

Introduction

Acts is a sequel to the Gospels. It describes the transition:

- Geographically, from Jerusalem to Rome
- Theologically, from Israel to the church
- Racially, from the Jews to the Gentiles

At the end of the Gospels, we find a handful of Jews gathered in Jerusalem talking about a kingdom that is to come to Israel. In Romans, we find an apostle who is not even mentioned in the Gospels and who was not even one of the twelve. He writes to a band of Christians in the city of Rome, talking about his plans to travel to the ends of the earth. The book of Acts tells us how this happened and why this change occurred. Acts fills the gap between the Gospels and the book of Romans, making it possible for us to fully understand the New Testament. So Acts must be seen as **a hinge book, a transition work bridging the work of Christ on earth with His work through the church on earth.**

Acts is the **first book of church history**. It records the story of the church from its beginning on the Day of Pentecost to the imprisonment of its greatest missionary, the Apostle Paul. It covers about 30 years, beginning with a small group of Jewish believers in Jerusalem shortly after the death and resurrection of Jesus, expanding to mostly Gentile believers scattered throughout the Roman Empire with Paul himself in Rome. It covers the transformation of discouraged and fearful followers of Jesus into fearless preachers of the Gospel. It follows the ministry of the Apostle Peter and then of Paul.

This is **a book primarily of history and geography**, whereas the epistles are primarily books of systematic theology. However, without Acts, we would not understand much of the data in the epistles. Acts gives a framework, a timeline, a background on which to hang the epistles. In Acts are the seeds of many doctrinal truths, especially about salvation, that are later developed in the epistles. It's a sort of doctrine shown in life rather than in systematic statement. It's doctrine in practice.

- Acts is the record of the continuation of those things which Jesus began to do while He was on earth and which He carries on as the risen Head of the church (1:1).
- It shows the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to the disciples of the Helper He would send (John 14:16-17; 16:5-15).
- It shows the process of Jesus' disciples going into all the world to make disciples of the nations (Matthew 28:19-20).
- It shows the Gospel of the resurrected Christ at work, transforming men's hearts and making them witnesses of the Way, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit sent to earth for that purpose.
- It shows us missionary work, a form of ministry completely unheard of in the Old Testament.
- It shows a pattern of church government.
- It shows that persecution resulted in expansion, not extinction. In spite of intense opposition of every kind, the Word of God spreads and people respond. Nothing can stop the steady growth of Christianity.

The Author

There is no dispute—from the earliest recorded church history, Luke was considered the author of both the Gospel of Luke and Acts which, taken together, means he wrote more of the New Testament than any other author—over one fourth of the content of the New Testament. He was a traveling companion of Paul. He is mentioned only three times in the New Testament (Colossians 4:14, where he is called *Luke, the beloved physician*; 2 Timothy 4:11; and Philemon 24). Else, we know very little about him personally. He was probably a Gentile, since he is mentioned separately from

the men *who are from the circumcision* (Colossians 4:11, 14). Also, he may have been from Troas because the “we” sections in Acts begin there.

The Date

It seems like Luke wrote Acts during Paul’s first Roman imprisonment for these reasons:

1. It best explains the abrupt ending of Acts. Luke stopped writing because he had brought events to the present, and he had no more to relate. Acts ends on a note of triumph, with Paul proclaiming the Gospel in Rome, unhindered by the Roman authorities.
2. The Roman authorities are tolerant of Christianity. That was not the case after the outbreak of the persecution by Nero in A.D. 64.
3. Luke does not mention the persecution begun by Nero. With Luke’s attention to detail, he certainly would have mentioned that.
4. There is no mention in Acts of the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Luke’s gospel account centers on Jerusalem more than the other gospels, so he would certainly mention this event if it had already occurred. Also, Luke mentioned the martyrdoms of the Apostle James and Stephen, why would he not mention the martyrdom of Jesus’ brother James, the head of the Jerusalem church, which took place in A.D. 62 (according to Josephus in *Antiquities XX*, ix, 1)?
5. Jewish matters which required attention in Acts (chapter 15) lost their significance after the fall of Jerusalem.
6. Luke is silent about the further career of Paul. He makes no mention of Paul’s second imprisonment in Rome, even though Luke was with him (2 Timothy 4:11).

So it’s assumed he did not mention them because these events had not taken place when Luke wrote Acts. Therefore, the date of A.D. 60-62 is usually given for the writing of the book. It was probably written in Rome or in Rome and Caesarea.

The Sources the Author Used

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Luke probably used a number of sources. First and primary were his own personal experiences. This is most clearly seen in the “we” sections of Acts (16:10-40; 20:5–28:31). A second source of information would have been Paul, with whom Luke spent much time. A third source is the other witnesses whom Luke contacted (20:4-5; 21:15-19). In Acts 21:18-19 James is mentioned as being one with whom Luke met. Also, while Paul was in prison in Caesarea for two years (24:27), Luke would have been free to carry out his investigative work throughout Israel (Luke 1:2-3). Having carefully researched eyewitness accounts, Luke, by the Spirit’s direction, penned the book of Acts. *Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the Word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught (Luke 1:1-4). The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach ... (Acts 1:1).*

An Outline of the Book

One outline of the book follows its theme verse 1:8—*but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.*

- I. Jerusalem (1:1—8:4)
 - A. The beginning of the church (1:1—2:47)

- B. The expansion of the church (3:1—8:4)
- II. Judea and Samaria (8:5—12:25)
 - A. The witness to the Samaritans (8:5-25)
 - B. The conversion of a Gentile (8:26-40)
 - C. The conversion of the apostle to the Gentiles (9:1-31)
 - D. The witness to the Gentiles (9:32—12:25)
- III. The remotest part of the earth (13:1—28:31)
 - A. The first missionary journey (13:1—14:28)
 - B. The Jerusalem Council (15:1-35)
 - C. The second missionary journey (15:36—18:22)
 - D. The third missionary journey (18:23—21:16)
 - E. The journey to Rome (21:17—28:31)

The outline of 1:8 was the assignment. Here are the seven progress reports:

1. *And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved (2:47).*
2. *The word of God kept on spreading ... (6:7).*
3. *So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria ... continued to increase (9:31).*
4. *The word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied (12:24).*
5. *So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily (16:5).*
6. *So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing (19:20).*
7. *And he [Paul] stayed two full years in his own rented quarters [in Rome] and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered (28:30-31).*

Chapter 1

The Introduction (1:1-5)

Verses 1-2—*The first account I composed*—refers back to Luke’s Gospel. Luke *investigated everything carefully from the beginning* and his plan was *to write it out for you in consecutive order*, with the purpose, *so that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught* (Luke 1:1-4).

- **Theophilus**—In Luke 1:3, he is called *most excellent Theophilus*, suggesting he was a Roman official (Acts 24:3; 26:25). Whether he was a Christian Luke was instructing or a pagan he was trying to persuade is not known. Some think he may have been converted between the writing of Luke and Acts because Luke drops the title in Acts.
- **About all that Jesus began to do and teach**—
 - Jesus taught His disciples by word and deed: His miracles strengthened their faith, His parables helped them understand spiritual truth, and His teaching formed their theology.
 - The work of Jesus is both finished and unfinished. His great work of providing redemption is finished and nothing may be added to it (John 17:4). His work of ministry and proclaiming the Gospel is not finished. He only started it. It’s what *Jesus began to do*...in His own physical body. But in the book of Acts, He is doing it through the bodies of men and women who are indwelt by His life. The incarnation is the secret strategy by which God changes the world.
- Even after His resurrection, Jesus continued to teach, **until the day when He was taken up**. (Luke used this term four times in this chapter, in verses 2, 9, 11, and 22.) The day marking the end of His earthly ministry had now arrived.
- **After He had by the Holy Spirit**—The Holy Spirit was both the source and power of Jesus’ ministry (Matthew 4:1; 12:18, 28; Mark 1:12; Luke 3:22; 4:1, 14, 18).
- **given orders**—Two orders are given here, to be obeyed sequentially:
 - (1) They were to wait in Jerusalem for what God had promised (verse 4)
 - (2) They were to be His witnesses (verse 8).
- **to the apostles whom He had chosen**—Jesus did instruct thousands of people in His days on earth, but His primary and constant learners were the disciples. Their only qualification was that Jesus *had chosen* them for salvation and for this unique service. Jesus saved, commissioned, equipped, gifted, and taught them so that they could be eyewitnesses to the truth and receivers of the revelation of God (the New Testament). [The term “disciple” means to be “a follower, a learner.” During Christ’s time on earth, these 12 were followers of Him. After His ascension, these same men became “apostles,” that is, “a messenger, one sent with a message.”]

APPLICATION—Jesus chose these men and taught them and they became transformed. There are two problems among believers today. First, many are ignorant of biblical truth, they are not taught. Second, those who may know biblical truth fail to live by it, that is, there is very little evidence that their life has been transformed by that truth. “It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus” (Bonar).

Verse 3—To these—the apostles

- **He also**—in addition to the orders of verse 2
- **Presented Himself alive, after His suffering**—Luke stresses the great and central fact of Christian faith: JESUS IS ALIVE! There is **nothing** else like it! All the religions of the world are based on writings. Christianity is the only one based on an event—the resurrection of Jesus.
- **by many convincing proofs**—The word “proofs” is only used here in the New Testament. It is the idea of that which causes one to “know for sure” or “...with certainty.” Proofs such as entering a room where the doors were locked (John 20:19), showing and touching His crucifixion

wounds (Luke 24:39), and eating and drinking with them (Luke 24:41-43); that is, it was proven by touch, sight, and feel, not just by a witness' account.

- **(1)** They saw Him, not just once but many times—*Appearing to them over a period of forty days*—From this word “appear” we get our word “ophthalmia,” which means literally “the eyeball.” These disciples “eyeballed” Jesus for forty days! Literally, “through forty days,” that is, not continuously but at intervals during a forty-day period of time. The most extensive summary of those appearances is in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8. The result of these appearances was that the apostles became absolutely convinced of the reality of Jesus’ physical resurrection. It then transformed them from fearful skeptics into bold, powerful witnesses, even to those who had crucified Jesus.
- **(2)** He spoke to them—*Speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God*—The “kingdom of God” is “*Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*” (Matthew 6:10). Certainly, there is the spiritual aspect of the Holy Spirit dwelling inside of believers in this age. But primarily it refers to the “millennial kingdom,” where Christ will physically reign on this earth for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:6). Jesus wanted the apostles to know that the crucifixion did not nullify the promised millennial kingdom. The apostles probably had difficulty believing in that kingdom after the death of the King. But the resurrection and appearances of Jesus changed all that.

Verse 4—(3) He ate with them (lit. “gather for fellowship” or “eat with”). They actually saw the food disappear (see also Luke 24:43).

- *He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem*—perhaps they were eager to begin witnessing.
- *But to wait for what the Father had promised, “Which,” He said, “you heard of from Me”*—see Luke 11:13; 24:49; John 7:39; 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; 20:22. The promise was that the Holy Spirit would be sent—He arrived 10 days later. Notice the three Persons of the Godhead here: the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

Verse 5—John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit—similar to John’s statement in John 1:33 when he baptized Jesus. The baptism with the Holy Spirit is not a special privilege for some believers, nor are believers challenged and exhorted in Scripture to seek it. It is not even their responsibility to prepare for it by praying, pleading, tarrying, or any other means. It is an entirely divine activity. It comes, like salvation itself, through grace, not human effort (Titus 3:5). God sovereignly pours out the Holy Spirit on those He saves (Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

- *Not many days from now*—Ten days after Jesus was taken back into heaven.

The Ascension (1:6-11)

Verse 6—So when they had come together—to gather in one spot (different word than in verse 4)

- *They were asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?”*—This sentence begins with “so,” which ties it to verse 5 and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In their minds, these two things (the outpouring of the Spirit and the Kingdom) must have been closely associated. The Old Testament frequently joined the two (Isaiah 32:15-20; 44:3-5; Ezekiel 39:28-29; Joel 2:28-3:1; Zechariah 12:8-10).

Verse 7—He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority—Christ had just been teaching them about the Kingdom, as to its character and future coming. He does not accuse them of coming to the wrong conclusion about that. Rather, it’s the timing of the fulfillment of the Kingdom that they had misjudged. No one knows the precise time except the Father (not even the angels or Jesus know it—Matthew 24:26).

Verse 8—But—In contrast to verse 7, they were not to know the times *but* they were to be witnesses.

- ***You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you***—*power* is the Greek word *dunamis*, from which we get the word “dynamite.” The Holy Spirit dwelling inside us is the spiritual dynamite we need to be a witness for Jesus Christ (verbally and with our lives).
- ***You shall be My witnesses***—witnesses are those who see something and tell others about it (see John 1:1-2; 2 Peter 1:16).
- The Greek word for *witnesses* is *martures*. So many Christians were killed as witnesses of Christ, that the Greek word *martures* (“martyr”) came to mean someone killed as a witness.
- This was not a choice Jesus was giving the apostles. Whether you want to be or not, *you shall be My witnesses*.

APPLICATION—How a believer lives her life lays the foundation of integrity and believability on which effective personal witness is built, *that they may adorn the doctrine of God in every respect* (Titus 2). And we are to *always be ready to make a defense to everyone who asks to give an account for the hope that is in you* (1 Peter 3:15). Nietzsche, the pagan philosopher, once said: “If you want me to believe in your Redeemer, you’ll have to look a lot more redeemed!”

- ***Both in Jerusalem***—The Gospel went first to the Jews.
- ***And in all Judea and Samaria***—Next, the Gospel went to the half-Jews. (The Samaritans were Israelites from the Northern Kingdom of Israel who had intermarried with the Assyrians when they had invaded Israel in 722 B.C.)
- Then the witness was to go ***even to the remotest part of the earth***—throughout the Roman Empire.
- As the book unfolds, this becomes the outline. The Apostle Peter, to whom Jesus had given the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 16:18-19), brings the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to each of these groups. This is the key to them becoming part of the church age, defined as those believers in whom the Holy Spirit dwells.

Verse 9—After He had said these things—These were His last words to them, His last instructions.

- ***He was lifted up while they were looking on***—a final, dramatic moment which provided powerful motivation for carrying on His work. I get the picture that all-of-a-sudden the apostles were standing there with their mouths open—amazed at what their eyes were seeing. This word “looking” means “to fix one’s eyes on some object continually and intensely—to look straight at, to stare at, to keep one’s eyes fixed on.”
- ***A cloud received Him out of their sight***—Jesus, in His resurrected body, left this world for heaven, to take His place on the throne at God’s right hand, waiting to return, back to this earth, as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Matthew 24:29-31; Revelation 19:11-16).

Verse 10—Two men in white clothing stood beside them—Angels have appeared this way before (Genesis 18:2; Joshua 5:13-15; Mark 16:5). Angels do not possess humans. They appear in bodily form as men. Demons (bad angels), however, possess humans and animals (Matthew 8:28-34).

- ***In white clothing***—God on the throne wears white (Daniel 7:9), when Jesus was transfigured, *His garments became as white as light* (Matthew 17:2; Mark 9:3); the angels wear white garments (Mark 16:5); and our eternal state is described as wearing white garments (Revelation 3:4-5; 4:4; 7:9; 19:14). The throne from which Christ will judge all unbelievers is called the Great White Throne (Revelation 20:11-15), indicating they are appearing before God and everything He represents for judgment.

Verse 11—they said, “Men of Galilee—Of the 12 disciples, 11 were from Galilee in the north. Only one was from Judea—Judas, and he was now dead (see verses 15-19).

- *why do you stand looking into the sky?*—Now the word for “looking” is a word that connects perception with thinking—that is, they were trying to figure out what they were seeing meant. Were they losing Jesus? Was it all over? What now?
- Then the angels said, “*This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven*”—At the Rapture, believers *will be caught up together...in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air* (1 Thessalonians 4:17). At the Second Coming, they *will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory* (Matthew 24:30) and *In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives...* (Zechariah 14:4).

Replacing the Traitor (1:12-26)

Verse 12—*Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet; which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away*—Obeying Christ’s command (verse 4), they returned to Jerusalem. The very steep, narrow Kidron Valley lies between the Mt. of Olives and Jerusalem. Probably because Theophilus may have been unfamiliar with the geography there, Luke says it is a Sabbath’s day journey (about 3,000 feet, a bit more than half a mile—Exodus 16:29; Numbers 35:5), from the city. The Mt. of Olives is about 400 feet above the Valley floor and about 200 feet higher than Jerusalem.

NOTE: The Bible nowhere specifies the Sabbath day’s distance. The 3,000 feet (2,000 cubits) is derived from the distance of the farthest tents from the Tabernacle during the 40 years of wilderness wanderings. Since work was prohibited on the Sabbath, the farthest anyone would need to travel to worship at the Tabernacle was 2,000 cubits. That, then, became synonymous with “Sabbath day’s journey.”

Verse 13—*when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying*—Houses typically had upper rooms, used for various purposes (even today in Israel). They are in place of yards. It’s where they gather in the cool of the evening, when the house is hot. It’s where they may bathe (2 Samuel 11:2). It’s where they hang the clothes to dry. This one must have been part of a large house, since 120 people were gathered (verse 15). They evidently were coming and going from this room because Luke 24:52-53 says, *they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the Temple, praising God*. This is in contrast to immediately after the crucifixion when they were seclusion—*the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews* (John 20:19).

- *They were staying, that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James...and Simon...and Judas, the son of James* [also known as Thaddeus in Matthew 10:3 and Mark 3:18]—By specifically naming them, Luke underscores the point that there now remains 11 of them.

Verse 14—*along with the women*—most likely included Mary Magdalene, Mary the wife of Clopas, Mary and Martha, and Salome, women who were present at the crucifixion and resurrection.

- *With His brothers*—Jesus’ biological siblings, the natural children of Mary and Joseph. Mark 6:3 gives their names as James, Joses, Judas, and Simon. James was the first head of the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:17; 15:13f) and author of the New Testament book of James. Judas (Jude) wrote the epistle of Jude. They were unbelievers about 8 months before this (John 7:5). It seems that they became believers when Jesus appeared to James after the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7). However their conversions took place, they became devoted followers of Christ.
- *And Mary the mother of Jesus*—The Bible never exalts her. This is the last reference to her in Scripture. She does not appear again in Acts nor in any of the epistles. She was a woman of virtue or she would have never been chosen to be the mother of Jesus. As such, she deserves honor

and respect (Luke 1:42), but she was a sinner who exalted God *her* Savior and referred to herself as a humble bondservant to God, as one who needed mercy (Luke 1:46-50).

- ***These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer***—A strong expression, meaning persistence in prayer. They were not praying for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They had not been told to pray for that but to wait for it. The coming of the Holy Spirit did not depend on their prayers but on God’s promise. They were praying because they were physically separated from Jesus and this was their only means of communicating to Him.

Verse 15—Sometime during the ten days between the ascension and Pentecost, ***Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren***—Luke adds that there were 120 of them present—From these few, Christianity spread throughout the world and throughout the centuries. But they did not launch out on their own. They waited patiently for the promised Holy Spirit who would give them the power they needed.

The Suicide of a Disciple (1:15-20)

Verse 16—Peter emerges as the leader of the group. They must have been wondering how Judas fit into God’s plan or how Jesus’ words in Matthew 19:28 were now to be fulfilled, where Jesus stated that when He sat on His glorious throne, the disciples would sit on the twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

- ***The Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David***—This shows Peter’s high regard for the Old Testament:
 - The Psalms were considered *Scripture*.
 - The Psalms were inspired by *the Holy Spirit*, speaking through the *mouth of David*.
 - The Scripture *had to be fulfilled* literally—from the verb *dei*, meaning a divine necessity. Its root is the word for “binding, put in chains, imprisoned.”
- ***Concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus***—In spite of Judas’ treachery [100% free will], God’s Word was being fulfilled [100% sovereignty].
- The verses referred to are Psalm 69:25 and 109:8 (as quoted in Acts 1:20). When David wrote those words, they were about his own situation. But the Holy Spirit had a secondary future prophetic purpose. So how did Peter know these Psalms were prophesying about Judas? After the resurrection when Jesus appeared to the disciples, He said, “...*all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.*” *Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures...* (Luke 24:44-45).

Verse 17—***Judas was counted among us, and received his portion in this ministry***

- “*But there are some of you who do not believe.*” *Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him* (John 6:64).
- *Jesus answered them, “Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?” Now He meant Judas...for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him* (John 6:70-71).
- “*...not one of them perished but the son of perdition [eternal damnation]...*” (John 17:12).
- “*...woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born*” (Matthew 26:24).

Verses 18-19—For Theophilus’ benefit and ours, Luke described Judas’ suicide in a parenthetical statement. After the betrayal, when he saw Jesus was condemned, Judas returned the money he had received to the Jewish authorities. It was blood money. *...he threw the pieces of silver into the sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself* (Matthew 27:3-5). Evidently, the rope or branch of a tree or his knot failed to hold under the weight of his body. He then plunged to a gruesome death on the rocks below, ***and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.***

- Obviously, Judas was dead, but the chief priests took up his money and said, “*It is not lawful to put them [the 30 pieces of silver] into the temple treasury, since it is the price of blood.*” So they counseled and *with the money bought the Potter’s Field as a burial place for strangers. For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood...*” (Matthew 27:6-8).

APPLICATION—Judas “felt remorse” for what he did (Matthew 27:3). Basically, he felt sad when he saw Jesus was condemned to die. It sounds like he did have a certain affection for Jesus, but he did not repent. He did not acknowledge Jesus was God. So a person may feel sorry or sad for what they did or for the consequences of their action, but that is not repentance. Repentance means to change your mind about your sin and about who Jesus is and turn toward Him for salvation.

Verse 20—See comments on verse 16.

The Selection of a New Disciple (1:21-26)

Because of Jesus’ prophecy that there would be 12 thrones in the kingdom on which will sit the 12 apostles (Matthew 19:28), there must be twelve apostles. Some say Peter and the apostles were mistaken to choose a replacement for Judas. They assume that Paul was the 12th apostle.

However, nothing in this passage indicates that what the apostles did was wrong. Jesus would not allow such a crucial error in such a crucial office at the very beginning of His church. Jesus chose Matthias just as surely as He chose the other eleven (verse 24). The mission of the twelve was primarily to the nation of Israel, while Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13). Paul was a unique apostle, but he was not one of the twelve. Paul does not fit their requirements in verses 21-22: to be one of the twelve, (1) *it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us—beginning with the baptism of John, until the day that He was taken up from us—*(2) *one of these should become a witness with us of His resurrection.* It also seems that they wanted their number to be complete by the time the Holy Spirit came upon them so he could *become a witness with us.* (At this point in time, they didn’t know that everyone who believes in Jesus from now on would receive the Holy Spirit.)

Two men met the two requirements: Barsabbas and Matthias. Nothing else is known of either of these men. They are not mentioned anywhere else in Scripture. Knowing the third requirement, the apostles prayed, “*Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two (3) Thou has chosen to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside...*” They prayed not for the Lord to choose but for the choice which the Lord had already made to be made known to them. The Lord could have answered their prayers by telling them to wait, then added Paul to the apostles, if that had been His plan.

In a shocking few words, they say, “*...apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.*” Judas, and all others who go to hell, belong there. It is the place of their own choosing. It belongs to them, and they to it!

After praying, *they drew lots for them.* This was an accepted Old Testament method for determining God’s will. Proverbs 16:33 says, “*The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord*” (see also Leviticus 16:8f; Numbers 26:55f; Joshua 7:14; 1 Samuel 10:20; 14:41f; Proverbs 18:18). This is the last time in Scripture this is done. The coming of the Holy Spirit would make this unnecessary.

Jesus made His choice: *the lot fell to Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.* Matthias was numbered with the 12 in Acts 2:14 and 6:2. The 12 did a lot in starting the church before Paul ever came on the scene—in fact, before Paul was even converted. Even after his conver-

sion, it was 3 years and then another 14 years (Galatians 1:18; 2:1) before he connected with the apostles in Jerusalem. Meanwhile, the 12 were faithfully carrying out the ministry of the church, primarily to Jewish converts.

Chapter 2

The Holy Spirit Descends (2:1-13)

Verse 1—*When the day of Pentecost had come*—“Pentecost” means 50. The coming of the Holy Spirit followed the pattern of the feasts under the Mosaic Law:

- Jesus was crucified on the day of Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7).
- The Feast of Unleavened Bread was celebrated the day after the Sabbath (on Sunday). It was the feast of the first fruits of the grain harvest (Leviticus 23:15). Jesus was the first fruits of the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20).
- Fifty days after the first Sunday following Passover, the Feast of Pentecost was celebrated (Leviticus 23:15f). Another offering of first fruits was made. The Spirit came as the first fruits of the believers’ inheritance (2 Corinthians 5:5; Ephesians 1:13-14). These believers were also the first fruits of the full harvest of all believers of the church age to come.

They were all together in one place—probably the 120, gathered in the upper room (1:13, 15).

Verse 2—*And suddenly*—Even though these believers knew the Holy Spirit’s coming was imminent (at any moment—1:5), there is an element of surprise. They didn’t know what that would be like.

- ***There came from heaven***—This was a supernatural action from God in heaven.
- ***A noise like a violent, rushing wind***—It wasn’t a wind, but it was a noise *like* a physical wind. Luke described it in terms he was familiar with. In both Hebrew and Greek, the words for “wind” and “spirit” are the same. Wind is frequently used as a picture of the Spirit (Ezekiel 37:9; John 3:8). It doesn’t say He was a wind, but He made a noise like a violent and rushing wind—such as a tornado or a hurricane would make. (When reporters stand in wind, you can hear it on their microphones. It’s loud. They try to shout over it.)
- ***And it filled the whole house where they were sitting***—They alone received the promised baptism of the Spirit (Acts 1:4-5; 11:15-17). That they were “sitting” shows they were not standing or kneeling, praying for the Spirit. He came to them on God’s timetable.

Verse 3—*and there appeared to them*—After they heard Him come, then they saw a visual manifestation of His arrival. This is the opposite of the natural order—light travels faster than sound, so we normally see something before we hear it.

- ***Tongues as of fire***—again, Luke is describing this in terms he is familiar with—*as of* fire. The presence of God displayed Himself as fire several times in the Old Testament (Genesis 15:17; Exodus 3:2-6; 13:21-22; 19:18: 40:38).
- ***Distributing themselves and they rested on each one of them***—*All* who were sitting in the room received the Spirit in the same moment. It was a uniform, sovereign work of God on all collectively, not something sought individually. At this moment, by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, they were all made into one spiritual body—the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Verse 4—*And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit*—This is distinguished from being baptized with the Spirit, which happened in verse 3. The purpose of the baptism with the Spirit is not to divide the body of Christ (as some teach, that it happens only to the “spiritual elite”), but to unify the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). It is what makes all believers into one spiritual body of Christ.

The filling of the Spirit, however, is a command in Ephesians 5:18. The grammatical construction means “continuously be filled” with the Spirit. It means to confess your sins to God, consciously practice the presence of Jesus in your life by obeying His commands, and have your mind saturated

with the Word of God (Colossians 3:16-25). As believers yield the moment-by-moment decisions of life to His control, they *walk by the Spirit* (Galatians 5:16). Here are some examples of being filled:

- Although Peter was filled with the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, he was filled again in Acts 4:8.
- Many of the same people filled with the Spirit in Acts 2 were filled again in Acts 4:31.
- Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit in Acts 6:5, yet filled again in Acts 7:55.
- Paul was filled with the Spirit in Acts 9:17 and again in Acts 13:9.

And [they all] began to speak with other tongues—

- The Greek word used here for “tongue” is *glossa*, which is the word for “languages.” It is not some ecstatic speech. Plus, the context says *each one hearing them speak in his own language* (verse 6).
- No doctrinal teaching for today should be made from incidents of speaking in tongues in Acts.
- The biblical gift of languages no longer exists today. It was a miraculous gift, and the age of miracles ended with the passing of the apostles (Hebrews 2:3-4). Outside of Acts, the miraculous gifts of the Spirit are only mentioned in the early epistle of 1 Corinthians. Later epistles, such as Ephesians, Romans, and 1 Peter, discuss spiritual gifts but make no mention of miraculous ones.
- The gift of languages was a sign of the transition between the Old Testament Mosaic Law and the new church age in Christ. Under the Law, there was one people, the Jews, and one language—Hebrew. Now in Christ, there are believers from many nations and many languages, all united in the one body of Christ.
- Having fulfilled its purpose, the gift of languages passed from the scene, just as 1 Corinthians 13:8 said it would. History supports this. Speaking in tongues was unknown from the close of the time of the apostles until the beginning of this century, except in heretical groups.

As the Spirit was giving them utterance—i.e., “to speak forth.” They didn’t learn languages studying, being coached, or practicing. I’m sure they never thought or expected that when the Holy Spirit came, this is what they would be doing. It was the Holy Spirit who was in control of the situation, and they simply received what He gave.

Verse 5—Jewish men were expected to come to Jerusalem for three feasts each year, one of which was Pentecost. Therefore, ***there were Jews living in Jerusalem—both Jews and proselytes*** (verse 10), that is, Gentile converts to Judaism.

- ***devout men***—obviously devout because they came from far distances to this feast.
- ***from every nation under heaven***—an idiom, meaning “from many lands” where the Jews had been dispersed.

Verse 6—when this sound occurred—lit. sound [of the wind] or voices [speaking languages]

- ***the multitude came together***—near the upper room where the 120 were gathered
- ***and were bewildered***—perplexed and confused, not understanding
- ***because they were each one hearing them speak in his own language***—Some 16 areas are listed in verses 9-11, some areas would have many languages, such as “Asia.” If all 120 gathered were speaking a different language, it must have covered every language. It seems like another miracle because God would know which languages were gathered there in order for the Holy Spirit to have the believers speaking those particular languages.

Verses 7-8—*they were amazed and marveled, saying, “Why are not all these who are speaking Galileans?...”* It seems they are additionally amazed because these believers were not educated orthodox city dwellers (from Jerusalem) but were from up north by Galilee—people perceived as ignorant and uneducated (see John 1:45-46; 7:52).

Verses 9-11—*Parthians* [modern Iran], *Medes* [part of the Persian Empire from Daniel’s time, now Parthians], *Elamites* [southwestern Iran, now Parthians], *Mesopotamia* [between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, modern Iraq], *Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia* [regions in Asia Minor], *Egypt, districts of Libya around Cyrene* [west of Egypt on the African coast of the Mediterranean Sea], *Rome*, Gentile *proselytes* [converts to Judaism], *Cretans* [from island of Crete], and *Arabs* [east of Judea].

- **Speaking of the mighty deeds of God**—the content of the message they were hearing—they began, not speaking of Jesus, but praising God, an essential element of Jewish life and worship (Exodus 15:11; Psalms 26:7; 78:4; 89:5; 96:3; 107:8, 21; 111:4). This would convince the hearers that these believers in Jesus were not blasphemers. They were devoted to praising the one true God. All this prepared the way for Peter’s message about Jesus.

Verses 12-13—*they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying... “What does this mean?”* They would soon know what it means when Peter proclaims the Gospel in his sermon. At the same time, *others were mocking and saying, “They are full of sweet wine.”* Like the Pharisees who saw Jesus’ miracles and rejected the evidence (Matthew 12:24ff), some of these people also tried to explain away the miracle as the believers being drunk.

APPLICATION—Miracles do not create faith. If a person does not believe, they will explain away the miracle. Even evidence will not create faith. If a person is open to the Gospel and belief, then miracles and evidence will substantiate that faith. (See John 11:47-48, 53.) When confronted with something new, people usually react in one of two ways: (1) some people begin to inquire, having open minds, ready to investigate further before coming to a conclusion. (2) Others immediately jump to a conclusion and want no explanation.

Miracles in Acts were given as a sign to unbelievers—that the Apostles were speaking from God and to cause inquiry and an opportunity to present the Gospel. When these people heard their own languages, it gave Peter an opportunity to preach a sermon that presented the claims of Jesus Christ, His resurrection, and the fact that they were sinners and needed to repent and turn to Jesus for salvation. These miracles (including tongues) were not done among the believers for their own edification.

Peter’s Sermon (2:14-40)

Explaining What Occurred (2:14-21)—It is not drunkenness, It is a work of the Holy Spirit

Verse 14—*But Peter*—In all four lists of the apostles, Peter’s name is first (Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; and Acts 1:13). He now continues his role as leader of the apostles (1:15).

- **Taking his stand with the eleven**—including Matthias, chosen to replace Judas (1:21ff). As eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ themselves, they supported Peter.
- Peter *...raised his voice and declared to them, “...give heed to my words”*—He showed no hesitation. He was bold and confident. A Spirit-filled Peter was a very different man than the one who denied Jesus three times.
- *...declared to them, “Men of Judea, and all you who live in Jerusalem”*—Jesus’ assignment was, *Be My witnesses...in Jerusalem...* (1:8). Jerusalem was the first place to hear the Gospel.

Verse 15—The Holy Spirit had gotten the crowd’s attention with the sound of His arrival. They want an explanation. First, Peter disproves their charge. *For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day* (9:00 in the morning), too early for a group to be drunk.

Verse 16—*but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel*—that is, this is not a fulfillment of Joel but it is the **kind of thing** spoken of by Joel, that is, a work of the Holy Spirit.

“To prove that the Spirit can produce such things, Peter quoted from Joel 2:28-32. This is a prophecy which will be fulfilled during the Millennium when Israel is reestablished in her own land. Peter was not saying that the prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost or even that it was partially fulfilled; knowing from Joel what the Spirit could do, he was simply reminding the Jews that they should have recognized what they were then seeing as a work of the Spirit also. He continued to quote from Joel at length only in order to be able to include the salvation invitation recorded in verse 21” (Charles Ryrie, “The Acts of the Apostles,” pp. 20-21).

In quoting Joel 2, Peter in no way changes the meaning of Joel.

Verses 17-21—Our purpose is not to delve deeply into Joel 2, but here is a brief outline:

- Joel gave the time as *in the last days* (verse 17) and *in those days* (verse 18). This is a common Old Testament expression of the time when the Messiah would come to set up His kingdom (for example, Isaiah 2:2; Jeremiah 23:20; 49:39; Ezekiel 38:16; Hosea 3:5; Micah 4:1).
- Verses 17-18 describe the Messiah’s kingdom.
- Verses 19-20a describe the Tribulation, *before the great and glorious day of the Lord*
- Verses 20b-21 describe the Second Coming
- Again, Peter’s purpose in quoting Joel is
 - To show these Jews that what happened to the apostles is a work of the Spirit—which is the kind of thing the Spirit can and will do in Christ’s kingdom
 - To introduce and transition into the theme of his message, *that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved*

The Theme (2:22-32)—Jesus is the Messiah

Verse 22—*Jesus the Nazarene*—the name by which Jesus was commonly known during His earthly ministry (Matthew 21:11; Mark 10:47; 14:67; 16:6; Luke 24:19; John 18:5, 7). It identified Him with His hometown of Nazareth. It was His name on the cross (John 19:19).

- Peter further described Jesus as *a man attested to you by God*—“attested” means to declare, display, or prove by clear evidence.” God Himself proved to them that Jesus was the Messiah.
- How did He prove it? *With miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him*—As Nicodemus said to Jesus, “*Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him*” (John 3:2). *Miracles* is from *dunamis*, a word meaning “power,” from which we get the word “dynamite.” *Wonders* refers to what takes place in the mind of the one who witnesses the miracle—to be amazed or stand in awe. *Signs* is from *semeion* and gives the intent of the miraculous works: to point to spiritual truth. NOTE:

“throughout Acts the term ‘wonders’ only occurs in conjunction with ‘signs,’ a testimony to the fact that mere marvels have no value in themselves except as they point beyond themselves to the divine power behind them and so lead to faith” (Polhill, “The New American Commentary: Acts”, p. 112).

APPLICATION—The point is, Jesus did not do miracles to help the poor or to restore rule to the Jews. He did the kind of miracles as signs that proved He was God and, therefore, led people to faith in Him. So the miracles were about Him, not about those He helped. His purpose was not to heal so-and-so, His purpose was to show He was God, and He did that by healing so-and-so. What that means is that the miracles were God-centered and God-purposed, not people-centered. It seems like today so-called “miracles” are people-purposed. A person wants to be healed and goes to a “healer.”

- *In your midst, just as you yourselves know*—They could not claim ignorance. Their rejection of Jesus was not based on lack of information but on hatred (John 10:37-39; 11:46-53; 15:24-25) and love of sin (John 3:19).

Verse 23—*this man*—the One whom God proved (through His miracles) that He was the Messiah

- ***Delivered up***—From the Greek *ekdotos*, appearing only here in the New Testament, it means to surrender to their enemies or betrayed. If Jesus was the Messiah, why did He not use His power to avoid the cross? He was not a victim (John 10:17-18; 19:10-11).
- ***by the predetermined plan***—*predetermined* is from the Greek *horizo* (from which we get the word “horizon”) means “to mark out with a boundary” or “to determine.” *Plan* is from *boulomai*, meaning “design” or “purpose.” So Jesus was delivered to death because God planned it and made it happen from eternity past (Acts 4:27-28; 13:27-29; 2 Timothy 1:9; Revelation 13:8).
- ***foreknowledge of God***—Greek word *pro* (before) *gnosis* (knowledge). To say God only knows what will happen and plans accordingly is to deny His sovereignty and omniscience. Actually, God knows all men in that sense.
“*Proginoskein* and *prognosis* in the New Testament...do not denote simple intellectual foresight...the mere taking knowledge of something beforehand, but rather a selective knowledge which regards one with favor and makes one an object of love... for that very reason comes very close to the idea of predestination” [Berkhof, “Systematic Theology, p. 112].
- ***You nailed to a cross***—That Jesus was delivered to death by God’s predetermined plan does not take away the guilt of those who put Him to death. Peter here puts the 100% sovereignty of God next to man’s 100% free will (see Luke 22:22, for example). These two appear together on almost every page of Scripture. Men are responsible not for God’s plans but for their own sins!
- ***By the hands of godless men and put Him to death***—lit. “lawless” men, meaning the Romans, who had lots of laws, but did not have God’s Law.

Jesus’ betrayal and death did not cast doubt on His credentials as the Messiah. It was part of God’s eternal plan (and the Old Testament clearly teaches that Messiah had to die—see Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53). The works of Christ and the death of Christ confirmed that He was the Messiah.

APPLICATION—From man’s perspective, Christ’s death seemed like a failure. It’s from God’s perspective (which we get from His revelation in His Word) that we find out it was the very thing that proved He is the Messiah! We don’t know what God is doing (Ecclesiastes 3:11) so don’t look for God’s will in circumstances and experiences. We only find God’s will in God’s Word.

Verse 24—*But God raised Him up again*—It proves beyond doubt the deity of Jesus Christ, it establishes His credentials, and guarantees our own resurrection (John 14:19; Romans 6:4-5; 1 Corinthians 6:14; 15:16-23). It is the proof that God accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins (Romans 4:25). Without it, His death becomes the heroic death of a martyr, the pathetic death of a mad man, or the execution of a fraud. So the greatest proof that Jesus is the Messiah is not His teaching, His miracles or His death. It is His resurrection, and that becomes the main idea in Peter’s sermon.

- Verses 23 and 24 are connected together. The Jews rejected and crucified their Messiah but God raised Him up again. Peter drives home the point that these Jews were guilty of opposing God, in spite of their claims to the contrary (Romans 2:17-20).
- ***Putting an end to the agony of death***—lit. “birth pangs.” Like a woman in labor, Jesus endured the pain of death. It was temporary, and resulted in something glorious—the resurrection.
...*Fixing our eyes on Jesus...who for the joy set before Him endured the cross...* (Hebrews 12:2).
- ***Since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power***—Death could not hold Him because of:
 - 1) His divine power—He is *the resurrection and the life* (John 11:25; see also Hebrews 2:14).
 - 2) The divine promise—Jesus said, ...*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up* (John 2:18-22; Luke 24:46).
 - 3) The divine purpose—In order to live with God in eternity, believers need to go through death and receive their eternal bodies—*This mortal must put on immortality* (1 Corinthians 15:16-26, 53). Because He lives, His people will live forever (John 14:19).

APPLICATION—One of the greatest proofs of the resurrection of Jesus is that Peter could stand up in the city where these events had taken place a little more than a month before and tell these people that Jesus had risen from the dead, with not a single person challenging him! They knew that the authorities could not produce the body of Jesus, though they would have given about anything to do so.

Verses 25-28—To further confirm that the resurrection was God’s plan for the Messiah, Peter quoted a prophetic passage from Psalm 16:8-11. Although written by David, it described the Messiah and His resurrection. It couldn’t be describing David because David died and his tomb was there in Jerusalem (verse 29).

- **God is at My right hand...that I may not be shaken**—God was beside Christ, protecting Him
- **My flesh also will abide in hope**—Christ physically had hope, even though He would endure the cross and death (Hebrews 12:2).
- **Because Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, nor allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay**—
 - “abandon”—to leave someone or something to a certain fate—in this case, the fate of death
 - “Soul” is the word for “personality.” It is the essence of who a person is.
 - **HELL** in common usage refers to the place of future punishment for the wicked. The word properly translated “hell” in the New Testament is the Greek *Geenna* or *Gehenna*, a place in the Valley of Hinnom where human sacrifices had been offered and where continuous burning of rubbish made it an illustration of the eternal Lake of Fire (Matthew 5:22). Other words like sheol or hades are improperly translated by this term.
 - **SHEOL** is the Old Testament Hebrew word for “the place of the dead” including the grave (Numbers 16:30, 33; Psalms 16:10) and the unseen place of those who have departed from this life, of both the righteous (Genesis 37:35) and the wicked (Proverbs 9:18). The dominion of “Sheol” or the grave will continue until, and end only with, *resurrection*, which is the only exit from it (Hosea 13:14, quoted in 1 Corinthians 15:55).
 - **HADES** is basically the New Testament Greek counterpart of Sheol. It refers to the place of the dead. It is in this sense that Peter is describing in Acts 2:27. But it also describes specifically the abode of the unsaved dead between death and the final judgment at the Great White Throne (Luke 16:23; Revelation 20:11-15). It differs from hell in that it is temporary while hell is permanent. However, this should not be confused with purgatory. The only exit for the wicked out of Hades is to the Great White Throne and then to the Lake of Fire. There is no “salvation” for those in Hades. [Purgatory is a Roman Catholic teaching of a temporary place of purging for those who have died whom they believe are going to heaven.]
 - **LAKE OF FIRE** refers to the eternal state of the wicked who have been judged at the Great White Throne Judgment and who are therefore forever separated from God and consigned to a special abode of suffering because of their sin and because they did not accept Christ’s payment for their sin. It is equivalent to and identified with the second death in Revelation 20:1.
 - **nor allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay**—Once dead, the human body decays (rots, decomposes). For example, speaking of Lazarus who had died, *...by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days* (John 11:39). But Jesus’ body did not decay. His body left the grave (Luke 24:3).
- **Thou hast made known to Me the ways of life**—i.e., the resurrection to life.
- **Thou wilt make Me full of gladness with Thy presence**—As a result of the resurrection, the Messiah would be full of gladness as He experienced God’s presence.

APPLICATION—Most (and oldest) versions of “The Apostles’ Creed” read “Jesus Christ...was crucified, dead, and buried...” But some later versions add, “...He descended into Hades.” This seems to be the correct understanding of Acts 2:27, 31. Here the creed hammers home the point that Jesus was really dead. He was nailed to a post. He died. He

had a real body, a corpse that was placed in a tomb. He was not merely unconscious—His soul left His body and went to the realm of the dead. But He was not abandoned or left there—He was resurrected, the only exit from death.

However, today some versions of “The Apostles’ Creed” read, “...He descended into hell.” This is not correct. “Hell” or “the Lake of Fire” is a place of eternal punishment after going through the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15)—except for two beings—the antichrist and the false prophet, who are so wicked, they are thrown alive into “hell” at the Second Coming of Christ (Revelation 19:20). Some Reformed views even teach that Christ did not pay for our sins on the cross but paid for them by going to hell. This view is not supported by the Bible, nor is it a correct translation and understanding of “The Apostles’ Creed.” [NOTE: There is no evidence that this is indeed a creed or statement of beliefs written by the apostles. It developed in church history as a statement of belief that was quoted for various reasons and changed many times.]

Verse 29—A body: In contrast to Jesus, *the patriarch David...both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day*, which provides the evidence that David had not fulfilled the prophecy of Psalm 16. Jesus died and was buried, but His tomb was empty—because He was resurrected, as Psalm 16 predicted.

Verse 30—A prophet and a promise: (1) *because he* [David] *was a prophet*, and (2) he *knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants upon his throne*—the Davidic Covenant of 2 Samuel 7:11-16. Yet at this point, the last descendant of David who was king on the throne was Zedekiah, who was taken captive to Babylon in 586 B.C. So for almost 600 years, there had not been a descendant of David on the throne. In fact, the Jews were being ruled by the Roman Caesars.

Verses 31-32—To sum up, the argument from Psalm 16 is: (1) the psalm speaks of a resurrection, (2) since David was not resurrected, it cannot speak of him, (3) *he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ* [Messiah], (4) therefore, the Messiah will rise from the dead, He won’t be left in death, and His flesh will not be decayed, and (5) now Peter concludes: *This Jesus God raised up again*.

- *to which we are all witnesses*—Jesus appeared to more than 500 people at one time and other appearances after His resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:6). This was their assignment from Jesus, *you shall be My witnesses* (Acts 1:8). But in a sense, everyone in the crowd was a witness because the tomb was right there in Jerusalem where they were—and it was empty! And no one denied it.

Verse 33—*Therefore* (because Jesus was resurrected) *having been exalted to the right hand of God*—see Romans 8:34; Philippians 2:9-11; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 10:12; 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22.

- *Having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit*—see John 14:26
- *He has poured forth this which you both see and hear*—So this sound of wind and speaking in languages is the result of the Holy Spirit which God the Father had promised to send. Now that Jesus was risen from the dead and glorified in heaven, God fulfilled that promise (Joel 2:28-29).

Verses 34-35—Peter now quoted from Psalm 110:1 to prove that the ascension and exaltation of Jesus proves He is the Messiah. The Psalm cannot be referring to David because David’s tomb is there among them. But David said, *The Lord* [God the Father] *said to my Lord* [the Messiah], *sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet* (a figure of speech meaning the submission of one’s enemies—Joshua 10:24-25). David was not exalted to God’s right hand, but Jesus was (Acts 1:9-11). The proof of that was the outpouring of the Spirit that the crowd just witnessed.

Verse 36—*Therefore, let all the house of Israel know for certain* [beyond any doubt] *that God has made Him both Lord* [sovereign over enemies] *and Christ* [Messiah]—*this Jesus whom you crucified.*

APPLICATION—So Peter has provided overwhelming evidence from the works of Christ’s life (verse 22), His death and resurrection (verses 27, 31), and the outpouring of the Spirit (which proves that Christ is now ascended into heaven and seated at the right hand of God, and He will be there until He comes again as King and God makes His enemies a footstool for Jesus’ feet—Revelation 19:11ff). That is, Jesus’ works, death, and resurrection prove that this outpouring is the Holy Spirit, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit proves that Jesus is now seated at the right hand of God. Therefore, ...read Hebrews 12:1-4.

Verse 37—Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit *comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment* (John 16:8). No matter how good Peter’s sermon was, it was the presence of the Holy Spirit convicting these people. ***Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart.*** So the process is: (1) Peter proclaimed the message (Romans 10:13-17), (2) the people heard the message (verses 36-37); (3) election, i.e., *as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself* (verse 39), (4) are convicted in their heart by the Holy Spirit, and (5) by their free will ask, ***“What shall we do?”***

- “pierced” is the Greek word *katanusso*, used only here in the New Testament. It means to stab suddenly and unexpectedly.
- Some reasons we can see for their anguish: (1) the realization that rather than welcoming their Messiah they had executed Him, the One for whom they had longed, for centuries, (2) they themselves had done it—what possible greater sin than killing their own Messiah? (3) fear of the Messiah’s wrath—Peter had just announced that the Messiah was alive and was going to put His enemies under His feet, and who were greater enemies than those who had killed Him? and (4) what they had done could not be undone.

Verse 38—***Repent*** = “to change one’s mind”—about two things: (1) that you are a sinner and (2) that Jesus is God. This is huge for these Jews who thought they were God’s chosen ones because they were Jews and because they rejected Jesus as a blasphemer and executed Him. Now Peter wants them to turn their back on all that and embrace Jesus as their Messiah and Savior. Both John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2) and Jesus (Matthew 4:17) called for people to repent.

- ***Let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ***—Baptism was a public break with Judaism and identification with Jesus Christ. Such a drastic public act would help weed out any “conversions” which were not genuine.
- ***Baptized...for the forgiveness of our sins***—Those who teach the view that baptism is necessary for salvation use this verse as a primary proof text. This is a false view because:
 - 1) In the immediate context, Peter is asking them to publicly identify themselves as followers of Jesus. This is similar to Jesus asking the rich young ruler to prove the genuineness of his repentance by parting with his wealth (Luke 18:18-27). However, no one would argue that giving away one’s wealth is necessary for salvation.
 - 2) No passage, when correctly interpreted, will teach something contradictory to the rest of Scripture, and the rest of Scripture clearly teaches salvation is by faith alone (John 1:12; 3:16; Acts 16:31; Romans 3:21-30; 4:5; 10:9-10; Philippians 3:9; Galatians 2:16).
 - 3) F. F. Bruce writes, “It is against the whole genius of Biblical religion to suppose that the outward rite [of baptism] had any value except in so far as it was accompanied by true repentance within” [*The Book of Acts*, p. 77].
 - 4) Throughout Acts, forgiveness is linked to repentance, not baptism (3:19; 5:31; 26:20). Besides, some were baptized who were not saved (8:13; 21–23), while some were saved with no mention of their being baptized (Luke 7:37-50; Matthew 9:2; Luke 18:13-14). The story of

the conversion of Cornelius shows that it's after being saved and receiving the Holy Spirit that they were baptized (Acts 10:44-46). Baptism follows salvation; it does not cause it.

- The preposition “for” (*eis*) can mean “for the purpose of” but it can also mean “because of” or “on the occasion of” [Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 3:35-36]. It is translated “because of” in Matthew 12:41. Clearly, that’s the meaning in this passage.
- **Forgiveness of sins**—The Jews lived under the Mosaic Law, where the sacrifices reminded them of their sin but they had no forgiveness, no cleansing of their conscience (Hebrews 10:11). So the forgiveness of sins would be a radical concept to these Jews hearing Peter’s message.
- **And you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit**—A “gift” is that which is free and unmerited. Peter attached no condition to receiving the Spirit except repentance. Nor did he promise that any supernatural phenomena would accompany their reception of the Spirit. Also, the Spirit does not come through water baptism (Acts 10:47).

Verse 39—This *promise* of the Holy Spirit was for the Jews present there with Peter, but it was also for *your children* [Jews] and *for all who are far off* [Gentiles—Ephesians 2:11-13].

- Because the ones who receive the Spirit are those whom *the Lord our God shall call to Himself*—here is the sovereignty of God. The only ones saved are those He calls. But also true is man’s free will, *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved* (verse 21). Both are 100% true!

Verse 40—*with many other words he solemnly testified*—what we have written down is only a synopsis of Peter’s sermon, which obviously lasted longer than the few minutes it takes for us to read it.

- **And kept on exhorting them**, which suggests a dialogue, question and answer time.
- **“Be saved from this perverse generation!”**—“perverse” means “bent” or “crooked,” that is, evil and unrighteous. Jesus said the same thing about that generation (Matthew 12:39, 45; 16:4; 17:17; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:19, 41; 11:29).

Verse 41—The response to Peter’s sermon? *Those who received his word*, i.e., repented, *were baptized* (publicly identified with Jesus Christ) *and there were added that day about 3,000 souls*.

Verse 42—This was not just a conversion experience for these people. *They were continually devoting themselves to...* Conversion starts a new spiritual life. It’s an on-going devotion or dedication to God, God’s Word, and God’s people. The result is that when they gather:

- 1) **the apostles’ teaching**—As we have already seen in Peter’s sermon, the apostles’ teaching was foundational to this new church age. It’s an exhortation we continue to see in their epistles—learn and teach God’s Word, and watch out for false teachers (defined as anyone who seduces you away from God’s Word). See Acts 17:11; Romans 12:2; 1 Timothy 4:6, 11, 13, 16; 2 Timothy 4:1-2, 16; Titus 1:9; and 1 Peter 2:2. “A believer should count it a wasted day when he or she does not learn something new from, or is not more deeply enriched, by the truth of God’s Word” (MacArthur). Scripture is your food for growth. You cannot function as a believer without knowledge of God’s Word (Hosea 4:6).
- 2) **To fellowship**—The meaning of *koinonia* is “participation” or “sharing.” These believers gathered together to participate or share in learning the apostles’ teaching, Communion, and prayer.
- 3) **To the breaking of bread**—i.e., taking Communion:
 - All believers meet on the common ground of the cross (Ephesians 2:16; Colossians 1:20).
 - It’s acknowledging Christ’s work on the cross (1 Corinthians 11:23-25).
 - It’s an example of the unity of believers (1 Corinthians 10:16-17).
 - It calls for self-examination and confession of sin (1 Corinthians 11:28).

- 4) **To prayer**—As believers, we are commanded to be devoted to prayer (Romans 12:12; Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 4:2).

Verse 43—everyone kept feeling a sense of awe—Gk. *Phobos*, from which we get the word “phobia.” It’s a reverential respect mixed with fear or wonder. It is used to describe the reaction to the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:5). It was the reaction when Jesus raised the widow’s son (Luke 7:16). Here it is describing the supernatural character of what was happening in them and among them.

- **Many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles**—This was one of the reasons for the awe. Some of these miracles are recorded (3:1-10; 5:12, 15-16; 9:32-35, 40-42). As we already mentioned in 2:22, they were designed to attract attention and point to spiritual truth (see Acts 9:32-35, 42; John 14:10-12; Hebrews 2:3-4; 2 Corinthians 12:12). God was showing that these apostles were His messengers with His message. After the Scriptures were written, the need for such confirming signs ended. Today we determine who speaks for God by what the Bereans did, *for they received the Word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so* (Acts 17:11).

Verses 44-45—all those who had believed were together—At the beginning they were together, but soon divisions erupted among them, as seen in the rest of the New Testament epistles.

- **had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need**—They did not sell everything and live in a commune, as verse 46 says they were going house to house. This was not Communism because it was voluntary. (In Acts 5:4, Ananias and Sapphira sinned by lying to the Holy Spirit, not by refusing to part with their possessions.) During the feasts in Jerusalem, many pilgrims came to Jerusalem (such as Jesus and His family, when He was a boy, came to Jerusalem from Nazareth—Luke 2:41), and the inns could not contain them all (Luke 2:7). So people would open their homes and share their food, etc. with such pilgrims. Now some of these pilgrims became saved and stayed for an extra time to be part of the new work of God. (For example, I would think they possibly were planning on a short visit, not a long visit, so they may have run out of money, etc.) So those who lived in the city shared with them.

APPLICATION—Someone asked Jesus, “*Who is my neighbor?*” Jesus replied from the Good Samaritan parable, “*The one who showed mercy...*” (Luke 10:29-37). God will bring people with needs across your path with an opportunity for you to show mercy. Hebrews 13:1-2 says, *Let love of the brethren continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.* 1 John 3:16-18 says, *whoever has the world’s goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? ...let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth* (see 1 Peter 4:9, 2 Corinthians 8:14-15).

Verses 36-37—They worshipped, prayed, and witnessed in the Temple (which was not destroyed until 70 A.D.) and were **breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meal together**. Communion was taken with a meal, called a “love feast” (Jude 12).

- **With gladness and sincerity of heart**—“sincerity” is only used here in the New Testament. It literally means “simplicity” or “free from rocks” or “smooth.” They were a unified, miraculous, sharing group of people, with the result of “gladness” or “rejoicing.”

Application—Showing mercy, sharing and giving, with spiritual things more important than material things—all result in being “free from rocks” in your soul. It brings gladness to your heart and life. ...remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, *It is more blessed to give than to receive* (Acts 20:35). Selfishness and hoarding put rocks and sadness in your soul.

- **Praising God**—to recite His wonderful works and His attributes in prayer to Him and to others.

- ***and having favor with all the people***—At this point in time, they were still freely going to the Temple, giving testimony of Jesus, and others could see their transformed lives. Later, as the doctrines of the church developed, the Jews would see it as a rejection of Judaism, and the Romans would see it as a rejection of worshipping the Caesars, and the persecution would begin.
- ***And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved***—Jesus said, *...I will build My church* (Matthew 16:18). We are not responsible for who gets saved or not. That's God's job. Our job is to be a faithful and wise witness (Acts 1:8; Colossians 4:2-6).