

H A N D B O O K O N

Acts and Paul's Letters

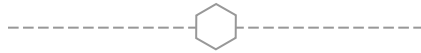


Thomas R. Schreiner

**ACTS • ROMANS • 1 AND 2 CORINTHIANS
GALATIANS • EPHESIANS • PHILIPPIANS
COLOSSIANS • 1 AND 2 THESSALONIANS
1 AND 2 TIMOTHY • TITUS • PHILEMON**

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Paul's Letters



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CHAPTER ONE

The Acts of the Apostles

Introduction

Author and Date

In the book of Acts we are not told the identity of the author, nor are we told when Acts was written. It is quite clear, however, that it was written by the same person who wrote the Gospel of Luke. A number of reasons could be listed, but I will restrict myself to three: (1) Both books are addressed to Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). (2) Acts refers to “the first narrative” (1:1), and that is obviously the Gospel of Luke. (3) The table illustrates some common themes that conclude the Gospel of Luke and are picked up at the beginning of Acts.

Theme	Texts
Proof of Jesus's resurrection	Luke 24:1-43; Acts 1:3
Promise of the Spirit	Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5, 8
Waiting in Jerusalem	Luke 24:52-53; Acts 1:4
Commission to proclaim the gospel	Luke 24:47-48; Acts 1:8
Jesus's ascension	Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9-11

The bridge between the end of Luke and the beginning of Acts shows the hand of the same author at work.

Theophilus knew the author, but how can we know who wrote the Gospel of Luke and Acts? It isn't my purpose to delve into this matter in detail, but we derive the conclusion from tradition and the internal evidence in Acts—the famous “we” passages, where the author of Acts traveled with

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Paul (Acts 16:10–16; 20:5–15; 21:1–12; 27:1–28:16). From the earliest times the early church agreed that Acts was written by Luke. It is quite unlikely that this tradition was invented, for when we read the NT, Luke plays a nearly invisible role. In fact, he only appears in three verses (Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philem. 24). The only reason we notice Luke when reading those verses today is because we know the tradition that Luke wrote a gospel and the book of Acts. Luke’s fame did not lead the early church to identify Luke as the author. It was just the opposite: Luke became famous because the tradition identified him as the author. The “we” passages of Acts, though not altogether determinative, also lead us to Lukan authorship. By a process of elimination in studying the “we” passages in Acts, Luke is shown to be the most likely author.

The date of the Acts of the Apostles is a much more difficult matter. It is tied up with how we date the Gospels, since Acts was clearly written after Luke. Also, most scholars think that Luke used Mark when writing his Gospel, and so the date is linked with a thicket of issues we can’t explore here. I believe there are good reasons to think that the Gospels were written early enough so that Acts was written in the 60s, before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in AD 70. Perhaps Luke completed Acts before Paul was freed from prison (Acts 28:30–31). On the other hand, it is also possible that Acts was written in the 70s or 80s. In any case, the interpretation of the book remains the same, whatever date we assign.

Structure and Central Themes

There are a number of different ways to structure Acts. Here are three possibilities.

Major Persons

Peter	1:1-12:25
Paul	13:1-28:31

Geography

Jerusalem	1:1-8:3
Samaria and Coastal Regions of Palestine	8:4-11:18
South Galatia	11:19-15:35
Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, and Ephesus	15:36-19:20
Jerusalem and Rome	19:21-28:31

Summary Statements

6:7	"So the <i>word of God</i> spread, the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly in <u>number</u> , and <u>a large group</u> of priests became obedient to the faith."
9:31	"So the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it <u>increased in numbers</u> ."
12:24	"But <i>the word of God</i> <u>flourished and multiplied</u> ."
16:5	"So the churches were strengthened in the faith and <u>grew daily in numbers</u> ."
19:20	"In this way <i>the word of the Lord</i> <u>flourished and prevailed</u> ."
28:30-31	"Paul stayed two whole years in his own rented house. And he welcomed all who visited him, <i>proclaiming the kingdom of God</i> and <i>teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ</i> with all boldness and without hindrance."

The outline below is overly simplistic and uses some modern categories, but it helps us get a big picture of Acts.

Outline

The gospel spreads in Jerusalem	1:1-6:7
The gospel spreads in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee	6:8-9:31
The gospel spreads to the gentiles	9:32-12:24
The gospel spreads to what now is Turkey	12:25-16:5
The gospel spreads to Europe	16:6-19:20
The gospel spreads from Jerusalem to Rome	19:21-28:31

The first structure presented above clearly doesn't work, since the book isn't fundamentally about Peter and Paul. In fact, Peter doesn't even appear in Acts 7, and he plays a minor role in chapters 8–9. The geographical structure is more promising but not very illuminating, and to be honest, is a bit boring. No structure is without faults, but I believe the summary statements in the third table nicely structure the book. The summary statements fit well with the theme of the book, which is found in 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

The summary statements in the table are marked to denote three themes. First, the **bold** in the summary statements notes the geographical spread of the gospel. In Acts 1:8 we see that the gospel begins in Jerusalem, then spreads to Judea, to Samaria, and then goes to the ends of the earth. If we look at the bold in the summary statements, we see that the only two summary statements that mention geography are in 6:7 and 9:31. In 6:7 the first part of the promise in 1:8 is fulfilled: the gospel spreads in Jerusalem. These chapters center on the Jerusalem temple, and the gospel is proclaimed in Jerusalem and

in the temple courts. The prophecy of Isaiah begins to be fulfilled here, “For instruction will go out of Zion and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isa. 2:3; cf. Mic. 4:2). The second summary statement in Acts 9:31 records the extension of the gospel to Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. We are not told much about how the gospel spread in Judea and Galilee, but the spread of the gospel to Samaria indicates that Judea and Galilee have also been reached. Later we will consider why it is so important that Samaria is included here.

Three other comments about the structure of 1:1–9:31 should be noted. First, why does the encounter with Stephen in 6:8–8:4 occur after the summary statement in 6:7, especially since Stephen was martyred *in Jerusalem*? Moreover, Stephen was appointed as one of the seven chosen to serve in 6:1–6, and so placing the story of his death (6:8–8:4) after the summary statement about the gospel spreading *in Jerusalem* seems to break up the narrative. I suggest that the story of Stephen’s speech and death are placed after the summary statement in 6:7 because Stephen’s death “scattered” the disciples “throughout the land of Judea and Samaria” (8:1), and “those who were scattered went on their way preaching the word” (8:4; cf. 11:19). Stephen’s speech and martyrdom, in other words, became the impetus for the gospel being proclaimed *outside Jerusalem* in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. It is the catalytic event for the spread of the gospel outside Jerusalem.

Second, why is the conversion of Paul (9:1–30) placed before the second summary statement (9:31) since Paul’s ministry was mainly to the gentiles and to the Jews in the diaspora? In a sense the conversion of Paul seems to complete reaching the Jews in Jerusalem and Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. It is crucial to see that this observation is being made from the Lukan narrative perspective, from the way Luke crafts the story. Certainly Jewish Christians continued to preach the gospel in Jerusalem and in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria after Paul’s conversion, but Luke doesn’t continue to rehearse that story after the conversion of Paul. Thus, the conversion of Paul represents a significant shift in redemptive history. From that point on, the Lord guides Peter (10:1–11:18) and commissions Paul to proclaim the good news about Jesus to the gentiles.

Third, this brings us to our final observation. Why are geographical references missing in the summary statements after 9:31? We noticed that 1:1–6:7 centers on Jerusalem, and 6:8–9:31 focuses on Judea, Samaria, and Galilee, but in the summary statements that follow, geographical references are absent. There is no need to mention specific locales because, from 9:32 on, the gospel goes to the gentiles to the ends of the earth, which includes the farthest reaches of the world. Every locale in Acts from this point on represents the spread of the gospel as it goes to the “end of the earth” (1:8). The word of

the Lord emanating from Jerusalem was going to all nations (Isa. 2:2–3; Mic. 4:1–2). It is fitting, then, that the book ends with Paul in Rome, not because Rome is the ends of the earth, but because it symbolizes that the church was carrying out Jesus’s mission to go to the ends of the earth, even by bringing the gospel to the capital of the Roman Empire. Thus Rome becomes a new launching point for mission.

The second feature of the summary statements is highlighted in *italics*. We see in three of the summary statements that the church grew by *the word* of the Lord or *the word* of God (6:7; 12:24; 19:20). The content of the word is “the kingdom of God,” and the kingdom focuses on Jesus Christ (28:31). The church in Acts grows and expands by the power of the word, which is a way of saying that “the gospel . . . is the power of God for salvation” (Rom. 1:16). Here is the place to make a very important observation. The message of salvation in Acts, the message that has an inherent power, is the message of the end-time kingdom. Some have said that the kingdom isn’t important in Acts in comparison to the Gospels, but this judgment is mistaken. The word “kingdom” isn’t used often, but the theme of the kingdom actually plays a central role in the book. The kingdom frames the entire book, for after Jesus’s ascension when he met with the apostles for forty days, he spoke to them “about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). And the book closes, as was just noted, with Paul “proclaiming the kingdom of God” (28:31).

Furthermore, it is imperative to see that the kingdom centers on Jesus Christ. In the last story of the book, as Paul explains the gospel to the Jews while under house arrest in Rome (cf. Acts 28:16, 23), he “testified about the kingdom of God,” which means that he “tried to persuade them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and the Prophets” (28:23). The kingdom and the gospel of Jesus Christ, the gospel Paul proclaimed in Rome to Jewish Christians, were not two different messages. The kingdom promises of the OT were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, in his death and resurrection. The close connection between gospel, kingdom, and the message about Jesus Christ is confirmed by Acts 8:12. When Philip was in Samaria, he “proclaimed the good news [*euangelizomenō*] about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.” Furthermore, when Luke summarized Paul’s three months of preaching in Ephesus, he says that he was “persuading them about the kingdom of God” (19:8). Similarly, Paul described his ministry among the Ephesians as “preaching the kingdom” (20:25). The word of the Lord, which has such power, is the gospel, the message of the kingdom, the good news about Jesus Christ.

The third theme in the summary statements (presented in the summary statement chart above), indicated by the underlined statements, is the growth of the gospel, the expansion of the word. Two words stand out for the growth

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of the church: *increase* (*auxanō*) and *multiply* (*plēthynō*), and in the chart immediately below they are italicized.

6:7	“the word of God <i>continued to increase</i> , and the number of the disciples <i>multiplied greatly</i> ” (ESV)
12:24	“But the word of God <i>increased and multiplied</i> ” (ESV).
19:20	“So the word of the Lord continued to <i>increase</i> ” (ESV)

We see these same two words, increase and multiply, in the LXX creation account where God says to the human race: “Be fruitful [*auxanesthe*] and multiply [*plēthynesthe*]” (Gen. 1:28 ESV). The creation mandate is being fulfilled in a distinctive manner in the gospel. Human beings were created to rule the world for God, and the rule over the world is restored through the gospel of Jesus Christ. As the gospel spreads, God’s rule over human beings is restored. The remarkable “number” of those who are converted is noted in two summary statements (Acts 6:7; 16:5), and the growth in numbers is recorded elsewhere in the book as well, as the table below shows.

Church Growth in Acts

Text	Reference to Growth
2:41	“That day about three thousand people were added to them.”
2:47	“Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”
4:4	“But many of those who heard the message believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.”
5:14	“Believers were added to the Lord in increasing numbers—multitudes of both men and women.”
6:1	“In those days, as the disciples were increasing in number . . .”
9:35	“So all who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.”
9:42	“And many believed in the Lord.”
11:21	“The Lord’s hand was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.”
11:24	“And large numbers of people were added to the Lord.”
14:1	“A great number of both Jews and Greeks believed.”
17:4	“Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, including a large number of God-fearing Greeks, as well as a number of the leading women.”
17:12	“Consequently, many of them believed, including a number of the prominent Greek women as well as men.”
18:8	“Many of the Corinthians, when they heard, believed and were baptized.”
21:20	“You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are who have believed.”

The creation mandate to rule the world for God was being fulfilled as the *church* increased and multiplied. But we can take another step. The promise given to Abraham that “all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen. 12:3) is a central theme in the covenant made with Abraham. In fact, this promise of universal blessing is repeated regularly in Genesis to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). The universal blessing promised to Abraham is the means by which the original creation mandate to rule God’s world will be fulfilled, and thus the increasing number of believers and the extension of belief to the ends of the earth (the inclusion of the gentiles) fulfills the promise of universal blessing given to Abraham.

One last point should be made. Psalm 72 is a messianic psalm, which looks forward to the realization of the promises made to David in the Davidic covenant. One petition in the psalm is, “May all nations be blessed by him and call him blessed” (72:17). The promise of universal blessing made to Abraham will become a reality through a Davidic king, and in Acts that king is clearly Jesus Christ. All these themes are pulled together in Peter’s second sermon in Jerusalem. “In addition, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those after him, have also foretold these days. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your ancestors, saying to Abraham, ‘And all the families of the earth will be blessed through your offspring.’ God raised up his servant and sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your evil ways” (Acts 3:24–26). The creation mandate to human beings, to rule the world for God, would become a reality through the covenant with Abraham, and the covenant of Abraham was fulfilled through a son of David, Jesus Christ.

Preparation for Pentecost (1:1–26)

Acts 1 functions as the preparation for Pentecost (AD 30) and for the gift of the Spirit that Jesus promised the disciples. We see from its first verse (1:1) that the book of Acts will continue Jesus’s words and works. The disciples, however, will only be able to do what Jesus did and to speak his words if they are empowered by the Holy Spirit; thus Jesus instructs the apostles to wait for the promise of the Spirit (1:4–5).

The promise of the Spirit is inextricably intertwined with the coming of the kingdom (1:4–6). The kingdom of God plays a central role in Jesus’s preaching in the Synoptic Gospels, and it is clearly one of the central themes in Scripture. The Prophets (e.g., Isa. 9:2–7; 32:1–5; 33:15–24; Amos 9:11–15; Obad. 21; Zeph. 3:8–20; Zech. 14:9) and the Psalms (e.g., 2; 72; 89; 102:15–22) anticipate the day when God’s kingdom will come and prevail over the earth.

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In the OT the fulfillment of the covenant promises and the coming of the kingdom will become a reality when God pours out his Spirit (e.g., Isa. 32:15; 44:3; Ezek. 36:26–27; Joel 2:28–29).

We are not surprised, then, to find that the promise of the Spirit in Acts 1:4–5 provoked the disciples to ask if the kingdom was about to be restored to Israel. The restoration of Israel is found in many texts in the OT, especially in texts that promise return from exile (e.g., Isa. 11:11–15; 40:3–11; 42:16; 43:2, 5–7, 16–19; 48:20–21; 49:6–11; 51:10; Jer. 31:27–34; Ezek. 34–37; Amos 9:11–15). Israel’s return from exile and the gift of the Spirit are two dimensions of the same promise, which is also described as “a new covenant” (cf. Jer. 31:31–34). The new covenant is also described as a “covenant of peace” (Isa. 54:10; Ezek. 34:25; 37:26) and an “everlasting covenant” (ESV: Isa. 55:3; 61:8; Jer. 32:40; 50:5; Ezek. 16:60; 37:26). It is clear from Isaiah 52:13–53:12 that the return from exile is based on the sacrifice of the servant of the Lord, who suffers death for the sake of his people’s sins. Since Jesus, the servant of the Lord, was crucified and risen, the new covenant (i.e., the gift of the Spirit) became a reality on Pentecost. We see at Jesus’s baptism that he was anointed with the Spirit (Luke 3:21–22), and now at Pentecost he pours out the Spirit on those who belong to him.

When the disciples asked whether Israel would be restored, Jesus directed them to their responsibility to witness, beginning in Jerusalem and even to the ends of the earth, instructing them that it wasn’t theirs to know the precise time of restoration. What Jesus meant by Israel’s restoration is debated. Some think the disciples asked the wrong question, but Jesus doesn’t criticize the notion that Israel would be restored. He corrects the idea that the time of the restoration can be calculated. Others believe that there will be a literal restoration of the kingdom to ethnic Israel, and so there will be a future kingdom in the millennium, where Jesus will reign over the earth from Jerusalem along with Jewish believers.

When we examine the text more closely, however, we see that the restoration of true Israel includes gentile believers in Christ. The kingdom includes Jewish believers, of course, and the Twelve (see below) constitute the foundation and nucleus of restored Israel. The phrase “the end of the earth” (*eschatou tēs gēs*, 1:8) provides the clue to what is going on. The “end of the earth” (ESV) represents the areas where gentiles live, denoting those who live outside Israel and the land of promise (Deut. 28:49; Isa. 8:9; 48:20; 62:11; Jer. 6:22; 16:19; 25:31). Jesus promised that the disciples would witness to “the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8), and this means that gentiles would be folded into the people of God. Isaiah invites all nations to come and to believe: “Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth” (Isa. 45:22). Isaiah also prophesies that the

servant of the Lord, who is Jesus Christ, will restore more than Israel: “It is not enough for you to be my servant raising up the tribes of Jacob and restoring the protected ones of Israel. I will also make you a light for the nations, to be my salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isa. 49:6). Here we have a hint that the restored Israel includes gentiles. The timing of restoration is not the only surprise, for the nature of restored Israel also confounds expectations. This reading is confirmed in Acts 13:47, which quotes Isaiah 49:6. The Jews in Pisidian Antioch largely rejected the gospel proclaimed by Paul and Barnabas, and so they turned to the gentiles so that the light of salvation shines “to the end of the earth.” We see, then, that the church of Jesus Christ, composed of both Jews and gentiles, constitutes the restored Israel.

Rounding out Acts 1 are three other themes, which we will look at briefly. First, before the Spirit is given, Jesus must be exalted, and hence we have the account of the ascension (1:9–11). For forty days after the resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples at various times. During those forty days they never knew when Jesus would suddenly be in their presence. The ascension clarifies that the period of appearances had ended; they would not see Jesus again until the kingdom came in its fullness. Most importantly, however, the Spirit would not be poured out, the new era would not be inaugurated, until Jesus ascended and ruled on high. We see this clearly in Acts 2:33: “Since [Jesus] has been exalted to the right hand of God and has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, he has poured out what you both see and hear.” Since the Spirit is only given after Jesus has been crucified and has risen, the Spirit glorifies Jesus in his ministry, death, and resurrection.

The second theme is the prayer of the disciples (1:12–14). The 120 disciples gathered for prayer before the coming of the Spirit. The waiting for the Spirit in Jerusalem wasn’t passive (1:4; Luke 24:49), for the disciples spent the time in prayer. Often in Luke-Acts the Spirit comes when there is prayer. Jesus was praying when the Spirit came down on him like a dove (Luke 3:21–22). After the disciples were threatened for proclaiming Jesus and the resurrection, they prayed together and “were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 4:31). Similarly, Peter and John prayed that the Samaritans would receive the Spirit (8:14–15). The account where Cornelius and his friends receive the Spirit is attributed in part to the prayers of Cornelius (10:2, 4, 30, 31). Here we see the confluence of the Spirit, the coming of the kingdom, and prayer.

Third, in 1:15–26 we see that the apostles selected the twelfth apostle before Pentecost. In popular circles it is often said that a mistake was made here and that the apostles should have waited for the selection of Paul. This reading is certainly wrong. Luke gives no indication that he believed the apostles went awry. On the contrary, he emphasizes that Scripture was fulfilled, since the

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betrayal of Judas was foretold by the Holy Spirit (1:16). Here Luke likely sees a fulfillment of Psalm 41:9, which states that one of David's closest friends turned against him. The treachery of David's friend isn't, strictly speaking, a prophecy, since it records an incident in David's life. Indeed, in the psalm David confesses his own sin (41:4). What we have here is typology, but it isn't arbitrary, for the text needs to be interpreted along the lines of the Lord's covenants with his people. The Lord made a covenant with David, promising that his dynasty would endure forever and that a descendant of David would reign on the throne (e.g., 2 Sam. 7; 1 Chron. 17; Pss. 2; 89; 132). David's life, then, functioned as a prophetic pattern and anticipation for the life of Jesus Christ. Just as David suffered before he gained the throne, so did Jesus. Just as David was abandoned by a close friend, so too was Jesus. Typology is not merely retrospective, as if the parallels are only present after the fact; the correspondences and patterns were planned by God from the beginning, and in this sense typology is prophetic, even though as readers we may only see the parallels retrospectively. Another feature of typology is escalation, which means that the fulfillment is greater than the type. The fulfillment outstrips the type; this is evident in the case of OT sacrifices, for the sacrifice of Jesus is clearly greater than the sacrifice of animals. According to Psalm 41, David was a sinner, but Jesus is greater than David, and thus he was without sin. He is the perfect messianic king.

Two OT psalms are quoted in 1:20, which function quite similarly (69:25; 109:8). Both psalms recount experiences in the life of David. Psalm 69 describes a time of great crisis in David's life, where his life was in danger, and he faced enemies who hated him for no reason. David pleaded for the Lord to deliver him and prayed that the Lord would judge his enemies for mistreating him. In 69:25 David prayed that his enemies would be destroyed and have no place to live, and Peter sees this prayer as fulfilled in Judas being removed from apostolic ministry and in his death (Acts 1:18–20). Clearly, Davidic typology is at work since the psalm is not an overt prophecy, and we see again that David in the psalm confesses his sins (Ps. 69:5). The hatred and opposition to king David points typologically to Judas's opposition to and betrayal of Jesus the Messiah. We again have an instance of escalation, and interestingly many NT writers see Psalm 69 as being ultimately fulfilled in the life and death of Jesus (e.g., Ps. 69:4 in John 15:25; Ps. 69:9 in John 2:17 and Rom. 15:3; Ps. 69:22 in Matt. 27:34, 48; Mark 15:23, 36; Luke 23:36; and John 19:29; Ps. 69:23–24 in Rom. 11:9–10).

Psalm 109 is similar in many respects to Psalm 69. David was once again beset by enemies, and there was no reason for their hatred of him. David prays that the Lord will show his faithfulness to him and have mercy on him

despite the fierce opposition against him. In the midst of the psalm, David prays against his adversary, asking God to judge him (Ps. 109:6–20). The appropriation of the psalm in Acts 1 shows that we can't dismiss the prayer as if it reflected a bad attitude. David prays for God's righteousness to be manifested in the world by repaying the wicked what they deserve (Ps. 109:20). As David prays against his enemy, one of the petitions is, "Let another take over his position" (Ps. 109:8; Acts 1:20). Again, this verse isn't a prophecy but a prayer, and it is about David's enemy, not Jesus's adversary. Still, Peter takes up what is said in the psalm and applies it typologically to Judas. What David prayed is fulfilled supremely in the relationship between Jesus and Judas.

We have seen, then, that Luke portrays the greatest treachery in the world (betraying Jesus) as a fulfillment of Scripture, and Scripture is also fulfilled in Judas losing his apostolic rank and another filling it. Did the apostles fall short of the ideal in casting lots to choose the twelfth apostle, or is it the case that after the Spirit is given, casting lots is shown to be inferior? Neither of these conclusions convinces. Casting lots had a respectable pedigree from the OT (e.g., Josh. 18:6, 8, 10; 1 Chron. 24:31; 25:8; Neh. 11:1). Where the lot falls reflects the Lord's will (Prov. 16:33) since there is ultimately no random event in the universe. Nor does Luke indicate that such an activity is otiose now that the Spirit has come, as if those who have the Spirit are always certain of God's will. Luke isn't attempting to provide a pattern for discerning God's will in the future; he indicates that the church could not discern which of the two to choose as an apostle, and thus the believers trusted God to choose which of the two should serve in the apostolic office. The apostles did the right thing in choosing Matthias, and the number twelve is significant before Pentecost since the twelve apostles represent the nucleus of restored Israel. Just as the twelve tribes represented Israel under the old covenant, the twelve apostles are the nucleus of the restored Israel—the Israel to whom the kingdom will be restored (Acts 1:6).

Expansion in Jerusalem (2:1–6:7)

Pentecost (2:1–41)

One of the most significant events in Christian history occurred on the first Pentecost after Jesus's resurrection. The Holy Spirit was poured out on the 120 believers who were gathered, and they spoke in tongues. The gift of the Spirit was accompanied by "a violent rushing wind from heaven" (2:2), and "tongues like flames of fire . . . separated and rested on each one of them" (2:3). Pentecost, which celebrated the grain harvest, was also connected with

the giving of the law on Mount Sinai in Jewish tradition. Thus, the giving of the Spirit on this occasion suggests that the new covenant (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:26–27) had arrived, and the era in which God’s people lived under the Mosaic covenant and law had come to an end. The phenomena accompanying the gift of the Spirit confirm this reading since they echo what happened at Sinai. The rushing of the wind may be analogous to “the very loud trumpet sound” (Exod. 19:16) on Mount Sinai. The tongues of fire remind us of the “thunder and lightning” on Sinai (Exod. 19:16), and often in Scripture fire denotes God’s presence (e.g., Gen. 15:17; Exod. 3:2; 13:21–22; 14:20, 24; Ps. 104:4; Isa. 5:24). The connections to Sinai point to the inauguration of the new covenant, to the gift of the Spirit, promised so often in the OT (Isa. 32:15; 44:3; Ezek. 36:26–27; Joel 2:28–29).

What is the significance of speaking in other tongues, which clearly in Acts 2 is speaking in foreign languages? It is connected with the Jews and proselytes who were visiting Jerusalem from a wide array of regions. We likely have here a reversal of the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1–9). At Babel the tongues of human beings were confused because of human sin. At Pentecost people who spoke different languages understood one another when the Spirit descended, and thus we have here an anticipation of the new creation, where the separation of peoples due to their inability to understand one another has ended.

Proclaiming the Gospel in Jerusalem (2:1–6:7)

Since Jesus as the crucified one was raised from the dead and reigns at God’s right hand, he pours out his Spirit on his disciples. Two long speeches are given by Peter in Jerusalem (Acts 2:14–40; 3:12–26) and two shorter ones (4:8–12; 5:29–32). I have divided the speeches into seven themes: (1) prophecy fulfilled in (2) Jesus’s ministry; (3) his death; (4) his resurrection; (5) his ascension; and (6) the gift of the Spirit. Therefore, (7) people should repent. First, the days of fulfillment have arrived in the ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, and such prophecy is fulfilled in the gift of the Spirit as well. The pouring out of the Spirit fulfills what Joel wrote (Acts 2:16–21; Joel 2:28–32). The culmination of redemptive history, the fulfillment of all that Israel longed for, has come in Jesus Christ: “all the prophets . . . have foretold . . . these days” (Acts 3:24). Moses prophesied that a prophet like him would arise to whom the people must listen (Deut. 18:15), and Jesus is the prophet like Moses (Acts 3:21–22). The covenant made to Abraham, pledging blessings for all peoples everywhere (Gen. 12:3), has been realized in Jesus Christ (Acts 3:25). This is Luke’s way of saying that the eschatological kingdom has come, the covenants are fulfilled, the new

creation has dawned, the new exodus has occurred, and the new and final David sits on his throne.

Second, prophecy is fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus. We actually find only one verse devoted to Jesus's ministry: "This Jesus of Nazareth was a man attested to you by God with miracles, wonders, and signs that God did among you through him, just as you yourselves know" (2:22). We recognize that Luke has abbreviated Peter's speech (2:14–36); there was no need to expand upon Jesus's ministry since Theophilus could fill in the details from the Gospel of Luke. The miracles and signs Jesus did were sufficient to accredit him as the Messiah. Here we can pick up a similarly abbreviated account, where in the speech to Cornelius and his friends, Peter summarizes Jesus's ministry by reminding them "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how he went about doing good and healing all who were under the tyranny of the devil, because God was with him" (Acts 10:38). Jesus was the Spirit-anointed Messiah, and his ministry is summarized in terms of doing good and healing.

Third, God was also working out his purposes in Jesus's death. Jesus's death was no accident but fulfilled God's predestined plan (2:23; cf. 4:27–28) in that it fulfilled prophecy (3:18). As readers we would love to see which prophecies were fulfilled according to Peter. Certainly, Peter's sermons were much longer than the abbreviated (but accurate) synopses we have here, and thus for the listeners Peter must have expounded the prophecies he had in mind. We have a clue in 3:26, which identifies Jesus as God's "servant" (see also 3:13; 4:27–28). Luke doesn't explain precisely why Jesus was put to death, but the reference to the servant almost certainly refers to Isaiah 52:13–53:12. It is quite clear in Isaiah that the servant died for the sake of his people and in place of his people, to atone for their sins. Luke provides other hints that Jesus's death was atoning when he calls upon them to repent "for the forgiveness of your sins" (2:38; cf. also 5:30–31), which is presumably based on Jesus's death. Similarly, Jesus's suffering and the wiping away of sins are closely tied together in 3:18–19. Peter claims that Jesus's name is the only means of salvation, and this salvation is tied to his death and resurrection (4:10–12).

Fourth, the Petrine speeches especially emphasize the resurrection (2:24–32; 3:15, 22, 26; 4:10; 5:30), which is scarcely surprising since the claim that Jesus was the Messiah was verified by his resurrection. The resurrection represented God's vindication of Jesus, for governing leaders among both Jews and gentiles declared that Jesus was guilty and thus put him to death for being a messianic pretender (2:23; 4:27–28). Naturally, a particular responsibility for putting Jesus to death was assigned to Jewish leaders since Jesus fulfilled their Scriptures and prophetic hopes (2:36; 3:13–15; 4:10; 5:30). The resurrection of

Jesus constituted a decisive rejection of the verdict that Jesus was guilty and instead declared that Jesus was God’s anointed one and the cornerstone of God’s new temple, the restored Israel (4:11; Ps. 118:22; Isa. 28:16), and thus he is the only hope for salvation (Acts 4:12; 5:31). Mercifully, the resurrection of Jesus wasn’t followed by immediate judgment for those who condemned him, but forgiveness was offered to those who turned from evil (3:26).

The language of 3:13 is particularly interesting, for there we read that God “glorified his servant Jesus.” The servant, as noted earlier, takes us back into the orbit of the suffering servant of Isaiah 52:13–53:12. The servant died for the sake of and in the place of his people (53:4–6, 10, 12), but his own people rejected and despised him (53:3) and did not believe in him (53:1). They actually thought that God was punishing him (53:4). The glorification of Jesus (i.e., his resurrection), however, represents his vindication. The same verb “glorify” (*doxazō*) occurs in Acts 3:13 and Isaiah 52:13. The servant will be “lifted up and glorified exceedingly” (my translation of the LXX). Jesus’s death did not end in humiliation but was the pathway to his glorification.

The longest explanation of Jesus’s resurrection comes in the first speech on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:24–32), where Peter quotes Psalm 16:8–11 to support the claim that Jesus is risen from the dead. He also emphasizes that he and others were witnesses to the resurrection (Acts 2:32); what the Scriptures prophesied is verified in the empirical world. The reference to Psalm 16:8–11 in support of Jesus’s resurrection is fascinating because the psalm clearly records an event in David’s life. In the context of the psalm, David asked the Lord to preserve his life and is full of praise because the Lord answered his prayers. The psalm doesn’t seem to be a prophecy about the coming Messiah. We see here what was noted earlier. Psalms about David are read typologically in light of the Davidic covenant and the promise that an heir of David would reign forever. Peter specifically notes David’s prophetic status and his realization that an heir would reign on his throne (Acts 2:30). David’s prophetic status doesn’t mean that he was conscious in Psalm 16 that he was writing about the Messiah. The point is that psalms about David function prophetically, and this is particularly true typologically. We also see another example of escalation in typology, for David was preserved from dying on the occasion in which the psalm was written, but Jesus was raised from the dead. Hence, the wording of the psalm particularly fits Jesus since he did not experience corruption in the grave (Acts 2:31).

Fifth, Jesus’s resurrection signified his vindication, and his vindication is a permanent reality since he reigns as the ascended Lord. He “has been exalted to the right hand of God” (2:33), and as the exalted one he poured out the Holy Spirit. Peter cites one of the most famous psalms in the NT, Psalm 110,

to support Jesus's exaltation. Jesus sits at God's right hand as Lord until his enemies are placed under his feet (Acts 2:34–35). God has "made this Jesus . . . Lord and Messiah" (2:36). We don't have adoptionistic Christology here, the idea that Jesus only became Lord and Messiah after his death. Instead, the point is that Jesus now reigns at God's right hand as Lord and Messiah, and such a reign only began after his resurrection. Indeed, Jesus's glorification (3:13), noted earlier, can't be separated from his ascension and exaltation. The servant "will be raised and lifted up and greatly exalted" (Isa. 52:13). Jesus's exaltation is also conveyed in his being identified as the cornerstone (4:11). Or, we read, "God exalted this man to his right hand as ruler and Savior" (5:31). The promise of the Davidic covenant that an heir would rule forever (2 Sam. 7:12–16; Ps. 89:29–37) is fulfilled by Jesus Christ, but the way the fulfillment came to pass was unexpected in that Jesus reigns now in heaven, at the right hand of the Father as the exalted Lord.

Sixth, as the crucified, risen, and exalted Lord, Jesus poured out the Spirit on his people (Acts 2:33). The baptism of the Spirit (1:5), which became a reality in the Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit, fulfilled the promise of the book of Joel (2:16–21; Joel 2:28–32; cf. Acts 5:32). Similarly, "the times of refreshing" in Acts 3:20 (ESV) is probably another way of referring to the Spirit. Those who repent and are forgiven receive the Spirit in 2:38, and similarly those who repent and are forgiven experience refreshment in 3:19–20; this refreshment is the gift of the Spirit. As noted earlier, the Pentecostal gift of the Spirit represented the fulfillment of kingdom and covenant promises.

Finally, the hearers were summoned to respond. They must "repent and be baptized" to receive forgiveness of sins (2:38). Similarly, they are called upon to "repent and turn back" for their sins to be erased (3:19; cf. also 3:26). We see again in 5:31 that repentance and forgiveness of sins are linked, and the Spirit is given to those who are obedient (5:32). Those who want to be members of restored Israel must acknowledge their sins and turn from them.

The Solidarity of Life in the Early Church (2:42–46; 4:32–5:11; 6:1–6)

Another notable feature of life in the early church was its solidarity: love characterized the community. We see four elements of community life in 2:42. First, the church was devoted to the teaching of the apostles, and that teaching is probably summarized for us in the Petrine speeches. Corporately, they listened to and obeyed apostolic teaching. Second, believers were committed to fellowship with one another, which means that the church showed concern and commitment to one another. This fellowship is expanded upon in 2:44–46 and 4:32–37. One of the signs of such fellowship was that "all the believers were

together” (2:44). Love between Christians manifested itself in that they spent time together. They met together daily in the temple and shared food together (2:46). Remarkably, they sacrificed for one another, even selling “possessions and property” (2:45) to assist those who were in need (2:44-45; 4:32-37). Such sharing was not mandatory or enforced but was entirely voluntary, testifying to the generosity that animated the early church.

Third, believers also broke bread together (2:42). The “breaking of bread” could refer to an ordinary meal (27:35), but it also denoted the sharing of the Lord’s Supper (Luke 22:19; 24:30; Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11). In this latter instance, the sharing of a meal and the Lord’s Supper both took place on the same occasion. The meal that believers frequently celebrated together reminded them regularly of the death of Jesus on their behalf, and his death was the basis for their forgiveness of sins and their life together as Christians. Fourth, the believers were also devoted “to prayer” (2:42). The prayers were likely both spontaneous and memorized. Prayer signified the community’s dependence upon God for maintaining their life together in truth and love.

Life in the community wasn’t without its strains, and Luke gives two indications that it wasn’t perfect. First, the sin of Ananias and Sapphira is recorded (5:1-11). The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was not that they failed to donate all their money, for Peter makes it clear that they were not required to sell their property, and after they sold it, there was no expectation that they would give all the proceeds to the church (5:4). Their sin, then, was lying; they pretended to give all the proceeds of the land sold to the church (5:1-3, 8-9). Their death symbolizes divine judgment upon blatant and intended hypocrisy in the church. Certainly, Luke isn’t teaching that death invariably follows in such situations. At the inauguration of the new covenant, the Lord reveals his standards for the community. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira echoes the sin of Achan in the OT (Josh. 7), for Achan also sinned deceitfully and deliberately when Israel sacked Jericho and first entered the land of promise, and thus Achan was stoned and Israel was cleansed of evil. So too, at the inauguration of the new covenant we see an example of the Lord’s response to blatant sin in the community. It is an example of escalation of judgment in the new age since Ananias and Sapphira sinned against the Spirit granted in the new covenant.

The other account has to do with the Hellenistic widows in Jerusalem who were being discriminated against in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-6). The Hellenistic Jews spoke Greek, while the “Hebraic Jews” spoke Aramaic, the native language. The Hebraic widows were apparently receiving necessary food, but Hellenistic widows were overlooked. We see here that the early church was not free of the pettiness, prejudice, and cultural discrimination that has marked

the church throughout the centuries. Luke probably includes the account to indicate how the church expended energy to resolve the problem. As the church continued to grow, new problems inevitably emerged. The apostles delegated the matter to others so that they could continue to concentrate on teaching and prayer. At the same time, it is remarkable that the seven appointed to care for the problem all have Greek names, which suggests that they were all diaspora Jews. Some of them (like Stephen and Philip) were probably bilingual, but the church appointed those from a Hellenistic background to avoid any sense of favoritism or discrimination. The story of the Hellenistic widows signifies how important it is to maintain the love of the community.

Suffering and Signs (4:1–31; 5:12–42)

It is also notable that the early church was marked by suffering and by signs and wonders. The apostles were arrested (4:1–3), questioned (4:5–7), and threatened (4:16–21) by the religious authorities. On a second occasion their lives were endangered, and they were beaten by the authorities (5:17–42), though they providentially escaped with their lives because of the counsel of Gamaliel. It is instructive to juxtapose signs and wonders and suffering, for those who believe in the former might think that they would be spared from the latter, but such was not the case in the early church. When the apostles were threatened by the authorities, they prayed that they would continue to boldly proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified and risen, and that God would heal and do signs and wonders through them (4:29–30). The remarkable signs and wonders and healings and exorcisms (5:12–16) accredited the message spoken by the apostles and drew people to hear God’s word. The phrase “signs and wonders” echoes the exodus, where the Lord performed many “signs and wonders” in freeing Israel from Egypt (Exod. 7:3; Deut. 4:34; 6:22; 7:19; 26:8; 29:3; 34:11; Neh. 9:10; Pss. 78:43; 105:27; 135:9; Jer. 32:20–21). Still, Israel did not fully believe in the signs and wonders because of their hard hearts (Deut. 29:3–4). Just as the exodus was attested by the signs and wonders, so too the new exodus, accomplished by the death and resurrection of Jesus, was verified by signs and wonders. Both the suffering and the signs and wonders accredited the gospel proclaimed by the apostles.

Expansion in Israel (6:8–9:31)

Stephen’s Speech (7:1–60)

I noted earlier how Stephen’s speech became the catalyst for propelling the gospel outside of Jerusalem into Judea, Galilee, and Samaria (Acts 9:31).

Those “scattered” outside the land preached the word in various locales. We want to survey here the main themes of Stephen’s speech, which may have been spoken around AD 31–32. Stephen was probably a diaspora Jew who faced opposition from Jews who came from synagogues in the diaspora (6:9). They leveled two charges against Stephen. First, they accused him of criticizing the Mosaic law (6:11, 13–14); second, they charged him with teaching that the temple was unnecessary and would be destroyed (6:11, 13–14). The law and the temple were two of the pillars of Judaism, and thus the charges were very serious.

At first glance, it might seem as though Stephen didn’t answer the accusations. He seems to lapse into telling Bible stories that have nothing to do with the complaints lodged against him, but a closer look reveals that his speech represents a profound response to the charges. Two themes in the speech need to be explored. First, God has worked profoundly in Israel’s history even when Israel was outside the land and there was no temple. For instance, Abraham had no inheritance at all in the land, “not even a foot of ground” (7:5), and yet Abraham was the father of the Jewish people. Certainly, there was the promise that Israel would eventually worship the Lord in the temple (7:7), but that was after four hundred years in Egypt (7:6). We see a similar theme in the life of Joseph. God was with him, even though he spent his life in Egypt—outside the land of promise. Indeed, God was with the people of Israel during their Egyptian sojourn, and we can conclude from this that God works in surprising ways. Along the same lines, the person whom God used to free people from Egypt, Moses, was “educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians” (7:22). We could say that he attended a pagan university! And God further prepared him for leadership during the forty years he lived in the desert (7:29–30). The holy place, therefore, is wherever God meets his people, and sacred space isn’t limited to the temple. As God was with Joseph in Egypt, so the holy place where Moses encountered the Holy One of Israel was in the Sinai wilderness, the fiery bush (7:30–34).

Furthermore, God did not even mandate from the outset that a temple should be built. Israel was instructed to build a moveable tabernacle, and with that moveable shrine they conquered the land of promise (7:44–45). The temple wasn’t always God’s mode of dwelling with his people, for it was only established in the days of David and Solomon (7:46–47). And Isaiah reminded the people (Isa. 66:1) that no temple can contain God since he transcends any building (Acts 7:48–49). Here we have a hint and a suggestion that a new temple was coming, a greater temple than the one in Jerusalem. Throughout his speech Stephen points to progressive revelation. God remains the same, but he deals with his people in different ways and with various covenants.

One segment of salvation history (when God gave the temple) must not be reified and treated as if it is the end point and culmination of God's plan.

The second theme uncovers a pattern in Israel's history where the people rejected God's messengers. For instance, Joseph was God's agent to preserve Israel from perishing during the Egyptian famine, but his brothers did not recognize that he was appointed by God and instead rejected him and sold him into slavery, though, we are told, the actions of the brothers were the means by which God accomplished his purposes (Gen. 45:4–7; 50:19–21). The theme is expanded upon in the case of Moses. The religious leaders of Stephen's day venerated Moses, but it was quite different when Moses was alive. The Israelite man who rejected Moses's leadership represented the typical response to his guidance (Exod. 2:13–14; Acts 7:26–28, 35). The law that Israel claimed to cherish was immediately rejected when it was given to Israel, for Israel broke the covenant in a dramatic fashion when the ink on the covenant (so to speak) was scarcely dry. Israel immediately flouted God's law by fashioning and worshiping the golden calf (Exod. 32; Acts 7:38–41). The wilderness generation and the history of Israel testified that Israel was often devoted to other gods and other temples. Since Israel flagrantly violated the covenant, the people were sent into exile (7:42–43).

Stephen's point, of course, is that the Israel of his day continued the pattern of their ancestors. The people claimed that they venerated Moses, but they were actually just like the people of Moses's day who ended up rejecting Moses. The same thing was happening, Stephen claims, with Jesus, for Jesus was the prophet Moses predicted would come (7:37). Stephen's hearers suffered from the same stubbornness and resistance to the Holy Spirit that had marked Israel's history (7:51). Their charge that Stephen didn't observe the law was ridiculous, for they, like their ancestors, killed and persecuted God's messengers (supremely Jesus!) and thus did not observe the law themselves.

Reading the law rightly means reading it in terms of redemptive history; it means reading it in terms of the whole story line. And those who failed to believe in Jesus revealed that they didn't understand how the temple pointed to something greater: Jesus as the true and final temple. Their claim to keep the law was contradicted by their refusal to believe in the one whom the law promised would come.

Stephen's speech enraged the people and ended up getting him killed (7:54–8:4). Before Stephen was stoned, he said, "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" (7:56). The opening of the heavens symbolizes revelation from God (Isa. 64:1; Ezek. 1:1; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:21; John 1:51; Acts 10:11; Rev. 4:1; 11:19; 19:11). What Stephen saw was most astonishing since he saw Jesus as the Son of Man standing at God's

right hand. Here we find the only instance in Acts where Jesus is identified as the Son of Man, though the title is quite common in the Gospels. The reference to the Son of Man alludes to Daniel 7:13–14, where the Son of Man is ushered into God’s presence and receives a kingdom in which all people serve him. Stephen confessed that Jesus is the Son of Man (cf. Acts 7:59), the king of Israel and of the world. What is curious is that the Son of Man stands, instead of being seated, since elsewhere in the Gospels he is portrayed as sitting at God’s right hand (Matt. 19:28; 25:31; 26:64; Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69), and elsewhere Jesus is depicted as one who sits and reigns (Matt. 20:21, 23; 22:44; Mark 10:37, 40; 12:36; Luke 20:42; Acts 2:34). Nowhere else do we read that he stands at God’s right hand. Scholars have given various explanations for why Jesus was standing. Probably it indicates a vindication of Stephen’s claims: Jesus stands as Stephen’s advocate before the throne. Stephen’s speech culminates, then, with a glorious vision of Jesus as the Son of Man. The promises of salvation and blessing have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The claims made by Stephen lead to his death; in his forgiveness of those who murdered him, Stephen reflects Jesus Christ, who forgave those who crucified him (Luke 23:34). Yet the martyrdom of Stephen didn’t squelch the proclamation of the gospel, for now those scattered because of persecution preach the word outside Jerusalem (Acts 8:4).

Philip’s Encounters in Samaria and with the Ethiopian Eunuch (8:4–40)

Chapter 8 records Philip’s preaching the gospel in Samaria and his encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch (perhaps AD 31–32). The Philip in question is not Philip the apostle, but the Philip who was part of the seven appointed to help with the Hellenistic widows (6:5). We know it wasn’t the apostle Philip, for the apostles had not left Jerusalem (8:1). Philip’s preaching in Samaria had a tremendous effect: many believed as he proclaimed the gospel, which was attested by signs (8:5–8). The people were previously attracted to Simon the magician, but they changed their loyalties when Philip preached the gospel.

Curiously, even though the Samaritans believed and were baptized, they did not receive the Spirit when they believed (8:12, 15–16). There is no other instance in the NT where people believed in Jesus and did not receive the Spirit immediately, and so what we see here is not a pattern or model. Instead, the regular pattern is that those who believe receive the Holy Spirit upon believing (2:38). What stands out is that the Samaritans only received the Spirit later, when the apostles Peter and John laid hands on them (8:17). The story doesn’t teach that laying on of hands is necessary to receive the Spirit, since others (Cornelius and his friends) received the Spirit without the laying on of hands

(cf. 10:44–48). The question that must be asked is this: why is it the case that the Spirit could only be dispensed through apostles and not through Philip the evangelist? Probably because there was a cultural breach between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Samaritans had a long history in which they were separated from the Jews, worshiping, for example, on Mount Gerizim instead of in Jerusalem, and prizing the Pentateuch instead of the entirety of the OT. John Hyrcanus destroyed their temple on Mount Gerizim during his reign (134–104 BC). The tension between the Jews and the Samaritans is evident also in the NT (Luke 9:51–56; 10:33; 17:16; John 4:9; 8:48; cf. Acts 1:8; 9:31).

Since the Spirit is always given when people believe, the Lukan narrative would naturally provoke questions in the minds of readers, since otherwise it is unheard of for people to believe and not receive the Spirit! How can such a phenomenon be explained? The best answer is that God withheld the Spirit on this occasion to prevent a breach between the Jews and Samaritans, only granting the Spirit through the hands of the apostles so that the Samaritan church would not split off from Jerusalem. The church was united under the authority of the apostles.

Though there is no compelling evidence that the faith of the Samaritans was inauthentic, Simon's faith is shown to be deficient. Simon was astonished by "the signs and great miracles" performed by Philip (Acts 8:13). When he "saw that the Spirit was given" (probably evidenced by speaking in tongues; 8:18), he offered Peter and John money so that he could also have the power to dispense the Spirit. The words Peter used demonstrate that Simon did not belong to God, for the words "part" and "lot" (*meris oude klēros*) are used in the OT to denote possession of an inheritance (e.g., Deut. 10:9 LXX), which signifies that one has a place in the land and people of Israel. Typologically, the land of the OT points to the final inheritance of believers in the NT (e.g., Rom. 4:13). Such a reading is confirmed since Peter called upon Simon to "repent" (Acts 8:22). Furthermore, Peter charged Simon with being "poisoned by bitterness" and "bound by wickedness" (8:23). The words "poisoned by bitterness" reach back to Deuteronomy 29:18, which is a striking parallel. "Be sure there is no man, woman, clan, or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the LORD our God to go and worship the gods of those nations. Be sure there is no root among you bearing poisonous and bitter fruit." It is clear that the person with a poisoned root is turning from the true God to false gods (see also Deut. 13:2); he is committing apostasy. Simon must truly repent to belong to the people of God.

What is the significance of the conversion of the Samaritans? Since Samaria was considered to be part of Israel and was part of the northern kingdom, the conversion of Samaria to Christ and its submission to the church in Jerusalem

constitutes a fulfillment of the prophecy in Ezekiel 37. Ezekiel prophesied that there would come a day when “the stick of Ephraim” and “the stick of Judah” would become “a single stick” (37:15–28). The unification of Samaria and Judea/Galilee constitutes the fulfillment of the promise in Ezekiel, and the “one king” who will “rule over all of them” is Jesus (37:22), since they are cleansed from their sins through Jesus (37:23). “My servant David will be king over them, and there will be one shepherd for all of them” (37:24). In Acts, the servant David is Jesus Christ (Acts 3:13, 26; 4:27, 30), and “the dwelling place” is the promised Spirit (Ezek. 37:27).

The story of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–40) could be understood as the conversion of the first gentile, but more likely the eunuch was considered to be a proselyte (8:27), and thus Cornelius and his friends are set forth as the first gentile converts. It isn’t certain if the eunuch was literally castrated or if he was simply a court official. In any case, the conversion of the eunuch was probably seen as the fulfillment of Isaiah 56:3, where eunuchs are included in the kingdom, indicating the arrival of the eschaton since he would be excluded from the Lord’s assembly if he was castrated (Deut. 23:1). Interestingly, the eunuch was reading Isaiah 53, about the servant of the Lord, and Philip explained that the text was fulfilled in Jesus. The portion he was reading from (53:7–8) doesn’t focus on Jesus’s substitutionary death but on his innocent suffering. Why is the focus on Jesus’s innocent suffering instead of his death for the sake of sinners? Probably because the early Christians had to regularly remind people that the death of Jesus was a miscarriage of justice, that he died as the innocent one. The first question people would ask is how it could be possible for God’s anointed one to suffer and to be put to death, and upon reading Isaiah the early Christians found that Jesus’s rejection was predicted from the beginning.

Paul’s Conversion (9:1–30; 22:1–21; 26:1–32)

Luke recounts the conversion and calling of Saul/Paul three times in the book of Acts (9:1–30; 22:1–21; 26:1–32), and thus his conversion plays a central role in his narrative. Paul’s call and ministry are one of the key means by which the gospel is proclaimed to the gentiles, and his conversion probably occurred in the early 30s, perhaps AD 32–33. The details of Paul’s conversion are well known and do not need to be rehearsed here. What is striking is the sovereignty of God, for a zealous opponent of the Christian faith suddenly realized that Jesus was the Messiah. Paul could scarcely help being convinced, since Jesus as the risen Lord appeared to him and commissioned him. Paul’s conversion represents a transition in Luke’s narrative, for Paul was called to

bring the gospel to the gentiles and to kings, though he continued to preach to Israel as well (9:15). What is striking in Paul’s story is that the persecutor turns into the one persecuted. The Jews in Damascus could not tolerate his preaching about Jesus and were conspiring to kill him (9:19–25). The same story was replicated in Jerusalem, and thus the church sent him off to Tarsus for safekeeping (9:26–30). The rejection among Jews became the pathway for Paul to proclaim the gospel among the gentiles, so that Paul’s preaching plays a fundamental role in fulfilling the promise of Abraham in bringing blessing to the ends of the earth (1:8).

Reaching Out to the Gentiles (9:32–12:24)

The Cornelius Story (10:1–11:18)

In the Lukan narrative in Acts, one of the central stories is the conversion of Cornelius and his friends (perhaps AD 37 or 38). We know that the account was very important to Luke because he tells the story twice: the first time the story is told in a more extended fashion (10:1–48), and in the second account, which is abbreviated, Peter defended his actions to critics in Jerusalem (11:1–18). This account is so important because here we find the first entry of gentiles into the people of God. Cornelius was probably a “God-fearer.” God-fearers were attracted to the monotheism and moral principles of Judaism but were not proselytes (converts to Judaism), because they were not circumcised. An angel appeared to Cornelius, instructing him to summon Peter to visit him, though Peter was in Joppa, thirty-seven miles south of Caesarea. Meanwhile, when Cornelius’s friends were about to find Simon the tanner’s house where Peter was staying, Peter fell into a trance, seeing in a vision a great sheet with unclean animals, which he was instructed to kill and eat (10:9–16). The vision puzzled Peter since the law of Moses clearly taught that eating unclean animals was forbidden (Lev. 11:1–44; Deut. 14:3–21). We also learn from Peter’s experience that Jesus never ate unclean food with his disciples, since Peter would not have been puzzled if he had often or ever eaten unclean food with Jesus. Peter emphasizes his observance of food laws in the strongest terms: “‘No, Lord!’ I said. ‘For nothing impure or ritually unclean has ever entered my mouth’” (Acts 11:8). Jesus did say that foods entering the mouth can’t defile a person (Mark 7:15), but the disciples apparently only understood the import of what Jesus said sometime after the resurrection. They slowly came to the realization that all foods were clean (7:19). The whole matter was puzzling to Peter since the vision was instructing him to violate commands given by God in the OT.