company.** Peter and John returned to their fellow believers and told the story of what had happened to them. In their absence, there had likely been many prayers offered. With them safely returned, an additional prayer of gratitude was given.

4:24 **they lifted up their voice with one accord.** It is not mentioned who gave the prayer, but the group prayed together. The term “with one accord” is *homothumadon*, meaning to be united with one mind and heart by common consent, but also with a musical connotation—several voices ‘singing’ different parts that together make a beautiful harmony. This could literally mean that they prayed the same words, perhaps echoing the words spoken by a leader.

4:25 **David hast said.** The prayer quoted from Psalm 2:1-2, one used at kings’ coronations and here applied to Jesus.

4:27 **thy holy child Jesus.** While “child” is a valid translation of *pais*, it can also mean ‘servant,’ which is more likely the sense here (and which all modern translations use). Jesus is God’s holy servant, “anointed” as the Messiah (also v. 30).

4:28 **determined before to do.** Jesus was not a victim, though Herod, Pontius Pilate, Gentiles, and even his own people gathered against him (v. 27). Everything that happened to him was predetermined by the Father.

4:29 **with all boldness they may speak thy word.** The disciples did not ask for deliverance from their trials but for boldness to continue, that they might enact “signs and wonders” in the name of Jesus to convince others of the truth of their words.

4:31 **the place was shaken.** “Shaken” here means not an earthquake but moved by a strong wind. The word for “wind” and “spirit” is the same, meaning that it was the coming of the Spirit itself that shook the house.

4:31 **filled with the Holy Ghost.** No physical manifestation is mentioned this time, compared to 2:3, but they were granted an outpouring of the Spirit as an answer to their prayer, allowing them to speak with boldness.

Having all things in common – Acts 4:32-37

4:32 **of one heart and of one soul.** Just as they prayed with “one accord” (v. 24), they also acted in unity, with hearts and souls that were one and the same.

4:34-35 **Neither was there any among them that lacked . . . laid them down at the apostles’ feet.** Inspired by the Spirit or perhaps also by something like the writings of Enoch (as was Joseph Smith and other early Church members in this dispensation), the Former-day Saints sold property and possessions and put all things in a shared system administered by the Twelve, based on everyone’s need. ‘Laying at the feet’ means completely surrendering it to them.

4:36 **Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas.** The example set by Barnabas of laying the full price of his land at the feet of the apostles is contrasted with that of Ananias and Sapphira in the next chapter. This was the same Barnabas who became a friend and missionary companion of Paul and who was the uncle of John Mark, author of the gospel of Mark. His name means ‘son of rest/consolation’ or ‘son of a prophet’ or perhaps ‘son of exhortation,’ depending on what Hebrew/Aramaic root is intended with *sabas*. He was a Levite, meaning a descendent of the tribe of Levi who was charged with helping the priests with the work in the temple.

4:36 **of the country of Cyprus.** Barnabas was from the island of Cyprus, just south of modern Turkey, which gives a clue why he and Saul went there later on a missionary journey (Acts 13).

Ananias and Sapphira – Acts 5:1-11

This puzzling story is Luke's first 'negative miracle' account, meaning a miracle that comes as a punishment instead of out of compassion or mercy. It may be modeled after the account of Achan in Joshua 7, though the source of the punishment here is the Lord, not the people of Israel, or the story of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron in Leviticus 10:1-5, who "offered strange fire" in their duties in the tabernacle and "died before the Lord."

5:1 **Ananias with Sapphira his wife.** This is the only mention of these two in the New Testament, so we know nothing of them outside of this story. His name (better written Hananiah) means 'God is merciful' and hers 'beautiful.'

5:1 **sold a possession.** The word *ktēma* could mean real estate but could also mean personal belongings.

5:2 **kept back part of the price.** Luke gives us advance notice to their action, in that they sold the "possession" for a certain amount but only brought part of it to the apostles.

5:3 **why hath Satan filled thine heart.** Their sin was not in what they gave or didn't give, it was in lying about it, saying they gave the whole amount but secretly keeping part for themselves.

5:4 **was it not thine own?** Peter's words confirmed that this was a voluntary offering, not one of compulsion. Even after their property was sold, they were still in control of it and could decide at any point just how much to contribute to the common good. There was no need to lie about giving all when they did not. The only point in the deception was community status.

5:5 **gave up the ghost.** This interesting William Tyndale expression was his way of translating *ekpsuchō*, which means to breathe a final breath.

5:6 **wound him up, and carried him out.** They wrapped him in burial strips of cloth and laid him in a tomb. The fact that they did this without involving his wife indicates his death was recognized as a curse from God, meaning he should be buried quickly, without mourning.²²

5:7 **about the space of three hours after.** The arrival of the wife is quite some time later, with no indication what brought her there. She is unaware of her husband's fate.

5:8 **Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?** Peter asked her about the specific amount that Ananias had brought to him, though Luke tells the story without specifically calling out the amount. *Tosoutos* ("for so much") represents a specific amount stated in a generic way, much like we say so-and-so or what's-his-name.

5:9 **to tempt the Spirit of the Lord.** "Tempt" (*peirazō*) here can also mean to 'test' or 'try.' Peter let her know that their actions could have fooled men but not the Spirit, which knows all things and should not be tested by lying.

5:10 **carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.** Like Ananias, Sapphira died quickly, was wrapped up, and carried to the tomb with her husband's body. Both died under the same curse of lying to God.

5:11 **fear came upon all the church.** This is the Old Testament fear of God, the dread that an unrighteous life will lead to the judgments of God, as exhibited by Ananias and Sapphira.

5:11 **the church.** This is the first time in Luke's writings that he used the word "church," which is *ekklēsia* or 'congregation/assembly', though it appears after this more than twenty times.²³

Early apostolic miracles – Acts 5:12-16

5:12 **many signs and wonders wrought.** The disciples selected as their gathering place Solomon's porch, on the eastern edge of the temple courtyard, and where Peter and James had taught after healing the lame man (3:1-10).

²² Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 217.

²³ Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 325.

5:13 **durst no man join himself to them.** This verse seems to mean that many people were afraid to join in their meetings (superstitiously, perhaps, after hearing about Ananias and Sapphira) but others esteemed them highly (“magnified them”). Many of those who esteemed them must also have joined the church, so many that they were described as “multitudes” (v. 14).

5:14 **both of men and women.** One of the few scriptures that specially calls out men and women as being part of the movement.

5:15 **the shadow of Peter passing by.** Many of that day believed that a shadow carried power for good or evil. The shadow of a criminal could harm you, and the shadow of a corpse could make you unclean. The text doesn’t say that Peter or the other condoned the belief, only that many believed that Peter’s shadow would heal them, perhaps somewhat like the crowds that gathered at the pool to be healed when the waters moved (see John 5:4).

5:16 **they were healed every one.** Luke uses a very similar phrase to describe Jesus’ healing (Luke 4:40), and 3 Nephi 17:9 describes Jesus healing “every one as they were brought for unto him” in the New World.

Persecution of the apostles – Acts 5:17-33

5:18 **put them in the common prison.** This remarkable story has the Jewish leaders arresting all the apostles and holding them in prison to try and silence their preaching in the temple.

5:19 **the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison.** At night an angel let them out, which was all the more frustrating to the Jewish leaders because the Sadducees (who makes up most of the leadership) didn’t believe in angels.²⁴

5:20 **speak in the temple to the people.** After freeing them in a way that no one saw them (v. 23), the angel commanded them to keep preaching publicly “all the words of this life” (or, as we might say, ‘the plan of salvation’).

5:21 **sent to the prison to have them brought.** The high priest and the others sent a message to the prison to have the apostles brought before them for trial.

5:23 **we found no man within.** The officers are unable to explain what has happened. The prison is secure, the guards are still in place and saw no one going in or out, but the prisoners have simply disappeared.

5:24 **they doubted of them whereunto this would grow.** Or, “wondering what this might lead to” (NIV).

5:25 **standing in the temple, and teaching.** Meanwhile, the men obeyed the voice of the angel and boldly went right back to the temple to teach where they were quickly spotted, probably by one of the temple guards.

5:26 **brought them without violence.** The temple police didn’t lay a hand on the apostles, knowing now that it would do them no good anyway. Rather, the followers of Jesus went willingly, knowing God would protect them.

5:28 **intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.** They didn’t believe they had Jesus’ blood upon them because they still thought he was guilty of blasphemy and that the Romans killed him. This was rationalization and self-deception, of course.

5:29 **We ought to obey God rather than men.** Peter’s fear was gone, seeing that God was protecting and directing them. He knew that the only way they could be true to their calling was to obey God, not men.

5:30 **ye slew and hanged on a tree.** Peter was echoing Deuteronomy 21:22-23 where a man hung on a tree was pronounced cursed of God. He recognized they believed this curse applied to Jesus since he had been crucified but refuted it by claiming that “Him hath God exalted with his right hand (v. 31) . . . And we are his witnesses (v. 32).”

5:31 **a Prince and a Saviour.** This is *archēgos* and *sōtēr*, meaning a ruler over them and an originator of salvation.

²⁴ Brown, *An Introduction*, 292.

5:32 **we are his witnesses.** A “witness” is *martys*, like martyr, meaning someone who watches and testifies.

5:33 **cut to the heart.** *Diapriō*, literally, ‘sawn [or divided] in half’ (notice ‘to the heart’ is in italics, meaning it was added by the translators); figuratively it means ‘furious,’ which is represented in their next action.

5:33 **took counsel to slay them.** Just as Jesus said would happen, they were plotting the same things against the apostles that they did against the Savior.

Gamaliel counsels restraint – Acts 5:34-42

5:34 **a Pharisee, named Gamaliel.** The apparent grandson of the famous rabbi Hillel, Gamaliel was well known in his own right. He was Paul’s teacher as a young man (Acts 22:3) and had the reputation of being a lenient and pragmatic interpreter of the Law, as was Hillel. The ‘opposing’ school of thought, that of rabbi Shammai, was much more strict and rigid in its interpretations of the Torah. “How different history might have been had Paul come under the influence of the Shammai school rather than that of Gamaliel.”²⁵ Gamaliel’s way of thinking, evidenced here, certainly helped Saul prepare to be receptive to the Damascus experience and the subsequent responsibilities he took on as an early leader of the church.

5:36-37 **Theudas.** Gamaliel used these two examples of failed leaders who could not garner support as justification for letting this run its course. Theudas led a rebellion in about AD 44, according to Josephus (*Antiquities* 20:97-98). Not much else is known about him.

5:37 **Judas of Galilee.** The second example was Judas’ revolt in AD 6/7, when Quirinius, the Roman governor of Syria, came to take a census (to tax them). Judas resisted the Romans and most of his group was captured and killed. In spite of Gamaliel’s comment that they “were dispersed,” the group actually stayed intact and reformed themselves as the Zealots, and it was this group that started the revolt in AD 66 that led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple four years later.

5:38 **Refrain from these men.** Based on his two examples, Gamaliel counseled restraint and patience, reasoning that if this was simply the ideas of men, like Theudas and Judas, nothing would come of it. But if it was truly inspired by God, they would be fighting against heaven itself and would not be successful (v. 39).

5:39 **lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.** “Haply” is an old English word meaning ‘by chance’ or ‘by accident.’

5:40 **to him they agreed.** Or, ‘they were persuaded by him.’ Gamaliel’s wisdom won the day and the council elected not to enact the harshest punishment against the apostles at this time. Still, they were cruel, as this verse shows.

5:40 **beaten them.** This was flogging, outlined in Deuteronomy 25:2-3, forty stripes, the punishment according to the Law of Moses. It was the custom to stop at thirty-nine, in order to not exceed the number required in scripture (2 Corinthians 11:24). Their hands were bound to a pillar so that they were bent over, and their chests and backs bared. A strap of cow-hide was used, one-third of the stripes on the chest and two-thirds on the back. “He that smites, smites with his one hand with all his might.” During the beating, Deuteronomy 28:58-63 was read aloud:

If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD; Then the LORD will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance. Moreover he will bring upon thee all the diseases of Egypt, which thou wast afraid of; and they shall cleave unto thee. Also every sickness, and every plague, which is not written in the book of this law, them will the LORD bring upon thee, until thou be destroyed. And ye shall be left few in number, whereas ye were as the stars of heaven for multitude; because thou wouldest not obey the voice of the LORD thy God. And it shall come to pass, that as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the LORD will rejoice over

²⁵ McRay, *Paul*, 45.

you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it.²⁶

5:40 **commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus.** The council repeated to the larger group of apostles the injunction that they have given to Peter and John earlier (4:18). That they would ignore this command was already clear from their words and actions (vv. 28-29).

5:41 **rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer.** An amazing attitude on the part of the apostles who did not complain that they had suffered as a result of their discipleship, but it humbled them to have suffered in some small way as Jesus had suffered for them.

5:42 **daily in the temple, and in every house.** The persecution didn't even slow the apostles down. Each day they were back in the temple courtyards right under the noses of the Sanhedrin and in private homes holding 'missionary discussions,' sacrament meetings, and otherwise teaching the growing church the words of Christ and the message of salvation.

Conclusion

J. B. Phillips, a Protestant minister who published a translation of the Bible called *The New Testament in Modern English*, wrote the following thoughts comparing the ancient church to the one he knew, as he completed his translation of Acts:

"Yet we cannot help feeling disturbed as well as moved, for this surely is the Church as it is meant to be. It is vigorous and flexible, for these are the days before it ever became fat and short of breath through prosperity, or musclebound by overorganization. These men did not make 'acts of faith,' they believed; they did not 'say their prayers,' they really prayed. They did not hold conferences on psychosomatic medicine, they simply healed the sick.

"We in the modern Church have unquestionably *lost* something. Whether it is due to the atrophy of the quality which the New Testament calls 'faith,' whether it is due to a stifling churchiness, whether it is due to our sinful complacency over the scandal of a divided Church, or whatever the cause may be, very little of the modern Church could bear comparison with the spiritual drive, the genuine fellowship, and the [happy] unconquerable courage of the Young Church."²⁷

Bibliography

Abbreviations:

- AT – Author's translation
- BYU – BYU New Rendition
- CJB – Complete Jewish Bible
- ESV – English Standard Version
- JST – Joseph Smith Translation
- KJV – King James Version
- LXX – Septuagint (Greek Old Testament)
- NASB – New American Standard Bible
- NIV – New International Version
- NJB – New Jerusalem Bible
- NLT – New Living Translation
- NRSV – New Revised Standard Version

²⁶ Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:259.

²⁷ J. B. Phillips, *The Young Church in Action*, as cited in Anderson, *Guide*, p. 7.

- TNT – William Tyndale 1534 New Testament

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