**Acts Commentary**

**Acts Chapter 1**

Act 1:1

**“O Theophilus.”** See commentary on Luke 1:3.

**“all.”** Figure of speech synecdoche (the whole for a part), for “all that was necessary.” John 21:25 makes it clear that there is no way “all” that Jesus did could be recorded.

[See figure of speech “synecdoche.”]

Act 1:2

**“until the day in which he was taken up.”** This sets the parameters for the book of Luke. It covered all Jesus’ life until he was taken up (which is covered in Acts), including the things Jesus received from his Father via holy spirit.

**“after he, through holy spirit, had given commandments.”** God, via the gift of holy spirit on Jesus, gave him what to say, and how and when to say it. Jesus did not just tell his apostles what he thought was important, he gave them the commands that God told him to give them. Jesus had gotten what to say to them from God, just as he said in John 12:49: “For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me, he has given me a command *as to* what to say and what to speak.”

Having this in the introduction to Acts gives us the proper emphasis in the book of Acts. Luke writes that in his former book, he covered what Jesus did and taught. From that broad starting point, Luke could have emphasized anything about Jesus’ life: his miracles, his holiness, his love, etc. However, what Luke states, and thus emphasizes, is that Jesus gave the commandments that he received from God via holy spirit, to the apostles. This launches the book of Acts and gives unprecedented credibility to the apostles, who now continue where Jesus left off. If there was any doubt that the apostles were qualified to continue the ministry of Jesus, it is now removed.

**“the holy spirit.”** There is no article “the” in the Greek text, although one could be supplied because of the preposition *dia* if that made the sentence clearer, which it does to many readers. Daniel Wallace writes: “There is no need for the article to be used to make the object of a preposition definite.”[[1]](#footnote-22294) A. T. Robertson writes: “...the article is not the only means of showing that a word is definite. ...The context and history of the phrase in question must decide. ...[As for prepositional phrases], these were also considered definite enough without the article.”[[2]](#footnote-28687) Robertson then cites some examples.

In this verse, the “holy spirit” refers to the gift of holy spirit that God put upon some believers before the Day of Pentecost.[[3]](#footnote-28661)

[For more information on there not being a need to have the definite article after a preposition to make a noun definite, see commentary on Rom. 5:5. For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

“**to the apostles whom he had chosen.”** It is important for the reader to be reminded at this point that the apostles did not just happen to be at the right place and right time and so somehow just fall into the position of being apostles. The book of Acts is the record of the start of the Christian Church, and it did not start with men who believed in Jesus and had a good idea to start an organization. Jesus specifically chose the apostles after spending an entire night in prayer (Luke 6:12-16). The verb “he had chosen” is in the middle voice, here meaning that he chose them for himself, i.e., his work.

Many Bible readers read Acts without the benefit of a thorough knowledge of the Four Gospels, and thus may lack the background to appreciate that the men who started the Christian Chuch were specifically chosen by Jesus Christ as his “apostles,” that is those men who he would send out to represent him (“apostle” means “one sent out”). R. C. H. Lenski writes: “The relative clause ‘whom he did elect for himself’ is added to ‘the apostles’ in order once more to bring to mind the elective act which constituted these men ‘the apostles,’ the specifically commissioned messengers (*apostellō,* to send with a commission) of Jesus, we may say, his ambassadors. The middle voice is important ‘he did elect for himself’; we may place a good deal into this middle [voice]; to represent him, to continue his work, etc.”[[4]](#footnote-18939) The phrase “the apostles whom he had chosen” is accurate for he had chosen all the apostles who were there to start the Church on the Day of Pentecost, even though Judas the traitor was not among that group.

Act 1:3

**“appearing to them over *a period of* 40 days.”** This does not say 40 days from Jesus’ resurrection, which was on Saturday, Nisan 17 (Nisan was the first month of the Jewish year), but 40 days of Jesus’ “appearing” to the disciples. His first “appearance” was on Sunday morning, Nisan 18. If we take the number 40 literally, and also realize that when counting a number such as the number of days in a period of time, the first and last day are counted, 40 days from Sunday, Nisan 18 (counting that day) brings us to the twenty-seventh day of the second Jewish month (called both Zif and Iyyar), which was a Thursday. Thus, the ascension was Thursday, the twenty-seventh of Zif.

Pentecost fell on Sunday, the eighth day of the third Jewish month, Sivan. We would say Pentecost fell ten days after the ascension (because in our normal English counting, we would not count the day of the ascension, but would start on the next day). We should remember, however, that although the Bible tells us that Jesus appeared to the disciples for 40 days, it does not tell us how long after that was the Day of Pentecost; we have to know that from the ancient sources (and they disagree; see commentary on Acts 2:1).

Act 1:4

**“being assembled together.”** This verse has a textual variant that is not easily dealt with, leaving us with three alternatives: assemble together, spend the night together, or eat salt together (which is the literal, usually translated simply “eat together”). The scholars are divided. Fewer scholars think that “spend the night together” is the meaning here, and they seem to be right about that. Those who say, “eat salt together,” do so because of the parallel record in Luke 24:43-53. However, it is unlikely that the record of Jesus eating a piece of fish (Luke 24:42-43) is what Acts 1:4 is referring to because that event took place on the Sunday that Jesus appeared to the disciples for the very first time. It seems clear from the greater context that this event of Jesus being gathered together with his disciples was a later event because it does not make sense that Jesus would tell his disciples to remain in Jerusalem and also tell them to meet him in Galilee. So it had to be later, when or after they had been in Galilee, that he told them to remain in Jerusalem. Although this gathering could have occurred in Galilee after Jesus’ resurrection, it seems most likely that it occurred in the Jerusalem area after Jesus and the disciples returned there after being in Galilee. Jesus likely spoke of the coming holy spirit on a number of occasions. It is very likely that the original reading of the text was “being assembled together” and is the choice of Bruce Metzger for the reason he gives.[[5]](#footnote-10971) Also, that the disciples were assembled together would have had to have been the situation even if Jesus and his disciples were eating together, so “being assembled together” is the variant chosen for the REV.

**“he commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem.”** This was an important command because it is very likely that the apostles were concerned about being in Jerusalem since Jesus had just been crucified there and they may well have felt their lives were in danger there, especially if they spoke up about Jesus.

**“to wait for the promise of the Father.”** The “promise” is the figure of speech metonymy[[6]](#footnote-20241) for that which was promised, the gift. The apostles did not have to wait for the promise; it had been given long ago. They had to wait for what was promised, i.e., the gift of holy spirit. Dynamic equivalent versions such as the NIV or paraphrased versions such as the Good News Bible, add the word “gift” so the English reader is not confused.

[See figure of speech “metonymy.”]

**“which, *he said*, “you heard about from me.”** The REV translates this as an ellipsis, adding, “he said.” However, the Greek text is the figure of speech anacoluthon, non-sequence. In this case, the indirect address of the first part of the verse suddenly becomes a direct quotation of Jesus.

[See figure of speech “anacoluthon.”]

Act 1:5

**“because.”** The Greek is *hoti* (#3754 ὅτι), and it means, “that, because, or since.” Lenski and Robertson refer to this as the consecutive *hoti*.[[7]](#footnote-17426) The question we must ask, and answer, is why did Jesus command his disciples to stay in Jerusalem? It was to wait for what the Father had promised, i.e., the gift of holy spirit. The disciples had already been baptized in water. If water baptism was all that was important and necessary for salvation, there would have been no need for the disciples to wait in Jerusalem or receive the gift of holy spirit. Sadly, many people reverse what Jesus said here in Acts. They say water baptism is essential for the believer and act as if baptism in holy spirit is not really essential but perhaps “nice to have,” or valuable in many ways. Jesus was teaching quite the opposite. He knew the disciples had already been water baptized. He also knew it would no longer be intrinsically valuable after the Church started on the Day of Pentecost. Thus, he commanded his disciples to stay in Jerusalem and receive baptism in holy spirit “because” John [only] baptized in water, but holy spirit was going to be first poured out in Jerusalem.

**“with water.”** The Greek is *hudōr* (#5204 ὕδωρ) in the dative case indicating the means by which the baptism occurs, i.e., the element that people were baptized with was water. John’s baptism was a shadow of what was to come, and even John himself said this (Matt. 3:11). Sadly, there are some who teach that water baptism is necessary for salvation. But Jesus never made water baptism a requirement for salvation, nor did any of his apostles. The apostles continued to baptize with water as commanded by the Lord Jesus (cf. Matt. 28:19), not for salvation, though, but for the symbolism of the washing away of sin and the new life of the believer in Christ.

[For more on baptism, see John W. Schoenheit, *The History & Doctrine of Christian Baptism.*]

**“with holy spirit.”** This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God.

[For more information on the holy spirit and uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” and also see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Act 1:6

**“is it at this time you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”** The question is logical. Jesus had just recently (most likely even that day) spoken to them about the coming holy spirit (Acts 1:5). The disciples were well acquainted with the Old Testament prophecies that the gift of holy spirit would be poured out in association with judgment upon the nations and the Messianic Age (Isa. 32:15-18; Joel 2:28-3:17). Therefore when Jesus told them that the gift of holy spirit was going to be poured out, it was natural for them to assume that the Messianic Kingdom was at hand. More than that, however, was the fact that the apostles still did not grasp the reality of the ascension. At the Last Supper, Jesus said he was going away, but they did not understand what he was saying. After he was raised from the dead, Jesus explained that he had to die and be raised (Luke 24:44-49), but he did not explain the ascension. The apostles and disciples knew about all the Scriptures that said the Messiah would restore the kingdom of Israel, and so now that they understood that he had to die and be raised, it most likely would have seemed to them that the only thing left was for Christ to somehow conquer the earth and set up his kingdom, so they asked him about it. However, even in his answer to them, Jesus did not explain the ascension; the apostles learned piece by piece as they lived for the Lord day by day. This teaches us that living the way we know to live day after day is more important to God than that we know the whole picture of what is going on in life.

**“restore.”** The Greek verb is *apokathistēmi* (#600 ἀποκαθίστημι), and it means to restore, to restore to a former state. The restoration of Israel and indeed, the earth itself, was foretold in Scripture (cf. Ps. 14:7; Hosea 6:11; Matt. 17:11; 19:28; Mark 9:12). *Apokathistēmi* is in the present tense, active voice, so some versions have translated it, “are you restoring,” but that very literal translation is misleading. The present tense verb is used to help show that the essence of the disciples’ question was “Is this going to happen now?” English also uses the present tense verb for something that might happen soon. For example, if a man is going to build a deck on his house, and a friend comes over to visit, the homeowner might say, “I am going to build a deck.” The friend might then ask, “Are you building it today,” using the present tense “are…building,” instead of the future tense. If the friend was using strict English grammar he would use a future tense and say, “Are you going to build it today,” but in common English, as in common Greek, a present tense verb was sometimes used for something that was going to happen soon. The disciples knew the coming of holy spirit was associated with the Messianic Kingdom, so when Jesus said the holy spirit was going to be poured out, the disciples wanted to know if the Kingdom was going to be restored also.

Act 1:7

**“dates.”** The Greek word can refer to a specific period or date (see commentary on 1 Thess. 5:1).

Act 1:8

**“when the holy spirit.”** The Greek text reads, “the holy spirit,” referring to “the” holy spirit that was spoken of as coming in the future. Both the Old Testament prophets and Jesus spoke of the coming gift of holy spirit (cf. John 7:39; 20:22). Acts 1:8 is one of the clearest verses that show us that when a person gets born again and receives the gift of holy spirit, that person gets spiritual power, and thus the ability to operate the manifestations of holy spirit right then, not later. However, this fact has been confused, and the translation of this verse in the King James Version is partly to blame. The KJV reads: “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.” What modern readers usually do not understand is that in 1611, the phrase “after that” is not a good translation of the Greek participle in this verse. The Greek text clearly indicates the power comes “when” holy spirit comes, which is at the time a person is saved via being born again. The modern versions we checked all had “when,” including the New King James Version, which has updated the English of the King James Version. When a person receives the gift of holy spirit, at that time they are spiritually powerful (cf. commentary on Eph. 1:13).

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

**“witnesses.”** The Greek is *martus* (#3144 μάρτυς), from which we get the English word, “martyr.” The word “witness” became martyr, because in the great persecutions of the Church in the first three centuries after Christ, many people gave a clear witness of Christ by standing firm in their faith even through torture and death, becoming martyrs for Christ.

Acts 1:8 marks very clearly a huge shift in God’s purpose for individuals and for the Christian Church. In the Old Testament, the Jews were never commanded to individually be witnesses to other nations. The purpose of God in the Old Testament was to make Israel as a nation a “holy nation” and a kingdom of priests (Exod. 19:5-6). God’s design at that time was that Israel as a nation would obey His laws and then He would so bless them that people of other nations would take notice and come and join Israel (cf. Exod. 12:48). There is no command in the Old Testament for Jews to witness to pagans to get them to become Jews, but God’s justice and power among the Jews was noticed by pagans who then joined Israel (cf. Rahab, Ruth). That all changed in the New Testament.

Jesus Christ officially started the shift in evangelism when he sent out some of his disciples to witness (Matt. 10:5-7; Luke 10:1-10). But what Christ did was very limited in scope and outreach. He only sent out the twelve apostles and a group of 72, and he specifically commanded them to go only to other Jews. Beyond that, he never commanded that all his followers tell others about God or salvation like he does here in Acts 1:8.

After Jesus died and was resurrected, and especially after the Day of Pentecost when every Christian is sealed with the gift of holy spirit, every believer is to witness to the world (Acts 1:8), is an ambassador for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20), and has been given both the ministry of reconciling people to others and the message of reconciliation, that is, things to say to people to get them to come to Christ (2 Cor. 5:18-19). Believers are to lead others to Christ, and are to be ready with enough understanding of why they came to Christ and how a person can get saved that they can act on what 1 Peter 3:15 says: “Always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.”

[For more on God’s purpose for Israel as an example to the nations, see commentary on Deut. 28:1. For more on Christian salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.” For more on the New Birth, see commentary on 1 Pet. 1:3. For more on how to get saved and how easy it is, see the commentary on Rom. 10:9.]

**“the uttermost part of the earth.”** Although Jesus’ words included everyone on earth, that was not yet in the mind of the apostles, who only thought in terms of the Jews, who had been scattered over the known world.

Act 1:10

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Act 1:11

**“taken up from you into heaven.”** The fact that Jesus went into heaven in his new body is one of the pieces of evidence that heaven has some kind of physicality, some kind of material existence, because Jesus was a material being. Jesus ascended into heaven in his new body, which was flesh and bone even though it was powered by “spirit,” not “soul life.” When Jesus first appeared to his followers who were inside a room with locked doors, “they were terrified and frightened, and thought they were seeing a spirit [*pneuma*]” (Luke 24:37). Jesus came into the locked room where they were staying, so the disciples thought they were seeing some kind of ghost-like being with a non-corporeal body. Jesus quickly corrected their misconception and said, “Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see, because a spirit [*pneuma*] does not have flesh and bones, as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39).

So even in his resurrected body, Jesus has flesh and bones, and at the Rapture, we will too because we will have a body like Christ’s new body (1 Cor. 15:48-49; Phil. 3:21). Jesus is in heaven now, and believers will be at the Rapture, and the two witnesses will go there also (Rev. 11:12), so the biblical evidence is that heaven has a physical aspect to it. It seems unlikely that God would take people to heaven in physical bodies, but their bodies somehow become non-physical while they are in heaven. However, since God does not speak specifically about it, we cannot be 100% sure.

[For more information on our spirit-powered body, see commentary on 1 Cor. 15:44.]

**“will come in the same way as you saw him going.”** Jesus ascended into heaven some 2,000 years ago, and at some point in the future, he will come back to earth, fight the Battle of Armageddon, and conquer the earth (Rev. 19:11-21). Christ will set up his kingdom on earth, and the kingdom will fill the earth (see commentary on Dan. 2:35). When Jesus comes back he will restore the earth into a Garden-of-Eden-like Paradise. The air, soil, and water will be completely restored. Also, animal nature will be restored to that which it was before Adam sinned, and thus the wolf will live with the lamb and the leopard will lie down with the young goat and the lion will eat straw like the ox (Isa. 11:6-9). The deserts will bloom (Isa. 32:15; 35:1-3, 6-7) and there will be more than enough food for everyone (Amos 9:13-14).

The earth will be restored, which is why the Bible says the Millennial Kingdom will be a new heavens and earth (Isa. 65:17), and why Jesus called that time the “New Beginning” (Matt. 19:28). Jesus will stay in heaven until he comes down and restores the earth, which is why Peter said that Jesus will be in heaven until “the time of the restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21).

[For more on Christ’s Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Act 1:12

**“a Sabbath day’s journey.”** The original Sabbath day’s journey set by tradition was 2,000 cubits (about 3,000 feet, or slightly over one-half mile), which the rabbis took from Joshua 3:4-5, that there were to be 2,000 cubits between the “place” of the people and the ark of the covenant. Since we know the distance between the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem is about one-half mile, we know that the Sabbath day’s journey in Acts 1:12 is the 2,000 cubit journey. However, later the rabbis decided the “place” of Joshua 3:4 could be the city where a person lived, and thus the Sabbath day’s journey was lengthened to be 2,000 cubits from the outside of your city. Then the Rabbis decided that if a person put food somewhere, that became his abode and thus his “place,” so a person could walk up to 2,000 cubits to where his food was and then another 2,000 cubits, for a total of over 1.1 miles (1.7 km). Sometime around New Testament times (the exact times these traditions changed is hard to pin down), the rabbis decided that if a person had to walk 4,000 cubits away from home on the Sabbath, he had to be able to get back, so the Sabbath day’s journey was lengthened to 8,000 cubits, or over 2 miles (3 km). These types of traditions which were not based on Scripture were part of the burdens that the religious leaders put on people.

Act 1:14

**“with one accord.”** *homothumadon* (#3661 ὁμοθυμαδόν). From *homos* (the same) and *thumos* (related to the soul, the life, the feelings, the passions). “Old adverb in *-don* from adjective *homothumos* and that from *homos*, same, and *thumos*, mind or spirit, with the same mind or spirit. Common in ancient Greek and papyri. In the New Testament, 11 times in Acts and nowhere else save Ro 15:6.”[[8]](#footnote-26441) It means to be of one mind, one passion.

**“and Mary the mother of Jesus.”** This lets us know that Mary assumed her proper role as a disciple of Christ, and joined with the other disciples. Customarily, the women, including Mary, are listed after male leaders. The most likely reason that Joseph is not mentioned is that he had died sometime before Jesus started his ministry, which is why after the crucifixion she went to live with John (John 19:27). The verse ends with “and the brothers of the Lord,” most likely because up until after the resurrection they had not believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but did after he was raised, but were new converts.

There is no indication in this verse that Mary was especially venerated in any way. In fact, after this record in Acts chapter 1, she passes out of history. Church tradition gives us more details about her life and death, but that is just tradition, there are no provable facts about her life after this. The Bible moves on to the ministry of Peter, then of Paul. The attention given to Mary began to intensify when Jesus began being considered to be God. Then her veneration became especially more focused after the Council of Ephesus, the ecumenical Church council in 431 when Mary was officially designated “*theotokos*,” i.e., “God-bearer,” or as it was more commonly referred to, “the mother of God.” The emperor Maurice (582-602) was the first one to set the celebration of the assumption of Mary definitively for August 15 for the entire empire.

Act 1:15

**“Peter stood up in the midst of the brothers.”** Although the Greek word *adelphoi* (“brothers”) can refer to both Christian men and women, and is therefore sometimes translated “brothers and sisters,” (see Word Study: “Adelphos”), because Peter was in the Temple and stood up “in the midst” of the brothers, culturally this would only be men. Although the female disciples could have been counted in the 120 (cf. Acts 1:14), it is also possible that they were not counted, which would explain why Peter started Acts 1:16 with “Men, brothers.” In any case, if the women were part of the 120, they would not have intermingled with the men but would have been apart from them, just as they would have in a synagogue.

**“names.”** The word “names” is used idiomatically for “people.” This kind of idiom poses a difficulty to translators. If we translate literally, people could be confused and not know what the verse is saying. In fact, in modern English we sometimes use “name” to refer to important people, but that is not the meaning here. The Bible is not saying there were about 120 important people and an uncounted number of unimportant people gathered there. However, the use of “names” has an emphasis that we should not miss, because it points to the importance of every individual. Every person gathered there was special and important to God.

**“together at that one place.”** The phrase occurs in the Septuagint as an idiom for “together,” which is why so many Bible versions read “together” (HCSB, KJV, NASB, NRSV). However, in this case, the text is giving us more than just a statement that the people were together, although that is clearly also part of the meaning of the word. By the one phrase in Greek, God communicates that the people were “together at that one place.” This immediately shows us that they are not in the “upper room.” For one thing, the houses in Jerusalem were quite small; it would not have been possible to get about 120 people in a room in a house. Second, and fatal to the argument that the 120 were in the upper room, was that it was where the men, the apostles, were living in Jerusalem (Acts 1:13). They would not have had a mixture of men and women up in the room where the men were staying.

The “one place” where the disciples “continued steadfastly in prayer” was the Temple. Luke 24:53 says the disciples were “continually in the Temple,” and the 37-acre Temple complex was the main place where groups of people gathered. For more on the Pentecost event happening in the Temple, see commentary on Acts 2:2, “house.”

Act 1:16

**“Men, brothers.”** The Greek word “men” is *anēr* (#435 ἀνήρ), the standard Greek word for an adult male. It is used in formal address, and so in the book of Acts, it occurs in combination with “brothers” (as here, Acts 2:29, etc.; “Men, brothers”), “Jews” (Acts 2:14 YLT; “Men, Jews”); “Israel” (Acts 2:22 YLT; “Men; Israelites”); “Men, brothers and fathers” (Acts 7:2); “Athens” (Acts 17:22 YLT; “Men, Athenians”); “Ephesians” (Acts 19:35; Men, Ephesians). Lenski says, “The assembly consisted of men, otherwise *andres* could not have been used; *adelphoi* [brothers] might include *adelphai* [sisters], just as today ‘brethren’ may include ‘sisters,’ but *andres* [men] could not include *gunaikes* [women], just as to this day the address ‘men’ omits ‘women.’”[[9]](#footnote-23118) We agree that Peter was only addressing the men, which is why he specifically used the term “men.” However, it seems clear from the context, especially the previous two verses, that there were women in the audience. However, according to the Jewish custom of the day, they would have been protected from freely interacting with the men, and certainly excluded from voting for a replacement for Judas.

It was a common custom in the ancient Middle East to only address the men in an audience, and often, only to count them (which is why in cases such as the record we know as “The feeding of the 5,000,” the number 5,000 included only men. The women and children were stated to be there, and likely outnumbered the men, but were not counted [Matt. 14:21]). As the Christian Faith developed through the first century, and God revealed that there was neither male nor female in Christ (Gal. 3:28), women took on greater roles of responsibility in the Church. Thus, Romans 16 mentions Phoebe, a deacon, and Andronicus and Junia, who were apostles (Rom. 16:7; although some theologians dispute that interpretation). Sadly, the chauvinism in the Church regained ascendancy, and so for most of the time since Christ, the Church has denied proper recognition and leadership roles to women. We feel that it is important to understand the Bible in the context of the times it was written and properly reflect the biblical customs. Therefore, we have decided to retain the biblical phrase “Men, brothers,” rather than to change it to something like “brothers and sisters.” We feel it is more helpful to both Christian men and women to properly understand the biblical customs and mindset of the times than to artificially include women and thus make Peter (and Paul, and others) say something he really did not say.

**“Holy Spirit.”** This seems to be more of a reference to God, the Holy Spirit, than it is to the gift of God, which is “holy spirit.” However, it is possible that it is a reference with more emphasis on the gift than on God Himself, in which case, “holy spirit” would make more sense in English.

There are a couple difficulties in translating this phrase. The first is the English forces us to make a choice between “Spirit” (God) and “spirit” (the gift from God). The original texts would have either all capital or all lowercase letters, and thus the copyist would not have to make a decision whether or not God or His gift of holy spirit was indicated, he could leave that decision to the reader. The second difficulty is that a person who really understands the subject, and also knows that God always placed His gift of holy spirit upon people when He wanted to inspire them with a prophetic word, would realize that “SPIRIT” in this kind of context really meant “The Spirit (i.e., God) by way of His gift of spirit.” Thus the one word “SPIRIT” actually covered both the Giver and the gift in the original understanding of the text. But this cannot be easily done in English, because proper English forces us to either have “Spirit” (i.e., God) or “spirit” (i.e., God’s gift of holy spirit given to us).

In the Bible, many people spoke or acted prophetically when the spirit came upon them (cf. Num. 11:17, 24, 25; 24:2, 3; Judg. 3:10; 1 Sam. 10:6, 10; 1 Chron. 12:18; 2 Chron. 15:1; 24:20; Joel 2:28). Nevertheless, it was always God who put the holy spirit upon people and who was the origin of the message. It is clearly recognized by the people and in the prophetic messages themselves that the message is from God and does not originate from the gift of holy spirit (cf. 2 Chron. 20:14, 15; 24:20; Isa. 59:21). Other times David is said to have spoken by the spirit are: Matthew 22:43; Mark 12:36, and Acts 4:25.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Act 1:18

**“Now this man acquired a field.”** Judas apparently bought the field in which he died with the money that he stole from the money box he was entrusted with. It has been taught that Judas bought the field with the money he got from the priests for betraying Jesus, but that cannot be the case because Judas repented of betraying Jesus and returned that money to the priests (cf. Matt. 26:14-16; 27:3). Jesus and his disciples had a money box in which they kept money that was given to them by thankful people who they, and especially Jesus, had helped (John 12:6; 13:29). The Bible tells us that Judas stole from the box, which would have been quite easy because there would have been money coming and going all the time and Judas was the one entrusted with the money. Although the Bible never specifically says that Judas bought the field with the money he stole from the money box, he bought the field with “the reward of his iniquity,” and stealing money from Jesus and the disciples would certainly be part of his iniquity, and it explains where the illicit money to buy the field came from.

Acts 1:18-19 are the figure of speech parenthesis, in this case, a parembole (a parenthesis complete in itself). This parenthesis was added by Luke for the benefit of his wide audience over the whole Christian world. Many of them would not have heard what happened to Judas and why there needed to be a replacement for him. Peter did not speak the words in verses 18 and 19 to his audience, for they all perfectly understood why Judas needed a replacement (for more on Acts 1:18-19 being a parenthesis, see the commentary on Acts 1:19).

**“he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.”** There is much discussion about the differences between the account of Judas’ death here in Acts and the account in Matthew 27:5 which simply states that Judas “hanged himself.” Many commentators simply say there were two accounts of his death, and Matthew and Luke recorded different traditions. However, first, the Bible is authored by God, and He would know how Judas died and what His inspired writers would put down. Second, it is unlikely that Luke and Matthew would write differing accounts since it seems that they both would have been familiar with Judas and what had happened to him. Judas was an infamous person, and if his death was as gory as Acts describes, Matthew would certainly have known about it and Luke would have heard much about it. There is no need to see a contradiction between Matthew and Acts. Matthew says Judas hanged himself and describes how Judas died. In contrast, Acts describes the ignominious end to Judas: that he fell, broke open in the middle, and all his bowels gushed out. The two accounts simply have different details.

Matthew and Acts are not difficult to harmonize. Conservative commentators show that the most logical explanation for what happened to Judas is that after returning the money to the priests, he went and hanged himself (Matt. 27:5), then later he fell to the ground and his body broke open (cf. Lenski, Kistemaker, Hendriksen, and many more). It seems likely that Judas would have hung for a few weeks at least, and finally, his body fell to the ground and the impact of the fall caused him to burst open. Peter and the rest of the apostles did not replace Judas and speak of his body breaking open until after the ascension, which was 40 days after Passover and even longer than that from the time Judas hung himself. So the fact is that Judas could have hung for quite a few weeks before falling and bursting open. The text does not tell us why Judas’ body fell but there are a number of logical possibilities. For example, the rope, weakened by time and weather, could have broken; or Judas’ body could have decomposed and weakened to the point it pulled apart due to its own weight; or someone might have cut the rope to try to get Judas’ body down (or even just to get the rope) and it fell; or it is even possible that people got Judas’ body down and threw it into the “field of blood” and it broke open upon being thrown.

That Judas’ body would have fallen and broken open upon hitting the ground is not at all unlikely. If Judas had hanged himself soon after returning the money to the priests as the Gospel of Matthew implies, he could have easily hung for weeks before falling, which would have made his body very susceptible to bursting open upon impact with the ground. Since Judas hung himself in the springtime of year when the weather was heating up and the skies were generally clear and sunny, if he hung for even a couple of weeks his body would have been bloated and his skin and muscles deteriorating. His body could easily have burst open upon impact with the ground, especially if there were roots or rocks on the ground that Judas’ body would have hit. Also, although there is no way to verify this, there is a long-standing tradition that Judas hung himself over a ravine and thus would have fallen some distance before hitting the ground.

To understand what happened to Judas, it helps to keep in mind that at the time of Christ, cities did not have “sanitation” or “public works” departments to deal with trash and even dead bodies if people died on the street. If a person died without a family to bury them, often their body just decomposed where it lay, and usually was eaten by dogs, rats, and other vermin. Large Roman cities sometimes had burial societies that a person could pay to belong to in order to ensure if they did die on the street that someone would take care of the body, but Judas would not have belonged to any such society if Jerusalem even had one. Gregory Aldrete writes about the city of Rome, but what he said was typical of larger cities in Roman times, that on the streets there was “the widespread presence of human and animal cadavers in various states of decomposition…. The normal course of events produced enormous numbers of dead bodies, many of which were not properly disposed of. The truly impoverished…along with Rome’s large population of homeless and beggars, simply lay where they dropped or were thrown into the Tiber or into pits just outside the city. …The poet Martial describes the gruesome death of a beggar whose last moments are spent trying to fend off the dogs and vultures that have gathered to feed on him….Suetonius mentions an incident when a stray dog ran into the room where the emperor Vespasian was dining and deposited a human hand beneath the table….”[[10]](#footnote-16155)

The point is that if Judas went out and hung himself outside the city as Matthew implies, it is highly unlikely that anyone would have taken down and buried his body—it would most likely have hung until it rotted or was slowly eaten away by vultures and such. Eventually, the rope would break or the body would decompose to the point it would be pulled apart by its own weight and fall to the ground, or possibly, someone who wanted to speed up the decomposition and disposal of the body, or who might have wanted the rope, might cut it down where it could be more easily eaten by dogs and other vermin. In any case, there is no problem believing that when the body fell it would have been so bloated and weakened that it would break apart like Judas’ body did.

Making it more plausible that Judas’ fall would cause him to break open in the middle is the fact that the Greek word *prēnēs* (#4248 πρηνής), often translated “headlong” or even “head first” can also refer to the prone position.[[11]](#footnote-17467) If Judas hit the ground in a prone position he almost certainly would have broken upon impact if he was bloated. However, the word *prēnēs* introduces another possibility as well: *prēnēs* might refer to being swollen up. Although not favored by the majority of lexicographers, some notable ones think that “swollen” is a distinct possibility, including the UBS Greek-English Lexicon; the Greek-English Lexicon by Arndt and Gingrich, and also the *Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* by Moulton and Milligan, which says there is some evidence that *prēnēs* could be a medical term meaning “swollen up.” Some English versions have the idea of swollen in their translation. For example, The Complete Jewish Bible by Stern, the Moffatt Bible, the translation by E. Goodspeed, and the translation by J. B. Philips, all have that Judas’ body swelled. Also, there was a very early Christian tradition that Judas “swelled up to monstrous proportions.”[[12]](#footnote-18427) But even if the Greek text did not read that Judas’ body had swollen up, the fact that his dead body had hung in the sun for a few weeks would mean it was swollen. So Judas hung himself but fell after his body had swollen up, and when he hit the ground he burst open. That is logical and harmonizes Matthew with Acts, with Matthew giving the way Judas died, and Peter describing the terrible end of Judas, as if it were fitting that one who betrayed Christ would end up without a proper burial.

Another way of harmonizing Matthew and Acts, but a very unlikely one, was proposed by V. P. Wierwille.[[13]](#footnote-31005) He proposed that Judas hanged himself by falling on a stake or sword, much like King Saul had done many years before (1 Sam. 31:4). However, although impaling oneself was a known form of suicide in the ancient biblical world, it was not common in the Roman world. Being impaled was often not immediately fatal, and if the person was not killed quickly, being impaled usually led to many hours and sometimes even days of tremendous pain and suffering. In contrast, hanging by the neck was fatal, quick, and often not particularly painful. Furthermore, when Matthew says that Judas hanged himself, the Greek word is *apagchomai* (#519 ἀπάγχομαι (ἀπάγχω)), a word that only occurs one time in the NT, and means to strangle or hang oneself. It is much more likely that if Judas had impaled himself on a stake, the Greek word *kremannumi* (#2910 κρεμάννυμι) would have been used instead of *apagchomai*. Also, if Judas died by impaling himself on a stake and not by hanging, then when Matthew uses the word *apagchomai*, instead of having the common meaning of “hang” oneself, it has to have the very uncommon meaning that Judas was “feeling suffocated” when he returned the money to the priests. Given that death by impaling oneself was not common in the Roman world, and given that the common meaning of *apagchomai* in Matthew 27:5 is to hang oneself such as by a rope, the easy way to harmonize Matthew and Acts is to see that Judas returned the money to the priests and went out and hanged himself, and by the time Peter addressed the group in Acts 1, Judas’ body had already swollen, fallen, and burst open. Judas met a very ignoble end, broken apart in the middle of a field he had purchased with the money he had stolen from the believers.

The money he got for betraying Jesus he returned to the priests; Matt. 27:3. He had other money that he stole from the gifts given by believers, and that is how he bought the field mentioned in Acts 1 (cf. John 12:6).

**“burst open.”** The Greek is *laschō* (#2997 λάσχω (λακάω), and it means to break open, break apart. Meyer gives evidence from Homer and other ancient Greek writers that this is an expression that means to burst open with a noise.[[14]](#footnote-27910)

Act 1:19

**“in their language…Akeldama.”** The word “Akeldama” is Aramaic. Acts 1:18-19 are a parenthesis, added by Luke to explain why there needed to be a replacement for Judas (see commentary on Acts 1:18). Luke was a native Greek speaker, and wrote in Greek. In contrast, Peter’s native language was Aramaic, and he would have spoken Hebrew as well. Peter would never have called “akeldama” a word “in their language,” because he was speaking to a room full of Aramaic-speaking Jews, and “akeldama” was their language. Luke added “in their language” to clarify the meaning of “akeldama” to his Greek-speaking audience. This verse shows that the book of Acts was originally written in Greek.

Act 1:23

**“And they put forward two.”** There has been debate about whether Matthias was the correct choice for the apostle to replace Judas. It has been suggested that Paul should have been the person to replace Judas. However, there is no reason to doubt the choice of Matthias or the way he was chosen. We must keep in mind that in those early days of the Church, it was vital that the word about Jesus Christ spread and the only way to spread it was word of mouth, and credibility came from being an eyewitness of the people and events being discussed. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John had not been written yet, and would not be written for a number of years, likely at least 15-20. Furthermore, Matthew and John were the only Gospel writers who were with Jesus and the other apostles to see what Jesus did and hear what he taught, and the Gospel of John was likely the last of the four Gospels written.

Peter and the other apostles knew that being an eyewitness of what Jesus did and taught was vital to the spread of the news about Jesus, and so the apostle to replace Judas had to be a person who was with them in an important and uncontested way from the very beginning (Acts 1:21). Paul could not have done that—he never even met Jesus. Also, the original apostles were to go to the lost sheep of the House of Israel, not to the Gentiles, and Matthias no doubt did that. In contrast, from his first knowledge of his calling as an apostle, Paul was to go to the Gentiles, even though it would be some years between his getting saved and his early work with the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). The record of the start of the Word among the Gentiles was Acts 10, and that was likely about ten years after Pentecost.

After Pentecost, the Lord began to populate his church with many apostles, prophets, pastors, and teachers. Paul was one of those, but he never joined the Twelve physically or in his mission. Matthias was chosen to replace Judas, and no doubt he did in many ways. Certainly, he did by his eyewitness testimony about Jesus, and by his being with the other apostles physically until they began to disperse as time went on.

[For more about how Matthias was chosen, see commentary on Acts 1:26.]

Act 1:24

**“You, Lord.”** The evidence shows that this prayer is to Jesus, not to the Father. By far the most certain evidence that this is a prayer to Jesus has to do with who would choose the apostle that would replace Judas. Jesus “chose” the original twelve apostles. Luke 6:13 says, “he called his disciples, and he chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles.” The word “chose” is *eklegomai* (#1586 ἐκλέγομαι), and although it is not an unusual word, it is important, because it was used of Jesus’ original choosing, then it is used in Acts 1:2, referring to “the apostles whom he [Jesus] had chosen.” Jesus had chosen the Twelve, and Acts confirms that in its opening verses. So it makes sense that when Peter prays, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen,” that he would be asking the Lord Jesus to now reveal the man who he chose to replace Judas—simply continuing the Lord Jesus’ process of choosing apostles. This also fits with Ephesians 4:11, which says that it is Jesus who gives the equipping ministries to the Church. Thus it is the Lord Jesus who chose the original twelve apostles, and it is also Jesus who appoints apostles to the Church. Therefore, it would be unusual if, in this one case, Peter had asked God whom He had chosen to replace Judas rather than asking Jesus.

It is clear from the prayer in Acts 1:24 that the apostles knew that Jesus already “had chosen” a replacement for Judas. They did not pray, “help us choose a replacement for Judas,” they prayed, “show us which person you have chosen.” In contrast to Jesus choosing a replacement for Judas, it does not flow well that Jesus would choose the original apostles, then Acts 1:2 would confirm that fact, but then Peter would suddenly pray “You, Lord,” and ask God whom He had chosen.

Peter was likely the one to lead the prayer, although there may have been “congregational prayer” as well, with other people praying after Peter took the lead. Peter was the recognized leader of the Church at this time and he stood up to speak about a replacement for Judas (Acts 1:15). A piece of contributing evidence that this prayer was to Jesus is that it is unlikely that the apostles would address the Father in such a familiar manner as to open a prayer with “You, Lord” (*su kurios*). On the other hand, the apostles had a very familiar relationship with Jesus, whom they had just seen on earth some ten days earlier, and addressing him that way would be more natural to them.

Act 1:26

**“they cast lots for them.”** The apostles cast lots to determine whether the Lord had chosen Joseph called Barsabbas, or Matthias. There is some debate about exactly how the lots were cast. Tradition and history make it most likely that this was not a vote of any kind, but rather a much more traditional casting of lots. Also, the fact that the apostles said that the lot would determine the one whom Jesus had chosen indicates that this was not a vote, not even a blind vote where no one knew whom the others had voted for.

This is the last time in the Bible, and for the most part in early Christian history, that lots were cast in what could seem like a random fashion: by having a lot fall out of a jug and believing it to be God’s choice. However, there is biblical and traditional evidence that a lot coming out of a bag or jug was a godly way to cast lots and that method had the approval and influence of God until the Day of Pentecost. On Pentecost (Acts 2), each believer received the gift of holy spirit and could hear from the Lord directly. But before that time—and this event occurred before Pentecost—God had established the casting of lots as a way to determine His will: “The lot is cast into the lap, but each of its judgments is from Yahweh” (Prov. 16:33). Also, the High Priest of Israel wore a breastplate that had a pouch in which were two stones, the Urim and the Thummim, and he would reach in and pull one out to determine the will of God (cf. Exod. 28:30; Lev. 8:8; Num. 27:21; Ezra 2:63).

A traditional way that lots were cast if the decision was between two alternatives was to put two stones or pieces of pottery (or objects such as those) into a jug or bag and shake them until one fell out, and that one was believed to be God’s choice. But there were both godly and ungodly ways to cast lots. The godly way was when a godly person cast lots for a godly cause and looked to the true God for His answer. The ungodly way was when a pagan (or an ungodly Israelite) cast lots for an ungodly cause and looked to a pagan god for an answer (see commentary on Deut. 18:10, “practices divination”).

Both God and demons can influence how lots fall, so both God and demons can make casting lots “work,” however, almost always, one way has God’s approval while the other way gives glory to the Devil and supports his agenda. Also, there are times when the lot gives an “answer” that is just chance with no actual spiritual help at all. It is also important to realize there are times when God was at work even when unbelievers were casting lots and thus the answer was the will of God. This happened with Jonah (Jon. 1:7). It also happened when Haman cast lots to determine when to ask the king about executing Mordecai (Esther 3:7). In that case, the date the lot fell on was enough later in the year that God had time to work in the situation and not only rescue Mordecai, but ensure him a leadership position in the Persian kingdom.

Luke wrote both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, and Luke begins his Gospel with Zechariah the priest being chosen by lot to burn incense in the Temple (Luke 1:8-9), another time God was clearly at work. We know from the Jewish records that the priest was chosen by a stone lot that was drawn out, not by any kind of vote, and it seems Luke would have been consistent in his use of “lot” in Acts; and if the apostles had a vote, Luke would have described what happened differently than he did.

The use of lots by God’s people to determine the will of God occurs in many places in the Old Testament. Joshua assigned parts of the land of Israel by lot (Josh. 14:2; 18:6-8); Levitical duties were assigned by lot (1 Chron. 24:7-19; 25:8-31; 26:12-16); the Levitical cities in Israel were assigned by lot (1 Chron. 6:61-65); Nehemiah determined who would live in Jerusalem by lot (Neh. 11:1); Saul was chosen as Israel’s first king by lot (1 Sam. 10:17-24). Achan, who stole things from Jericho and brought disaster upon Israel, was discovered by lot (Josh. 7:14-18). More examples could be given, but the point is that choosing by lot was an established way of determining the will of God even at the time when the apostles chose Matthias by lot. But after Pentecost, things changed. The testimony of the Bible and history is that after Pentecost, the church abandoned the casting of lots and relied on revelation from God or the Lord Jesus to determine the will of God.

So given the cultural background of the apostles, and given the fact that the decision of the lot was the one they thought that Jesus, not themselves, had chosen, it seems that Matthias would have been chosen by a lot falling or being pulled from a bag or jar. However, the fact is that we cannot be 100 percent sure of that since the Bible does not say exactly how the lot was cast.

**Acts Chapter 2**

Act 2:1

**“Pentecost.”** The Greek word *pentēkostē* (#4005 πεντηκοστή ; pen-tā-cos-'tā), was the Greek name of the Jewish feast that came 50 days after Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Technically the word is the substantive feminine form of *pentēkostos*, (πεντηκοστός), “fiftieth.” The Feast of Pentecost had several names. It was called “the Feast of Weeks” (Exod. 34:22; Deut. 16:10); the “Feast of Harvest” (Exod. 23:16) and the “Day of Firstfruits” (Num. 28:26). Traditionally, Pentecost ended the wheat harvest, and wheat was the last of the grains to be harvested in Israel.

God chose the Day of Pentecost to be the day on which He started the Christian Church and made the New Birth available for the very first time. The Feast of Pentecost was one of the three feasts in the Jewish calendar year for which God required all Jewish males to come to Jerusalem (Exod. 23:14, 17; Deut. 16:16).

[See Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.”]

In the calendar year that began with the month Nisan, the first of the three feasts was the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which started at sunset after the Passover Lamb was sacrificed, and it was a seven-day feast (Exod. 23:15). The final feast of the three was the Feast of Tabernacles, and it was also a seven-day feast (Deut. 16:13). In contrast, Pentecost was called the “Day” of Firstfruits because it was a one-day festival. That becomes very important on the day the Church started because it means that when the Jews from all over Israel came for Pentecost, they would all be in the Temple on that one day. All the devout Jews in the area would have been assembled in the Temple at the time of the morning sacrifice when the gift of holy spirit was poured out from heaven. For the other feasts, any particular Jew might not have been present the one day God started the Church. The way God started the Christian Church honored the Jewish people by giving the faithful Jews (non-believing Jews would not be present) a golden opportunity to be the very first people in history to be born again of God’s holy spirit. Also, it meant that the Good News of Jesus Christ and the power of holy spirit would be carried back to the whole Roman world by those faithful Jews.

Although the Old Testament is clear that Pentecost falls 50 days from the first day “after the Sabbath,” during the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread, there has always been disagreement among the Jews as to when to start counting the 50 days. That is because the OT does not seem to be clear on which “Sabbath” to start the counting after—the special Sabbath that was the first day of the feast, or the regular weekly Sabbath that came during the feast. In biblical times, there were at least four major views on counting the days.[[15]](#footnote-23182) Does “the day after the Sabbath” refer to the sixteenth of Nisan, the day after the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was always a special Sabbath (Lev. 23:7)? If it does and the Pharisees thought it did, then “Pentecost” did not fall on a set day of the week, but varied from year to year. On the other hand, many people, including the Sadducees, believed that “the day after the Sabbath” referred to the day after the weekly Sabbath that occurred during the seven-day Passover Feast. If that were the case, then the counting started on the Sunday after the weekly Sabbath and continued for seven Sabbaths (49 days), and then ended on the fiftieth day, which was always a Sunday. The Council of Nicaea, AD 325, decided that was going to be the way the Christian Church would count the 50 days, and it has been that way ever since for the orthodox Church, which accounts for our modern reference to “Pentecost Sunday.”

Many qualified commentators (and the Pharisees), start counting the 50 days on the sixteenth of Nisan, the day after the “Special Sabbath” that begins the Feast of Unleavened Bread. However, in this case, we have to agree with the Sadducees and the many qualified commentators who say that the “Sabbath” in Leviticus 23:11 is the weekly Sabbath, and who start counting the 50 days to Pentecost starting with the regular weekly Sabbath that falls during the Feast. Goudoever agrees that the 50-day counting begins on Sunday after the weekly Sabbath, and says, “this is the original meaning of Leviticus 23:11.”[[16]](#footnote-28621) Baruch Levine agrees, and says that Leviticus 23:11, “uses the abbreviation *Shabbat* in its normal sense of a particular day, the Sabbath.”[[17]](#footnote-29046) Some commentators try to use Joshua 5:11 to try to show that the 50 days should be counted from the sixteenth of Nisan, but that verse says nothing about waiving the grain offering.

Very convincing evidence that we gain from the scope of Scripture that the 50 days of Pentecost are counted from the day after the weekly Sabbath is the fact that the wave-sheaf was a type of Christ. Both the wave-sheaf that was the first of the harvest, and the harvest it represented, were types and symbols of future events. The true harvest of the earth is those people who will be raised from the dead to everlasting life. Jesus fulfilled the type of the wave-sheaf by being the true firstfruits of the harvest because he is the firstfruits of the dead (1 Cor. 15:20, 23). Jesus presented himself in the Temple as the High Priest and the firstfruits on Sunday, the eighteenth of Nisan (the first month of the year), shortly after he met Mary Magdalene at the tomb (see commentary on John 20:17). Then, counting that day as day one, we can see that Pentecost fell 50 days later, on Sunday the eighth day of the third month, Sivan.

We can now set some firm dates concerning Jesus’ last week on earth. His crucifixion would have been Wednesday, Nisan 14. The day of his resurrection was Saturday, Nisan 17 just before sunset. His appearing to Mary Magdalene and then going up to God in the Temple was Sunday, Nisan 18. So the Day of Pentecost was 50 days later, on Sunday the eighth of Sivan.

There were many “hidden types” in the Pentecost Feast; however, we should be aware that it seems Jews did not understand the meaning of many of the types associated with their feasts. During the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover), only one sheaf of grain was waved and that one sheaf was acceptable for all the people (Lev. 23:11). This symbolized that the one true sheaf, Jesus Christ, was the acceptable firstfruits for everyone else. During the Feast of Pentecost, there were two loaves of bread offered (Lev. 23:17), which could symbolize the Jews and Gentiles both being acceptable to God.

At Passover, the bread that the people ate was made without yeast, and yeast is usually a type for sin. So at Passover, the people ate the bread that had no “sin,” and the true bread without sin was Jesus Christ. In contrast to Passover, at the Feast of Pentecost, the two loaves were made with yeast (Exod. 34:22; Lev. 23:17). This symbolizes that Jews and Gentiles are acceptable to God in spite of our sin when we accept Christ as Lord.

Also, the Feast of Pentecost was called, “the Day of Firstfruits” (Num. 28:26) even though it was the end of the grain harvest, but God knew that the Day of Pentecost would be when He would give the “firstfruits of the gift of holy spirit” to God’s people (Rom. 8:23). Thus it was that on the Day of Pentecost, Jesus Christ poured out from heaven the promised gift of holy spirit and started the Christian Church.

[For more on the feasts and Sabbaths of Israel and their order in the calendar, see commentary on Lev. 23:2.]

**“they.”** The twelve apostles, not the 120 disciples. See commentary on Acts 2:3.

**“in one place.”** Almost certainly the Temple, not a private house. See commentary on Acts 2:2, “house.”

Act 2:2

**“house.”** In this verse, “house” refers to the Temple in Jerusalem. The Greek word is *oikos* (#3624 οἶκος) and its primary definition is “house,” a building in which people live. However, *oikos* was applied to all kinds of dwellings, including the king’s palace (Matt. 11:8), the Temple of God (Matt. 21:13 [from Isa. 56:7]; Luke 11:51; John 2:16; Acts 7:47, 49 ), temples of idols (Judg. 9:27, 46; 16:27, 29, 30; 1 Sam. 5:2, 5; 31:9, 10; 2 Kings 5:18; 10:21); the human body as a house of something living in it (Matt. 12:44); a family or extended family (Heb. 3:6), descendants from a common ancestor (Matt. 10:6, “the house of Israel”), a family, kingdom, or nation (Luke 11:17); the Christian believers (1 Pet. 2:5), a household including the possessions and property (Acts 7:10).

Many times in the Old Testament the word “house” was applied to the dwelling of God, both when it was just a tent in the wilderness, and when it was the large and stable Temple in Jerusalem. Sometimes the house referred to the Tabernacle or Temple in the phrase “house of the Lord” (cf. Exod. 23:19; 34:26; Judg. 19:18; 1 Sam. 1:7; 3:15; 2 Sam. 12:20; 1 Kings 3:1, 2; 5:3, 5; 6:1). Sometimes the phrase was “house of God” (cf. Judg. 18:31; 20:18, 26, 31; 21:2 KJV). Many times, however, the word “house” was used alone and it is from the context that we know it referred to the Temple (cf. 2 Sam. 7:5-7, 13; 1 Kings 5:17, 18; 6:2-10; 8:16; 9:3; 2 Kings 22:6; 2 Chron. 34:8; Ezra 1:2; 3:12; 6:15; Neh. 11:12; Ezek. 40:5). As we saw above, the New Testament continued referring to the Temple as the “house.” Many times English readers cannot see that the Temple is called the “house” because to avoid confusion many English versions simply translate the Hebrew word “house” as “Temple” (cf. Ezek. 40:5 HCSB, ESV, NASB, NIV).

There are a number of reasons that lead us to conclude that the “house” where the outpouring of holy spirit on the Day of Pentecost occurred was the Temple. For one thing, Jesus had instructed his disciples to stay in Jerusalem until the gift of holy spirit was poured out (Acts 1:4). The two closing verses of the Gospel of Luke tell us where the apostles stayed during that time. After the ascension, they “returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And were continually in the Temple, blessing God” (Luke 24:52-53). For them to be continuously in the Temple meant that they would be there when the Temple was open during the day.

We must also remember that this particular day was the Day of Pentecost, which was one of the three feasts of the Old Testament when Jews were commanded to travel to Jerusalem. In contrast to Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles, which were seven-day feasts, Pentecost was a one-day feast. It is inconceivable that the apostles and disciples who were dedicated Jews, and whom Luke says were continually in the Temple, would not have been in the Temple on Pentecost at the time of the morning sacrifice, about nine o’clock in the morning.

Another reason that the “house” would have been the Temple was the sound that was like a rushing wind filled the entire “house.” This was a very impressive event, and it was the first thing that caught the attention of the crowd. If the Pentecost experience had been in a private home in Jerusalem, and the sound filled that “house,” there is no reason to believe any other Jews would have heard the sound or been interested—certainly not a “multitude” as Acts 2:6 states. In contrast, the Temple complex was about 37 acres and packed with Jews from every nation who had all come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost in obedience to the Mosaic Law.

There is no reason to doubt that this Pentecost was a typical June day in Jerusalem: a hot, cloudless day with no wind or perhaps only a slight breeze. Yet at about nine in the morning, everyone in the Temple heard a loud sound as if there was a violent wind—but there was no wind. What could that mean? Everyone would have been curious; wondering about it, talking about it, and looking around. Then it would not have been missed that it looked like fire was falling from heaven, spreading out into separate tongues, and coming to rest on a small group of men. That would have brought the crowd running in the direction of the apostles. As the crowd got close, however, what they heard was those apostles speaking out in the different languages of the crowd present—languages the men from Galilee did not themselves know!

That phenomenon would have bewildered and amazed the crowd, likely numbering in many thousands, and Peter took the opportunity to speak to the huge crowd. So now we have seen some more things that make it almost impossible for the “house” to be the upper room. The huge crowd of Jews in the Temple would not have heard the sound of the wind if it had only filled a local house. Then, the crowd could not have gotten through the streets of Jerusalem, which were very narrow then, just as they are today. Lastly, there would have been no place for Peter to address a crowd that was so large that three thousand people believed. No doubt there were thousands who did not believe as well.

It has been suggested that many houses had a courtyard, and that is where the 120 could have gathered and thus where the Pentecost experience occurred. However, modern-day archaeology, as well as testimony from ancient sources, shows us that at the time of Christ, the larger houses in Jerusalem were generally on the far western side of the city, while around the Temple the houses were smaller and the streets very narrow. No one in the Temple could have heard the sound of wind in a house on the west side of Jerusalem, perhaps a half mile away, especially given the high, thick walls of the Temple, which would have reduced any sound coming from outside. In contrast to a house somewhere in Jerusalem that could not accommodate a multitude, the Temple had many acres of open space and the crowd could have easily heard the sound, seen the “flames of fire,” heard the apostles speaking in tongues, and then heard Peter speak.

The crowds of Jews who heard the noise of speaking in tongues would have been in the Temple. Commentators who think Pentecost occurred in the Upper Room, say the crowds heard the noise of speaking in tongues and went to the house, but the Jews understood the tongues, and since there were people of every nation in the Temple, hearing people praise God in known languages would not have been completely unusual for a feast day and would not have moved the Jews from the Temple. The commentators who say that Peter and the others walked from the Upper Room to the Temple properly understand that the crowd of Jews was in the Temple, but are forced to invent the part about the apostles migrating to the Temple.

While most scholars recognize that there is enough ambiguity in Luke’s use of “house” that we cannot say for certain where the Pentecost event occurred, a number of scholars recognize that the Temple is much more likely to be the “house” in Acts 2:2 than a private home in Jerusalem. The NIV Study Bible note reads: “Evidently not the upstairs room where they were staying (Acts 1:13) but perhaps someplace in the Temple precincts....” The New King James Version Study Bible note reads, “The place may have been part of the temple. It is difficult to imagine how the large crowd mentioned in Acts 2:5 could have observed the activities in the upper room or congregated in the narrow streets outside the house where the disciples were meeting.”

**“they were sitting.”** The twelve apostles, not the 120 disciples. See commentary on Acts 2:3.

Act 2:3

**“them...each one of them.”** This is referring to the twelve apostles, not the 120 disciples. The thing that looked like fire that was divided into different flame-tongues, came to rest on each one of the twelve apostles, and it was the twelve who first spoke in tongues on the Day of Pentecost. The context switched from the 120 disciples to the decision to get a twelfth apostle in Acts 1:16. By Acts 1:26, Matthias was added to the eleven, making twelve. Then we must remember that in the original text there were no chapters and verses, so when Acts 2:1 says, “they were all together,” the “they” refers to the eleven and Matthias from the verse before. We get a better picture of the way the text reads by taking out the chapter and verse numbers, and also the punctuation, all of which have been added by translators to add clarity, but sometimes they misguide us.

“And they gave forth their lots and the lot fell upon Matthias and he was numbered with the eleven apostles and when the day of Pentecost was fully come they were all with one accord in one place” (Acts 1:26-2:1 KJV without punctuation).

Acts 2:1 does start with “and,” even though it is not translated in many versions. Besides the grammatical evidence that “they” refers to the twelve apostles, not the 120 disciples, there are at least two more important pieces of evidence. The first is that Acts 2:1 says, “they were all together in one place.” The Temple complex was almost 40 acres, and getting 120 people together there would have been difficult. Not impossible, but difficult. However, the much more conclusive evidence that only the apostles had the initial experience of Pentecost is in Acts 2:7, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?” The twelve apostles were all Galileans, but not all of the 120 disciples were Galileans.

**“spreading out.”** The Greek word is *diamerizō* (#1266 διαμερίζω). In the passive voice, which it is here, it means to be divided off or divided into separate parts, to be separated or separated away from, to be dispersed, “to spread out,”[[18]](#footnote-24686) to be distributed. Here, as in many places, the Greek says more than we can easily say in English. What the people saw was the tongues that looked like tongues of flame coming down and spreading out such that each apostle had a tongue of flame resting on him. What is also contained in the Greek word is that these tongues of what looked like flame were “distributed,” by the Lord (see commentary on Acts 2:33). This was no random event. The apostles were selected by the Lord and received his sign of approval. Fire from heaven was always a sign of divine presence or action. God’s fire was used in judgment to consume his enemies, and it was also used as a sign of divine approval. For example, fire on Mount Sinai signaled divine presence (Exod. 19:18). A pillar of fire over the Tent of Meeting (Tabernacle) signaled God’s presence there (Exod. 40:38; Num. 9:16).

God lit the Tabernacle altar with fire from heaven (Lev. 9:24), which is why the Levites were told to keep the fire going and never let it go out (Lev. 6:12, 13). God accepted Gideon’s offering with divine fire (Judg. 6:21). Elijah’s sacrifice was accepted by fire from heaven (1 Kings 18:38), as was David’s (1 Chron. 21:26). God also lit the fire on the altar of the Temple with fire from heaven (2 Chron. 7:1-3). The Jewish audience collected there at the Temple on the Day of Pentecost understood all this, and had the opportunity to see that God (and His Messiah) accepted the apostles.

Act 2:4

**“they were all filled.”** The twelve apostles, not the 120 disciples. See commentary on Acts 2:3.

**“with holy spirit.”** The Greek has no definite article, and spirit is in the genitive case. This is not confusing to the Greek reader. We say “filled with,” while the Greeks said “filled of,” it was just the way they spoke (Cf. Luke 4:28; 5:26; Acts 3:10; 5:17; 13:45, 52; 19:29).

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

**“speak in other tongues.”** For a much fuller explanation of speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:5.

**“the Spirit.”** The Greek word translated “Spirit” is *pneuma* (#4151 πνεῦμα). This use of “the Spirit” likely refers to Jesus Christ, who was pouring out the language of speaking in tongues (see Acts 2:33). However, Acts 2:4 is ambiguous, perhaps purposely so, because in the Bible, God is called the “Spirit,” Jesus Christ is called “the Spirit,” and the gift of holy spirit is called “the spirit.” So which “SPIRIT” was giving the utterance here in Acts 2:4? It could well be a general reference to all three: God, who gave holy spirit to Jesus and thus is the ultimate source of the manifestations of holy spirit; Jesus, who poured out the gift of holy spirit upon people and thus is the immediate source of the gift of holy spirit; and the gift of holy spirit through which the manifestation of speaking in tongues comes.

Since God is “spirit” (John 4:24) and He is called “the Spirit” (cf. Ezek. 1:12, 20; 3:12, 14, 24; 8:3; and 11:1, 24; see commentary on Ezek. 8:3). John 3:8 speaks of being born of “the Spirit,” i.e., of God; and Matthew 12:31 says that blasphemy against “the Spirit,” i.e., God, would not be forgiven. The Bible has many names that refer to God. Because God is holy (Isa. 6:3; John 17:11), He was also known as “the Holy,” which usually gets translated as “the Holy One” (2 Kings 19:22; Job 6:10; Ps. 71:22; 78:41; 89:18; Isa. 1:4; 29:23; Luke 1:49; John 17:11). Sometimes “Spirit” is combined with “holy,” and God is called “the Holy Spirit.” Thus, in Acts 5:3, Peter told Ananias, “how is it that the Adversary has filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?” whom he identified in Acts 5:4 as “God.” The Gospels say Mary was impregnated by “the Holy Spirit,” (Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35), whom we know is God because Jesus is always called the Son of God and never “the Son of the Holy Spirit.”

After his resurrection, Jesus is also called “the Spirit.” That is because when God raised Jesus from the dead, He gave him a spiritually powered body. His physical body was flesh and bone (Luke 24:39), but it was now made alive by “spirit,” not by “soul” like a normal human body. That is why the Bible says that Jesus was raised “a spiritual body” (see commentary on 1 Cor. 15:44). Jesus is called “the Spirit” in Romans 8:26-27; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; and Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22 (see commentary on Rev. 2:7). he is also likely called “the Spirit” in Acts 8:29; 10:19; 11:12;

The gift of holy spirit is also referred to as just, “the spirit” (cf. Acts 8:18; 21:4; 1 Cor. 2:12; 7:40; 12:7; 2 Cor. 1:22; 2 Cor. 5:5).

Acts 2:4 has both the gift of holy spirit and “the Spirit,” which given the immediate context likely refers primarily to Jesus, who poured out “this that you see and hear” (Acts 2:33). The unexplained use of pneuma, “spirit” at the end of Acts 2:4 may seem confusing to us today, but among the first-century Christians, who were accustomed to the gift of holy spirit and to Jesus being called “the Spirit,” it was clearer than it is to us.

There are reasons for believing that the second use of *pneuma* in Acts 2:4 primarily refers to Jesus. The Bible says that Jesus, “the Spirit” “poured out this that you…hear (Acts 2:33).” Thus it seems to be Jesus who gave the tongues. Jesus is the immediate source who energizes the gift of holy spirit such that the believer can speak in tongues. The verb, “was giving them” is imperfect, showing that the giving continued over a period of time. It was not “given” as a one-time thing. “The Spirit,” likely Jesus, continued to give the language as long as the people spoke in tongues.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’” For more on “the Holy Spirit,” see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

Act 2:5

**“*deeply* religious.”** The Greek is *eulabēs* (#2126 εὐλαβής); see commentary on Acts 10:2, “godly man.”

Act 2:7

**“Galileans.”** The gift of holy spirit was first poured out on the twelve apostles, not the 120 disciples. The Twelve were from Galilee, but not all the 120 would have been. See commentary on Acts 2:3.

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Act 2:9

**“Parthians.”** Parthia was in what is Iran today, and where Persia had been before it. The natives spoke a Persian dialect.

**“Medes.”** Media was not a country at the time of the New Testament. The Persians had conquered the nation of Media, which then formed the larger Persian Empire (cf. Esther 1:3, 18, 19; Dan. 5:28; 6:8, 12, 15; 8:20). These people were Jews who were apparently descended from the Jews of the time of Daniel who were carried as captives to that area and had stayed in the area and thus at this time were from Media and therefore were considered Medes (for more on Media, see the REV commentary on Jer. 51:11).

**“Elamites.”** Elam was not a country at the time of the New Testament. The Elamites occupied the area north and west of the Persian Gulf. Like Media, Elam had become part of the ancient Persian Empire.

**“those who live in Mesopotamia.”** At the time of the New Testament, this area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers was part of the Parthian Empire. Today it is Iraq.

**“Judea.”** This most probably does not mean what we usually think of as Judea, the area in southern Israel. It likely means the areas where the Jews had settled (or been deported to), and in this case, refers to areas in what we know as Syria today.

**“Cappadocia.”** A Roman province in the southeast of what we know as Turkey today.

**“Pontus.”** A Roman province in what is now northern Turkey, on the Black Sea.

**“Asia.”** A Roman province that was in the far southwest of what we call Turkey today. The important city of Ephesus was in Asia.

Act 2:10

**“Phrygia.”** An area in what is now central Turkey. In New Testament times, eastern Phrygia was in the Roman province of Galatia, while the western part was in the province of Asia.

**“Pamphylia**.” A Roman province in what is today southern Turkey.

**“Egypt.”** The country of Egypt.

**“parts of Libya near Cyrene.”** Cyrene was settled by Greeks in the seventh century BC and was the leading city of the district of Cyrenaica (also called Pentapolis) in North Africa. The city of Cyrene was about 17 miles from the Mediterranean Sea, built on a plateau. Cyrenaica was ruled by its own people but surrendered to Alexander the Great in 331 BC. Later, it was given to the Romans. At the time of Christ, the city of Cyrene was the capital of Libya in northern Africa on the Mediterranean Sea, which in 27 BC was made, together with Crete, the Roman province of Cyrenaica. People from Cyrene were present in the Temple on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10).

**“visitors from Rome.”** In other words, not true Roman citizens, but Jews and proselytes who lived in Rome, and who would have likely spoken Latin and Greek.

**“proselytes.”** This is almost certainly referring to those Gentiles who were fully proselytes, and not just “proselytes of the gate.” For information on the two different kinds of proselytes in Judaism at the time of Christ, see commentary on Acts 10:2.

Act 2:11

**“Cretans.”** People who live on the Island of Crete, which in 27 BC was made, together with Cyrene in Libya, the Roman province of Cyrenaica.

**“Arabians.”** Likely people of the Nabatean kingdom of Arabia, mostly in what is Saudi Arabia today.

**“the mighty works of God.”** The Greek adjective translated “mighty works” is *megaleios* (#3167 μεγαλεῖος), and it means great, powerful, splendid, magnificent, excellent. It is used here in Acts 2:11 as a substantive, an adjective used as a noun, and thus means “mighty deeds”;[[19]](#footnote-26100) “mighty acts; powerful works”;[[20]](#footnote-26098) “mighty works.”[[21]](#footnote-23159)

[For more on substantives, see commentary on Matt. 5:37.]

The translations capture the meaning of the Greek differently but have basically the same message: the apostles were extolling God. They spoke of His “mighty works” (ASV, CEB, ESV); “great things” (CJB); “magnificent acts” (CSB); “mighty acts” (NAB); “wonderful works” (KJV); “the wonders” (NIV); “wonderful things” (NLT); “deeds of power” (NRSV). It is important to understand that when the apostles spoke in tongues, they spoke about how magnificent and mighty God was. They were not prophesying a message to the crowd, they were declaring how great God was.

Act 2:13

**“sweet new wine.”** It is not “new wine” as in wine that was freshly pressed (which would have been *neos oinos* in the Greek); rather this comes from *gleukos* (#1098 γλεῦκος). Most lexicons define this word as “sweet new wine,” that is, wine that is still in the process of fermenting.[[22]](#footnote-22145) The grape harvest in Palestine ended in August, or September at the latest, which by the time of Pentecost (usually June but sometimes May) would have been some eight months past, so the fermentation would have been over. However, the ancients had ways to keep the wine sweet and from turning to wine vinegar, such as adding honey to it, which would also prolong the fermentation process.

These mockers are typical of unbelievers. They ignore the facts (like the fire from heaven and the fact that no group of drunken people speaks fluently in other languages) and instead just voice their doubt and unbelief. Sadly, the mocking deters many Christians from getting involved in the conflict of the faith, since most people dislike and avoid conflict. The Adversary wages a harsh and relentless war of words, and often these empty arguments sound so plausible they stop Christians. For example, a dedicated Christian who prayed daily, gave regularly, and went to meetings regularly might have someone say to him, “You don’t have to be legalistic about your faith.” That almost sounds persuasive, until we really stop to think that being dedicated is not being “legalistic.” Many such hollow accusations have hindered Christians in their walk with the Lord and are a reason that Christians need to be deliberate about their faith and know what they believe and why.

Act 2:14

**“Fellow Jews, and all you who are residing in Jerusalem.”** The “fellow Jews” and those “residing in Jerusalem” are the same people. In common Semitic style, Peter repeats the same message saying it in two different ways. The Jews who had traveled to Jerusalem for Pentecost would be staying in or very near the city of Jerusalem because Pentecost was a one-day feast. If a visitor stayed very far from Jerusalem then they would not easily be able to travel to the city to be part of the festivities, which started very early and went on throughout the day until at least the afternoon sacrifice.

Act 2:15

**“third hour.”** This is about our 9:00 a.m. Both the Jews and Romans divided the daytime into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 a.m. The nights were divided into “watches,” four watches of three hours each.

[For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48.]

Act 2:17

**“a portion of my spirit.”** The Greek of this phrase gives the sense of God having a large amount of spirit from which he pours some out upon mankind. Literally, it reads, “I will pour out from my spirit.” The preposition *apo* (“from; away from”) combines with the genitive “of my spirit,” to make the equivalent of a partitive genitive, showing that God is taking some of, or part of, His spirit, and putting it on people. Thayer notes that the *apo* in Acts 2:17 is used of “the separation of a part from the whole; where of a whole some part is taken.” BDAG and the *EDNT* both reference Acts 2:17 as a case where the genitive with *apo* is a substitute for the partitive genitive. The NAB agrees, and translates the phrase, “I will pour out a portion of my spirit.” The Septuagint has the partitive idea in Joel, the idea being, “some of my spirit.”[[23]](#footnote-24893) Some translations simply have “I will pour out of my spirit” (Darby, Douay-Rheims, KJV, Rotherham), which could be more clearly translated as, “I will pour out *some* of my spirit.” Thus the concept that God only pours out part of His spirit upon people is inherent in the text.

It is important that we recognize that there is a difference between what we today hear in Peter’s teaching and what Peter’s Jewish audience would have heard. Because of the Epistles to the Church, we today know that when the gift of holy spirit was poured out, it came as the New Birth and was sealed inside the believers. Although that is quite true, Peter’s audience did not know about that.

That God was now “pouring out” his spirit (i.e., giving it abundantly), would have meant two distinct things to Peter’s audience. Although they did not yet understand the New Birth, they did know from Joel that, if Peter was correct about the timing (which he was), God would give spirit to everyone. This is in contrast to how things were in the Old Testament. For example, in Numbers 11, God only put the gift of holy spirit on 70 men out of all the millions of Israelites. Moses said that he wished “that all the people of Yahweh, were prophets! Yea, let Yahweh put his spirit upon them” (Rotherham), but that did not happen. Throughout the history of the Old Testament right up until the day Peter was speaking, God had only given His holy spirit to a relatively few individuals. But now on the Day of Pentecost, the ascended Christ would pour out the gift of holy spirit upon anyone who believed (Acts 2:38; Eph. 1:13).

The second thing that the words “poured out” indicated to Peter’s Jewish audience would be that God would work powerfully through His spirit and energize many prophecies, miracles, etc. The connotation of “pour out” was that the energizing of the spirit would not be just a trickle of prophecies and power, but a great flowing of the manifestations of holy spirit, which is what we should still be seeing today. That is also clear in the immediate context, which we can see because Peter spoke of prophecy, visions, and dreams.

Although many English versions capitalize the word “Spirit” as if it referred to “the Holy Spirit,” clearly it does not. This “spirit” is the gift of holy spirit that each person gets when he or she is born again.

Act 2:20

**“the sun will be turned into darkness.”** This is not a regular reoccurring eclipse, but a special supernatural occurrence in the time of Tribulation that precedes the Second Coming of Christ when he comes from heaven to earth and fights and wins the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19). This prediction, as the quotation itself, is in Joel, and Jesus spoke of the sun being darkened when he taught his disciples about the Great Tribulation (cf. Matt. 24:29), and the book of Revelation says the sun will be darkened (Rev. 6:12; 8:12). The sun being darkened is connected to the wrath of God, not just in these verses, but in the ninth of the ten plagues that struck Egypt at the time of the Exodus, which was a plague of darkness (Exod. 10:21).

**“the moon into blood.”** The moon does not literally become “blood,” but becomes blood-colored. This is well described in Revelation 6:12, which uses the word “like” to describe the appearance of the moon: “and the full moon became like blood.” The verb *metastrephō* (#3344 μεταστρέφω), translated “turned” governs both the nouns sun and moon, so that we understand the moon is “turned” into blood, i.e., turned into blood from the point of view of someone looking at it from earth, i.e., it becomes blood-colored. In a lunar eclipse, the moon can take on a dark red appearance, but this verse is not referring to a lunar eclipse, but to a full moon, which is usually brilliant white. Instead, at this time in the Tribulation, the full moon is blood red. Although Acts 2:20 simply says “moon,” the book of Revelation specifically says, “whole moon,” which we refer to as a “full moon.”

Act 2:21

**“whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”** The phrase “call upon the name of the Lord” generally refers to prayer, and was used both in the Old Testament and New Testament (see commentary on 1 Cor. 1:2). The person who “calls on the name of the Lord” is one who obviously believes in God and prays to Him for help, support, etc. Peter is quoting Joel, so “the Lord” in this context is God.

After the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, and the Day of Pentecost, a person believes and confesses Christ as Lord to be born again (Rom. 10:9). That would be generally included in calling on the name of the Lord here in Acts because calling on the name of the Lord means the petitioner is asking for God’s help, which they could only reasonably expect if they were willing to do things God’s way. Note that right after quoting this verse from Joel, Peter then tells the crowd about Jesus Christ and how he had been raised from the dead and seated at God’s right hand and given the throne of David.

Act 2:26

**“rest.”** From the Greek *kataskēnoō* (#2681 κατασκηνόω), literally meaning “to pitch one’s tent,” that is to dwell, settle, or live. However, the translation “live” (NIV84) could give the misleading impression that David was “alive” while resting in death. Rather, the sense is that after David had died, his flesh would “tent,” that is, dwell, settle down, or better, “rest” (cf. HCSB, KJV, NIV2011, YLT), in the hope of resurrection.

The point of the passage is not that David was “living” but exactly the opposite, as Acts 2:29 and 2:34 make clear: “he both died and was buried… [and] did not ascend into the heavens.” BDAG points out how early Christian gravestones used this word as a euphemism for “resting.”

Act 2:27

**“soul.”** The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; and attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here *psuchē* is used of the person himself. Thus, the HCSB and NIV use the word “me” instead of “my soul.” This is one of the many verses that prove the soul is not immortal, although to understand that point clearly, we must understand what “the grave” is in the last part of the verse.

[For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

**“the grave.”** The Greek word we translate “grave” is *Hadēs* (#86 ᾅδης). In the New Testament, the Greek word *Hadēs* is used as the equivalent of the Hebrew word *Sheōl*, which was the state of being dead. When the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek around 250 BC, the Hebrew word *Sheōl* was translated by the Greek word *Hadēs*. *Sheōl* is not the physical grave itself, but the state of being dead (the actual physical grave was referred to as the *qeber*; #06913 קֶבֶר). Some theologians refer to *Sheōl* as “gravedom” (the reign of the grave; or the reign of death). It is not a place, but a state of being—the state of being dead. In the Hebrew Old Testament, dead people are said to be in *Sheōl* (cf. Gen. 37:35; 42:38; 1 Kings 2:6; Job 7:9; Ps. 6:5; 16:10; Prov. 7:27; etc.).

It was actually a bad choice to translate *Sheōl* as *Hadēs*, because in *Sheōl* people are dead, whereas, in Greek mythology, *Hadēs* was a place where the souls of dead people are alive. So when the Greeks translated *Sheōl* as *Hadēs*, it introduced great confusion about the state of the dead into Judaism and then into Christianity, and that confusion still exists today. It would have been much better if the Greeks had simply transliterated *Sheōl* into Greek and brought it into the Greek language as a loanword. The Bible, properly translated, makes it clear that dead people are dead until the Rapture or a resurrection.

This verse shows how mistranslation can skew theology. If this verse were being read by a first-century Greek who did not know that *Hadēs* was the Greek translation of *Sheōl*, he would be led to think that people, including Jesus, had gone to the *Hadēs* of Greek mythology, ruled by the god *Hadēs*, which is not even close to what the text is saying. However, something similar has happened today, because many Christians think that *Hadēs* is another name for the place in Christian mythology called “Hell,” which is ruled by the Devil and his demons, and is where evil people go and are alive in torment when their earthly body dies. But Jesus certainly did not go to a place where there are dead people being tormented by demons. He died and was dead. We need to be clear on this point: the New Testament *Hadēs* is the same as the Old Testament *Sheōl*, and it was not a “place” at all, but a state—the state of being dead. That is why the prophecy was that God would not abandon people to *Sheōl* (*Hadēs*). If God did not raise people up from being dead, they would stay dead forever. The soul does not live on after the body dies. When the body dies, the soul is dead; gone.

[For more on *Sheōl* as *Hadēs* being words that refer to someone being dead, not alive, see commentary on Rev. 20:13. For more on the dead being dead and not alive in any form, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

**“Devout One.”** The Greek word is *hosios* (#3741 ὅσιος), not *hagios* (#40 ἅγιος), which is the usual word for “holy” (and occurs over 230 times in the New Testament). *Hosios* occurs 8 times in the New Testament and means “devout, pure, dedicated, holy. When used of people, it is used of those who observe their duty to God and fulfill their obligations to Him. *Hosios* has a range of meanings and can also refer to things that are generally used in worship to God and are “pure” (“pure hands” 1 Tim. 2:8). *Hosios* also sometimes refers to the outward standard of that which constitutes holiness, and in those cases, because English does not have a good equivalent for *hosios*, “holy” may be the best translation even though an English reader cannot tell it from *hagios.*[[24]](#footnote-27017)*Hosios* is also used to refer to the inner nature of God and Christ, which is pure and devout.

[For more on *hosios* and how it differs from *hagios*, “holy,” see commentary on Titus 1:8.]

Act 2:28

**“life.”** Here the word “life” refers to “life in the Age to Come.” See commentary on Luke 10:28.

Act 2:33

**“the promised holy spirit.”** The holy spirit was called “the promised holy spirit” because God had promised to send His gift of holy spirit in the Old Testament. The Old Testament prophets had foretold that a new spirit was coming in the future, one that was different from the spirit God gave in Old Testament times. It was foretold to come as part of the Messianic Kingdom and the New Covenant that God would make with Israel (Isa. 32:15-18; 44:3-5; Ezek. 11:17-21; 36:26-27; Joel 2:28-29). The Old Testament prophets said the spirit would be “poured out” (i.e., given in fullness) into all the believers (Ezek. 39:29; Joel 2:28-29), which came to pass (Acts 2:33; 10:45; Titus 3:6). Jesus knew that it would come before his kingdom, perhaps to help believers to endure the Great Tribulation (John 15:26-16:16).

Although the Christian Church was a sacred secret, hidden in God and not foretold in the Old Testament, in His wonderful grace, God has given the Christian Church the gift of holy spirit that He promised to give in the Millennial Kingdom. That is why in Acts and the Church Epistles this new holy spirit is sometimes referred to as “the promised holy spirit (Eph. 1:13; cf. Acts 2:33; Rom. 8:23).

The Greek text places “holy spirit” as the object of the preposition “of,” saying, “the holy spirit of promise.” This is a common construction, particularly in the Semitic languages but used in Greek also. Grammatically, nouns have more force than adjectives, so saying, “the holy spirit of promise” places more emphasis on “promise” than does the phrase, “the promised holy spirit.” However, due to the Trinitarian teaching that “the Holy Spirit” is a person and not the gift of God (a belief promulgated and supported in most versions by the translation “the Holy Spirit”), the phrase “the holy spirit of promise” tends to be unclear, while “the promised holy spirit” is much clearer. For more on the promised holy spirit, see commentaries on John 7:39 and Ephesians 1:13.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

**“he has poured out this.”** Acts 2:33 says that God gave the gift of holy spirit to Jesus Christ, who then gave it to the Church. As the Bible reveals, the gift of holy spirit is given by God to Jesus Christ, to be administered or given to others (Luke 24:49; John 15:26; Acts 2:33; Titus 3:6). John the Baptist also said it would be Jesus that would baptize in holy spirit (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16).

When God raised Christ from the dead, He sat him at His own right hand and gave him “all authority” (Matt. 28:18). Thus, God made Jesus Christ the agent who carried out the work of God. It was common in biblical times that kings would work through a “right-hand man” who would know what the king wanted and get it done. We see this in the record of Pharaoh and Joseph (Gen. 41:44), and Ahasuerus and Haman (Esther 3:1, 10; 8:2). Jesus knew that he would be God’s right-hand man and get things done for Him, so at the Last Supper, he told his disciples that he would send the holy spirit that came from God. Jesus spoke of the “helper” (the holy spirit) coming, “that I will send to you from the Father” (John 15:26) Later that night he again spoke of the holy spirit and said, “I will send it to you” (John 16:7). Titus 3:6 says the same thing, and speaks of the holy spirit “which he [God] poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ.” That is exactly the truth that is being relayed here in Acts 2:33. That the gift of holy spirit was given by God to Jesus Christ, who then poured it out on the Church.

The fact that the gift of holy spirit ultimately originated from God explains why some verses speak of God giving the gift of holy spirit (cf. Acts 2:17; 5:32; 1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Cor. 5:5; 1 Thess. 4:8). But the fact that God gave Jesus Christ the authority to give the gift of holy spirit to people explains why some verses say that Jesus gives the spirit (John 15:26; 16:7; Acts 2:33; Titus 3:6).

Along with the gift of holy spirit come the giftings that people have in the Church, which is why Ephesians 4:8 and 4:11 say that Jesus gave “gifts” [ministries] to people in the Church. Here again, we see God as the Author and Christ as the agent, which is why some verses speak of God placing people in the Body as it pleases Him (cf. 1 Cor. 12:18), while other verses say that the Lord Jesus distributes ministries to people (1 Cor. 12:5; Eph. 4:8, 11). Once we realize that God is the Author and Christ is the agent who is doing the work of God, many verses that would otherwise be confusing make very good sense.

[For more about baptism, and that it can be by immersion or by pouring water onto the head of the person, see commentary on Mark 1:4.]

Act 2:38

**“in the name of Jesus Christ.”** This phrase means, in essence, “by the authority of Jesus Christ.” It is a cultural phrase that refers to the authority a person has due to his relationship with the one being named, who in this case is Jesus Christ. In Christian culture, “the name of Jesus Christ” gave the user authority, just as using the name of any other ruler or great person would give the one who used it authority. Peter does not have to say here what Romans 10:9-10 says about confessing Christ as the risen Lord because he had just described that and more in his teaching to the people gathered there in the Temple (cf. Acts 2:22-35).

[For more on the use of the name of Jesus Christ, see commentary on Acts 3:6.]

**“the gift of the holy spirit.”** When God gives His nature to people so they can be empowered with spirit power, that nature, called “the holy spirit,” is a gift to the person who receives it. The Bible specifically calls it “the gift of holy spirit” (Acts 2:38; 10:45). God is not a gift to people, so when the Bible speaks of “the gift of holy spirit,” it is not speaking of God or of a third “Person” in the Trinity. God had put His gift of holy spirit upon many people throughout the Old Testament, and here in Acts 2:38, Peter says that anyone who believes will receive the gift of holy spirit.

[For God putting His gift on people to empower them, see commentary on Luke 4:18. For more on the gift of holy spirit see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” For more on the different uses of “spirit” in the Bible, see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Act 2:39

**“As many as the Lord our God will call.”** Many theologians assert that this verse means a person cannot be saved unless God first calls him, at which point the person can then decide to call upon God and be saved. That is not what this verse is saying. Peter did not know the Christian doctrine set forth by Augustine, Calvin, and others, that a person could not exercise his free will and be saved unless God first gave him saving grace. Peter was a Jew who had been taught from the Old Testament that God chose and called the nation of Israel, but not the Gentile nations, and Peter thought of “calling” in this context in terms of groups of people, not individuals. Peter did recognize that an individual Gentile could be saved even if God did not call the Gentiles as nations. He certainly would have recognized that Ruth the Moabite, for example, was saved. Furthermore, he was aware that there were many proselytes to Judaism from the Gentile nations. In this address in the Temple, Peter says, “the promise [of the holy spirit] is to you [Jews] and your children,” because he was aware that the holy spirit had been promised to Israel. Furthermore, when he said the promise of holy spirit was to “you,” the word is plural, meaning “you as a group.” The promise was not given to “each of you individually,” even though each person would have to receive the spirit by their own faith.

In spite of the fact Peter was addressing a group of Jews, and knew the holy spirit had been promised to Jews, he also knew that Joel had said the spirit would be poured out on “all people” (Joel 2:28). Thus, likely by revelation he added, “and to all who are far off.” He himself was not thinking of the Gentiles at that time, because years later he argued with the Lord about entering the house of a Gentile (Acts 10:14). Nevertheless, he was inspired to say in his message that God can call whatever peoples or nations He wanted, and that they too could be baptized and receive holy spirit. This would occur individual by individual for the nations, just as it had for Israel.

Act 2:41

**“were baptized.”** It seems that all these converts to Christianity were immersed in water because that was what John the Baptist and Jesus had done to many people, and water baptism continued to be done in early Christianity and then became a tradition in the Church even though it was baptism in holy spirit that accompanied salvation (1 Cor. 12:13). It would have been possible for all 3,000 people to be baptized in water that Pentecost day because Jerusalem had many dozens of mikvahs (ritual immersion pools), but it is also possible that they were baptized in water in the same way that they had just been baptized in holy spirit—by it being poured out onto them, onto their head and body (Acts 2:33).

[For more about baptism, and that it can be by immersion or by pouring water onto the head of the person, see commentary on Mark 1:4.]

**“souls.”** The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; and attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here *psuchē* is used of the person himself. Thus, many versions, including the HCSB, NAB, and NET, say “people” instead of “souls.”

[For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Act 2:42

**“they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching.”** The translation “continued steadfastly in” could also be translated as “devoted themselves to.” The Jews who believed were coming out of a deeply rooted system of error and misunderstanding and had to relearn many things about the Messiah, the Old Testament prophecies, and the Law; including what was godly and what was just “human religion.” This was not something that could be done overnight (the apostles had spent many months with Jesus in person and yet were still learning), nor was it easy or comfortable. Here in Acts 2:42, we see the focus and tenacity it takes to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

**“fellowship.”** The Greek word is *koinōnia* (#2842 κοινωνία, pronounced koy-no-'nee-ä). Like many words, it has a range of meanings and uses, so it is important to pay attention to the context to determine which meaning it has in that particular context. *Koinōnia* refers to a close association involving mutual interests and sharing; a close relationship characterized by involvement and sharing. From that basic definition it came to refer to the love or goodwill that comes with a close relationship, and thus was used of “generosity” or “participation,” and it also came to refer to the result of close association, which is sharing, giving, and was even used of “a gift” or “a contribution” (2 Cor. 9:13).

Thayer offers one definition of *koinōnia* as: “joint participation,” and another as “intimacy.”[[25]](#footnote-13372) The Internet encyclopedia Wikipedia says, “The essential meaning of the [word] *koinōnia* embraces concepts conveyed in the English terms community, communion, joint participation, sharing, and intimacy.”[[26]](#footnote-26916) We, as well as other Christians who have studied the subject, have come up with a useful definition to describe fellowship among Christians: “intimate joint participation.” The beauty of having a definitive definition of *koinōnia* is that it allows us to tell if we are actually having true Christian fellowship or not. To help us understand “intimate” in a social context, someone once defined “intimacy” as “in-to-me-see,” which is accurate and clear. It is amazing the extent to which we can be with others and never let them see into us. Many people can talk for hours without ever letting the listener “see” into them. That may be wise to do “on the street,” but it is certainly not how fellowship, *koinōnia*, is supposed to work among Christians.

For example, a person may go to a large church and sit in the auditorium and listen to the pastor or teacher. That person may well be learning valuable things, but that is not “fellowship” because it is not intimate (no sharing of hearts), and it is not “joint participation,” it is one-way communication. Listening to a lecture on the television is not “fellowship,” and sitting and listening to one in an auditorium is not either. One-way communication is not fellowship. Listening to teachings is important for building the like-mindedness necessary to have fellowship, but it is not itself “fellowship.” Similarly, a person who goes to a church but just chats and “makes small talk” may be engaging in “joint participation” but that is not true “fellowship” either because there is no “full sharing,” no “intimate joint participation” in which people open their hearts to each other.

We all know when we have genuine fellowship with others, that is, true, “intimate joint participation.” We let people into our hearts and lives, and are with people who open their hearts and lives to us, and that happens among people who are in close association and when we are with people we trust.

The New Testament has several of the different uses of *koinōnia*. Here in Acts 2:42, *koinōnia* refers to all the aspects of “fellowship”: there was the intimate joint participation among the believers, the love and goodwill that comes with that relationship, and also sharing, giving, gifts, and contributions among the community of believers. In 2 Corinthians 6:14, “…what fellowship does light have with darkness,” *koinōnia* primarily refers to the intimate joint participation that is unavailable in that unbalanced relationship. In Romans 15:26 we see *koinōnia* used to mean a gift or contribution, which is also its meaning in Hebrews 13:16. In 1 Corinthians 10:16, *koinōnia* is used to refer to participation, as it does in Philippians 1:5.

The basis of true *koinōnia* among Christians is our love of God and our commitment to Him. Beyond that, it is important that we agree on certain basics of the Faith. If we do not, there is often enough discord to produce a lack of trust and no true intimate joint participation.

The Epistle of 1 John lays out the relationship between teaching and “fellowship.” 1 John 1:3 says, “What we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you also may have fellowship with us.” Note that John does not think that telling people what he had seen and heard was “fellowship,” but rather John taught what he had seen and heard “so that” there could be “fellowship.” The teaching produced the like-mindedness that was necessary for intimate joint participation to occur.

**“prayer.”** The Greek word for “prayer,” *proseuchē* (#4335 προσευχή ), is in the plural, but it is a collective singular, like the English word “deer” or “fish,” which can be one or more than one. In this case, the disciples devoted themselves to the practice of prayer, which would include all kinds of prayer.

Act 2:43

**“every soul.”** This means every person. See commentary on Acts 2:41.

Act 2:46

**“from house to house.”** The emphasis is that each house was involved. Some versions read that they broke their bread “at home,” but this misses the point. It is not that each one ate at home, but rather that every home was involved, and they shared with each other.

**“in the Temple.”** These early Christians were all Jews, so they continued worshiping in the Temple.

**“sincerity.”** The Greek is *aphelotēs* (#858 ἀφελότης), and means “simplicity.” The root word comes from a description of land that was without rock, hence smooth. Thus the idea is simplicity, or humility of heart. Sincerity captures this feeling more than simplicity, which could be read in a negative sense.

Act 2:47

**“and having favor with all the people.”** The first followers of Jesus were all Jews at this point, and they commended themselves to both God and man. They were joyful, full of praise, often in the Temple, sharing and helping each other and others out, so no wonder they had the favor (lit. grace) of “all the people” in the city.

**Acts Chapter 3**

Act 3:1

**“at the hour of prayer, the ninth *hour*.”** The ninth hour corresponds roughly to our hour from 3 to 4 p.m. The Jews counted 12 hours in the day, with the first starting at what is roughly equivalent to our 6 a.m. As early as the time of David (c. 950 BC) the Bible alludes to there being three daily hours of prayer among the Jews: “Evening and morning and at noon I will utter my complaint….” (Ps. 55:17 ESV). By the time of Daniel (c. 500 BC), the three times for prayer each day seems to be quite well established because Daniel prayed upon his knees three times each day (Dan. 6:10).

However, ancient sources disagree as to exactly when the three hours of prayer were observed. According to the Talmud, the Jewish people prayed three times each day: morning, afternoon, and evening. John Lightfoot says that the prayers coincide with the morning and evening sacrifice and that prayers were also made between those times, “from the sixth hour and a half,”[[27]](#footnote-14447) which would be close to noon, around 12:30 p.m. Yet he also points out that the Jerusalem Talmud says the practice was “The recital of the Shema in bed is the foundation; that is, after the stars have begun to appear.”[[28]](#footnote-18053) After the stars had begun to appear is certainly later than the evening sacrifice, however. F.F. Bruce writes, “a service of public prayer accompanied these two sacrifices [the morning and evening] and there was a further service at sunset.”[[29]](#footnote-10598) Acts 3:1 confirms that the ninth hour, about 3 p.m., was indeed an hour of prayer.

Adam Clarke refers to rabbis who teach that people should pray when the sun rises, when it reaches the meridian [i.e., noon], and when the sun has set, “passed just under the horizon.[[30]](#footnote-31336) Lange writes: “…in the later age of the apostles, custom had firmly established the three hours of prayer, namely, the third hour of the day, in the morning…the sixth, at noon; and the ninth, in the evening. The first and third coincided with the hours in which the morning and the evening sacrifices were, respectively, offered.”[[31]](#footnote-24773) In conclusion, it seems clear that the ancient sources testify to there being three hours of prayer, one of them coinciding with the morning sacrifice and one coinciding with the evening sacrifice. The sources disagree as to whether the third hour is close to noon, or after the evening sacrifice close to when the stars appear in the evening.

In Acts 10:3 the angel appeared to Cornelius at the hour of the evening sacrifice (the ninth hour). In Acts 10:9 Peter went up to the roof of the house in which he was staying and prayed at the sixth hour, about noon, and some commentators have used that to support the idea of an hour of prayer being around noon, but the Bible never says Peter prayed at a recognized hour of prayer, he may have just been moved to pray about that time.

Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 a.m.

[For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48.]

Act 3:6

**“I have no silver and gold.”** The Greek literally reads, “silver and gold do not exist/are not present for me.” The Greek word translated “have” is *huparchō* (#5225 ὑπάρχω), which means, “to exist,” or “have at one’s disposal.”[[32]](#footnote-26499) The use of this verb does not mean Peter is denying money even exists to him, rather, he is saying he does not have any. There is no money present at his disposal. Thus the translation, “I have no silver and gold.”

**“in the name of Jesus Christ.”** This phrase means, in essence, “by the authority of Jesus Christ.” It is a cultural phrase that refers to the authority a person has due to his relationship with the one being named, who in this case is Jesus Christ.

Because of the patron-client society of the biblical cultures, including the Greek and Roman cultures, “who you knew” was extremely important in day-to-day life. Personally knowing a socially powerful and well-connected person had all kinds of advantages. For example, if a person was in need or in trouble, he could use the name of his powerful friend to gain favor and influence. It was actually that very custom that led rulers such as Solomon to acquire hundreds of wives and concubines (Solomon himself had 700 wives and 300 concubines; 1 Kings 11:3). Families would encourage the marriage of a daughter to a ruler because they knew that they would then have a valuable social connection, and even have the potential of having the next ruler or powerful person in the kingdom come from the family.

In Roman society, the patron-client relationship was very important and often somewhat formalized. The patron supported the client with influence and often money as well, and the client looked out for his patron’s interests and watched for ways to spread his influence, acted as “eyes and ears” for him, and might accompany him from place to place as a vocal supporter and bodyguard.

Legal trouble was one kind of trouble that knowing a powerful person could help with. In our modern times, we like to think that “the rule of law” provides protection to the innocent, and the courts are only interested in who is “right” according to the law of the land. In biblical times, judgment was much more arbitrary, and often the judges did what was expedient for themselves without much attention to the guilt or innocence of the parties involved. This shows up throughout the Bible, which is why the Bible is so explicit about bribery. Paul spent two years in a Roman prison in Caesarea because the governor wanted a bribe (Acts 24:26). Also, in the “Parable of the Persistent Widow,” the judge “neither feared God nor cared about men” (Luke 18:1-8 NIV), and the widow had to beg for justice over and over. The judge finally judged the case, but for his own good, not hers. So it was that in biblical law courts, whether Eastern (Israel, Syria, Egypt, etc.) or Western (Greece, Rome), having the influence of a powerful person in the courtroom could win the case.

In Christian culture, “the name of Jesus Christ” gave the user authority, just as using the name of any other ruler or great person would give the one who used it authority. It is important to realize that “the name of Jesus Christ” is not a “formula,” that is, it is not like a “magic formula” that has to be said at the right time in the right order with the right emphasis or it won’t work. There is no magic behind the words, “the name of Jesus Christ.” The name represents authority only because the one being named, Jesus Christ, exists and has authority, and also the one using the name has an actual relationship with the one whose name he is using. This is very clear from the culture. If a person tried to get out of trouble by using a name he invented, he would not have any authority. The person has to exist and genuinely be a powerful person. Similarly, if someone used the name of a powerful person, but had no relationship with the person, the “name” would not work, in fact, he would be in serious trouble for using it. We see that exact scenario in Acts 19:13-16 when some exorcists who were not Christian tried to use the name of Jesus Christ to gain authority over demons because they knew about Paul using it, and the demon hurt them badly.

The proof that “the name of Jesus Christ” is not some kind of formula is in the Bible itself. As we saw above, using the name of Jesus without a relationship with Jesus does not work, and can even be harmful. In contrast, if a person has a relationship with Jesus Christ, then although “the name of Jesus Christ” can be used, sometimes it is not necessary to speak the name out loud. The simple fact that the person has a relationship with Jesus is enough. Thus, in Acts, sometimes we see the name of Jesus Christ being used, and sometimes not. Peter said to the lame man, “In the name of Jesus Christ, stand up and walk,” and he did (Acts 3:6). But in Acts 9:40, Peter raised the dead by just saying, “Tabitha, get up.” Similarly, in Acts 16:18, when Paul was delivering a woman from a demon, he said, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her,” and the demon came out, but Paul healed a lame man in Lystra by just saying, “Stand upright on your feet” (Acts 14:10).

The idea of authority is also present when Christians baptize people “in the name of Jesus Christ.” For example, if a minister says, “I baptize you in the name of Jesus Christ,” he means that it is in his authority as a minister of Christ that he can baptize. When Peter told the people to be baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 2:38), he meant that the people would be baptized by those people using the authority of Jesus Christ. Jesus had authorized his disciples to baptize people (John 4:1-2), and his disciples still had his authority to baptize people.

Act 3:13

**“Servant Jesus.”** Jesus was the great servant of God, as the prophets had declared. The greatest of these declarations are the “Servant Songs” of Isaiah. Isaiah presents the Messiah as the “servant” of God and foretells much of what he will do. The servant songs in Isaiah do not have definitive “stop” verses, so scholars differ as to when they end but our studies lead us to conclude that the four songs are: Isaiah 42:1-7; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12. The most famous Servant Song is Isaiah 52:13-53:12, and it describes the torture, death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Isaiah 52:13 begins, “Behold, my servant,” and tells how Jesus will bear our sins and sicknesses.

A verse that ties the role of the Servant foretold in Old Testament prophecy with Jesus Christ in his ministry is when he quoted Isaiah 42:1 concerning himself: “Look! My servant whom I have chosen…I will put my spirit on him” (Matt. 12:18). It is clear that when the disciples prayed to God and referred to Jesus as “your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed” (Acts 4:27), they were making a reference to the prophecy in Isaiah 42:1. This is confirmed by the fact that in the very next verse, the prayer continues that the rulers gathered against Jesus: “to do whatever your hand and your counsel decided beforehand would happen.” Of course, people knew what God had planned beforehand for the Messiah because it is clearly laid out in the Servant Songs, especially Isaiah 52:13-53:12.

Both Hebrew and Greek have several different words that can mean “servant.” Here in Acts 3:13, the word is translated as “Servant” in most versions, but “Son” in the KJV, is *pais* (#3816 παῖς), and it has a range of meanings that include an infant; a boy or girl child (depending on the gender of the noun); a servant; a slave; or an attendant or minister, such as a king or lord might have. The exact meaning was determined by the context. In this case, the clear reference in Acts to the Servant Songs of Isaiah shows us that “servant” is the proper translation of *pais* in Acts.

Here in Acts 3:13, the context of *pais* is the suffering and subsequent glorification of Jesus, clearly a subject of the Servant Songs, and not something the Jews would readily identify with the “Son.” R. C. H. Lenski writes: “*Pais* is never used in the sense of “Son of God;” that thought is always expressed by *huios theou*.”[[33]](#footnote-31774) Simon Kistemaker writes: “God has glorified Jesus, whom Peter deliberately calls “servant” to remind his listeners of Isaiah’s prophecy concerning the suffering and glory of the Lord’s servant (Isa. 52:13-53:12). They should know that Jesus fulfilled this messianic prophecy (cf. Matt. 12:18).”[[34]](#footnote-25286)

Actually, the fact that Peter deliberately called Jesus the “servant” is even clearer than Kistemaker says, because Peter had everyone’s attention due to the fact that he had just healed a man who was over 40 years old. The prophecy in Isaiah included the suffering of Jesus, but it also specifically said that we are healed through his wounds—and here was living proof the prophecy was correct! We should also note that the majority of the modern translations read “servant.”

More evidence that the apostles called Jesus the “servant” of God here in Acts 3:13 is that they also called him God’s “servant” in Acts 4:27. Acts 4:27 is in a prayer that the disciples prayed (Acts 4:24-30). In that prayer, they called King David the “servant” (*pais*, #3816 παῖς) of God (Acts 4:25), and then in the same prayer, using the same word *pais*, they called Jesus the servant of God (Acts 4:27). Jesus Christ was not God, he was the servant of God, just as David was.

[For more on Jesus not being God or a God-man, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

Act 3:15

**“the one who leads the way into life.”** The Greek word translated by the phrase the “one who leads the way into life” here in Acts 3:15 is *archēgos* (#747 ἀρχηγός), and it has several meanings, including, one with the preeminent position and thus “leader, ruler, prince,” or one who begins something and thus is the first in a series, thus, “pioneer, founder,” or one who begins or originates something. According to Friberg, it means “strictly [speaking], *one who goes first on the path*; hence *leader, prince, pioneer*.” The *EDNT* says that in Acts 3:15 the proper rendering is the “one who leads the way into life,” and several Bibles follow that general idea. For example, The New Testament by William Barclay reads, “you killed the man who blazed the way that leads to life,” and other versions that read in a similar way include the New English Bible, Today’s English Version, and God’s New Covenant by H. Cassirer. Some other versions use “pioneer,” similar to the use of *archēgos* in Hebrews 2:10 (cf. Moffatt’s Bible; The Kingdom of God Version).

The translation, “the one who leads the way into life” is not common, but it is accurate, and in this context makes Peter’s statement very hard-hitting. The religious leaders “killed” the very one who leads the way to life, showing their opposition to life and to God, but God rescued the situation by raising Jesus from the dead, so he still leads the way to life.

The translation “Prince of Life” is used by many Bibles, but “The meaning ‘Prince’ does not fit the context and is usually quite inadequate.”[[35]](#footnote-21759) We would add that “author” does not fit with the context nor the scope of Scripture (see commentary on Heb. 5:9, “source”). The emphasis of this text does not so much seem to be on “who” Jesus is (“Prince” or “author” or “source”) as to what he did and does. The religious leaders “killed,” “the one who leads the way into life.” Jesus led people to life while he was alive, but the greater truth is that by his death and resurrection he “leads” people to life.

Part of the powerful beauty of Peter’s statement lies in the fact that although many people are afraid of death, godly people do not have to be. Jesus is the one who leads people to life; he blazed the trail for us, and we can follow that trail. We can be sure that if we die, just as God raised Jesus to everlasting life in a new and powerful body, He can and will do the same for us. Jesus led the way to everlasting life and we can confidently follow him.

**“from among the dead.”**[[36]](#footnote-19681) See commentary on Romans 4:24.

Act 3:19

**“wiped clean.”** For more information on the translation “wiped clean” see commentary on Colossians 2:14.

Act 3:21

**“Heaven must receive him until.”** Jesus Christ ascended into heaven and will be there until it is time for him to return to earth and conquer it and set up his worldwide kingdom. Jesus comes down and fights the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19:11-15), and never goes back to heaven. Instead, he sets up a kingdom on earth that replaces all the kingdoms (nations) on earth and fills the whole earth. That is when “the meek will inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5 KJV).

**“the time of the restoration of all things​.”** The literal Greek can seem awkward in English because it uses a dual genitive construction, “the times of the restoration of all things,” and it uses “times” for a period of time when we would simply say “time” to mean the same thing. The time all things are restored that Peter is speaking about is Christ’s future Millennial Kingdom on earth. At that time the heavens and the earth will be restored to an Edenic state. Jesus called this the “New Beginning” (see commentary on Matt. 19:28).

[For more on Jesus’ kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**“from ancient times.”** The Greek reads *apo aiōn* , more literally, “from the ages,” but it means “throughout the ages” or more understandably, “from ancient times.” The rendering in some versions, “from the beginning,” is not clear, especially in light of the Old Testament. The restoration of all things, which will occur when Christ comes back and conquers the earth and begins the Messianic Age (Millennial Kingdom), was implied but not clearly laid out in Scripture until after the time of Moses, which is why the Sadducees did not even believe in a resurrection, much less a restoration of Eden. In fact, in Acts 3:24, Peter clarifies that it is from the time of Samuel that the prophets have clearly spoken of these things.

[For the comparison of the Millennial Kingdom and Eden, see commentary on Luke 23:43.]

Act 3:23

**“soul.”** Here, “soul” means “person; individual.” See commentary on Acts 2:41.

Act 3:24

**“Samuel.”** Although the resurrection and the Millennial Kingdom were implied in the books of Moses and Joshua, it was not clearly taught in those Scriptures. It was certainly known about, because Job, a contemporary of Abraham, knew about it (Job 19:25-27). Furthermore, Hebrews 11 tells us that people living before the time of Samuel and David knew about it, people such as Abraham, Joseph, and Moses. Nevertheless, it was during the time of Samuel and David when the restoration of the earth was more clearly taught (cf. Ps. 37:9-11, 22, 29, 34), and then as time progressed the prophecies became clearer and clearer. For example, Ezekiel 37 clearly teaches about the resurrection of the dead and their return to the land of Israel (Ezek. 37:11-14).

Act 3:26

**“Servant.”** See commentary on Acts 3:13.

**Acts Chapter 4**

Act 4:1

**“the priests.”** In this context, “the priests” would be the regular priests whose turn it was to serve in the Temple. Although we can surmise that this group of priests were the priests who served their priestly course of duty in the Temple shortly after Pentecost each year, exactly which course of priests would have been serving at the time of this incident cannot be determined. Because these were the regular priests who had charge of the Temple and its services regularly at this time, they are the first in the list. However, they had less authority than the commander of the Temple and the Sadducees.

**“commander of the Temple.”** The Greek word translated as “commander” is *stratēgos* (#4755 στρατηγός), in the singular form, and the “commander of the Temple” was the top commander of the Temple police. In the Jewish writings, he is called, “the man of the Temple Mount.” The Temple police were a large number of hand-picked Levites who kept order at the Temple. They had the power to arrest people, which is what they were sent to do to Jesus but were unable to do (John 7:30, 32, 45).

At night the Temple police were placed in 24 stations around the Temple and its compound. Twenty-one of the stations were occupied by Levites, while three were occupied by both Levites and priests. There were ten men at each station except for the three innermost to the Sanctuary, which had ten Levites and ten priests. Thus, there were 240 Levites and 30 priests on guard in the Temple every night.

[For more on the Temple police, see commentary on Luke 22:4.]

**“the Sadducees.”** These would have been high-ranking Sadducees, likely members of the family of the High Priest and/or members of the Sanhedrin. The High Priest was a Sadducee, and so Sadducees had a lot of authority and influence at this time, especially in matters related to the Temple (cf. Acts 5:17). There may have been some Pharisees among the regular priests, but the Sadducees specifically rejected the resurrection (Matt. 22:23), so they were upset for multiple reasons. Note that the next day, the members of the High Priest’s family were at the trial (Acts 4:6).

**“came up to them.”** The Greek verb translated as “came up to” is *ephistēmi* (#2186 ἐφίστημι) and it often refers to coming suddenly. In this case, the religious leaders moved quickly to stop the spread of the Gospel. They came while Peter was still speaking, so Acts 3 and 4 are closely connected.

Act 4:2

**“upset because they were teaching...the resurrection.”** There were many combined reasons for the Sadducees and priests

**“from among the dead.”**[[37]](#footnote-22658) For the reason for the wording, “from among the dead,” see the REV commentary on Romans 4:24.

Act 4:7

**“in the midst.”** The Greek word is *mesos* (#3319 μέσος) and means midst or middle. Acts is historically accurate in this description, for the Sanhedrin met in a semicircle on a raised semicircular platform so that all the members could see one another, while the accused stood on a lower level, but clearly “in the midst” of them.

**“By what power or in what name.”** Annas, Caiaphas, and the rest of the Sanhedrin knew that a miracle had been done. While it was proper according to the law to use the name of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Solomon, or some other well-accepted names to appropriate the power or authority of God, it was against Jewish law to use magic. The point of their “investigation” was to discover if the apostles had done the miracle by magic and thus broken any laws, at which point they could imprison them or even perhaps kill them. However, no specific regulation apparently existed concerning the name of Jesus, and the miracle was a great one and widely known among all the people of Jerusalem (Acts 4:16), so they felt that all they could do was threaten them not to use “this name” any more (Acts 4:18). We Christians need to realize that there is great power in using the name of Jesus Christ when we walk by revelation and faith.

Act 4:8

**“holy spirit.”** This holy spirit was the gift of God that He gave to believers at Pentecost.

[For more information on there not being a need to have the definite article after a preposition to make a noun definite, see commentary on Rom. 5:5. For more information on the holy spirit and uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” and also see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

**“the People.”** The nation of Israel was called “the People,” so it is appropriate to capitalize it when it refers to Israel.

Act 4:10

**“in the name of Jesus Christ.”** This phrase means, in essence, “by the authority of Jesus Christ.” It is a cultural phrase that refers to the authority a person has due to his relationship with the one being named, who in this case is Jesus Christ. In Christian culture, “the name of Jesus Christ” gave the user authority, just as using the name of any other ruler or great person would give the one who used it authority.

[For more on the name of Jesus Christ, see commentary on Acts 3:6.]

**“from among the dead.”**[[38]](#footnote-31417) See commentary on Romans 4:24.

Act 4:11

**“rejected.”** From *exoutheneō* (#1848 ἐξουθενέω), See commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:20.

“**the cornerstone.** The Greek text reads, “the head of the corner.” That is, the stone with the most important place (see “cornerstone” in commentary on Matt. 21:42).

Act 4:13

**“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John.”** It seems the testimony and the boldness of Peter and John (no doubt along with the testimony of others and some of the miracles and healings) did have an effect on the people listening, because not too many years after this a large number of the priests believed (Acts 6:7).

**“uneducated.”** Greek is *agrammatos*, (#62 ἀγράμματος), “illiterate, without learning: (i.e. unversed in the learning of the Jewish schools).”[[39]](#footnote-16463) This does not refer to having no education. It means that the apostles had not gone to the schools for “higher education,” i.e., in Rabbinic training.

**“ordinary.”** The Greek word *idiōtēs* (#2399 ἰδιώτης,), a word “very common in Greek writings from Herodotus down; properly, a private person, opposed to a magistrate, ruler, king.”[[40]](#footnote-18198) They held no public office, were not of a noble class, etc. They were regular people. They did not do a miracle because of any special rank or privilege.

Act 4:17

**“the People.”** The nation of Israel was called “the People,” so it is appropriate to capitalize it when it refers to Israel.

Act 4:24

**“Master.”** The Greek is *despotēs* (#1203 δεσπότης) and means master or lord, and it refers to someone who has legal control and authority over others, such as subjects or slaves (cf. 1 Tim. 6:1; Titus 2:9). It is used both as a title for God (Luke 2:29; Acts 4:24), and a title for Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 2:1; Jude 4). See commentary on Luke 2:29.

Act 4:25

**“through holy spirit.”** This is God (cf. Acts 4:24) energizing David through His gift of holy spirit. In the Old Testament, when God wanted people to speak for Him, He put His spirit (His gift) upon them and gave them revelation via that gift of holy spirit. David had the spirit of God upon him (1 Sam. 16:13), and God energized David through that spirit (cf. commentaries on Matt. 22:43; Mark 12:36 and Acts 1:16).

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

**“peoples.”** This is a plural reference that includes the people of Israel. See commentary on Matthew 2:4.

Act 4:27

**“servant.”** See commentary on Acts 3:13.

Act 4:30

**“Servant.”** See commentary on Acts 3:13.

Act 4:31

**“filled with the holy spirit.”** The Greek texts differ on the article “the,” and some do not have it, but the textual evidence strongly supports that the “the” was in the original text and must have been somehow dropped in the copying process. This holy spirit was the gift of God that Jesus Christ poured out on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:33).

[For more information on the holy spirit and uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” and also see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Act 4:32

**“And the multitude.”** This verse begins a new topic, which includes the death of Ananias and Sapphira, and actually, this verse should have been 5:1. The Ananias and Sapphira record would generally be better understood if people saw that what it involves begins in Acts 4:32 with the Christians being of one heart and one mind, and sharing their possessions. See commentary on Acts 5:5.

**“soul.”** The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the person himself. All of the believers had the same attitude and feelings about their material possessions.

[For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

**“had all things in common.”** It has been said that this was the first example of communism. It is truly much more noble than that because it was for a much higher purpose than political stability, a political system, or a humane society that was egalitarian. The sharing was not to produce “equality” of what was owned, but to make sure that everyone in the Christian community had what they needed so they could focus on God and the things of God, especially evangelism. This communal sharing was not to redistribute wealth so everyone could have a good time in life. Acts 4:34 indicates that those who owned lands or houses sold them. *The Expositor’s Greek Testament* notes, “The language shows that we are not meant to infer that the men sold all that they had.”[[41]](#footnote-11950) In other words, people did not give away everything and then share and share alike. They gave their plurality to those who needed things to survive. A.T. Robertson notes that this giving occurred over a period of time and was based on need.[[42]](#footnote-23922) As the need arose, something would be sold to fill that need by way of the apostles’ distribution.

**Acts Chapter 5**

Act 5:1

**“But a certain man named Ananias.”** The actions of Ananias and Sapphira are much more ungodly when contrasted with the actions of Barnabas (Acts 4:36-37). The lessons would have been clearer if the chapter break was not placed where it was and Acts 4:32-37 had been marked as the start of Acts 5 instead of breaking the Barnabas record away from the Ananias and Sapphira record.

Act 5:3

**“How is it.”** The Greek is the idiomatic phrase, *dia ti*, which can often mean “why?” However, in this case, Peter is not asking “Ananias, ‘why’ has Satan filled your heart?” That would be asking what motivated Satan to fill your heart, and the answer would be: “For the same reason Satan does everything he does: to steal, kill, and destroy” (John 10:10). This question is deeper. Peter likely did not realize Ananias would drop dead; and the question is: “How is it that the Adversary has filled your heart?” In other words, what did you think about, wish for, want, and covet, that gave Satan such a foothold in your life? The question, quickly made rhetorical by Ananias’ death, should not be rhetorical to us. We are responsible for guarding our minds and lives against the work of the Adversary.

**“the Adversary.”** The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated as “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost.

[For more information, see commentary on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

**“the Holy Spirit.”** Here in Acts 5:3, Peter says Ananias lied to “the Holy Spirit,” which in this context can be seen to be another name for God the Father, because in the next verse, Acts 5:4, Peter says Ananias lied to “God.” “The Holy Spirit” is the name for God that emphasizes His power in operation and special holiness. God is called “the Holy Spirit” in a number of verses in the NT, including Matthew 1:20; 12:32; and Hebrews 9:8.

Calling God “the Holy Spirit” in one sentence and then “God” in the next is a good example of the common Semitic parallelism of equivalent terms. This way of Semitic speaking in which something is mentioned twice but by slightly different terms can be found throughout the Bible. For example, when Naomi returned from Moab to Bethlehem, having lost her husband and both her sons, she said to the people, “Why do you call me Naomi, since Yahweh has testified against me and *El* Shaddai has afflicted me?” (Ruth 1:21). Naomi was not naming two Gods, “Yahweh” and “Shaddai,” but one God with two names (cf. Job 15:25). Joel 1:15 mentions “the Day of Yahweh; destruction from *El* Shaddai,” which refer to the same event. Job 22:26 uses *Shaddai* and *Eloah*, two different names for God. Deuteronomy 32:3 speaks of “proclaiming the name of Yahweh;” “ascribing greatness to *Elohim*.” Psalm 46:7 says that “Yahweh of Armies” is with us; the “God of Jacob” is our refuge. Deuteronomy 32:15 says that Israel “forsook God, who made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation.” Psalm 78:41 says that Israel tested “God” (*Elohim*), and hurt “the Holy One of Israel.” All these verses call God by different names in the same verse or context, and many more examples could be cited, but the point is that it was common in Semitic language to draw attention to something by calling it by different names. That is what Peter did to Ananias: he said Ananias had lied to the Holy Spirit and lied to God.

The fact that Peter used both “the Holy Spirit” and “God” when speaking to Ananias is actually evidence against the Trinity. If there were a Trinity, Ananias could not have lied to one “Person” of the Trinity, “the Holy Spirit,” without also lying to the other two “Persons” in the Trinity, the Father and Jesus. So if there were a Trinity, we would have expected Peter to say to Ananias that he lied to “the Trinity” or “to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” The fact that Ananias lied to “the Holy Spirit” and “God” is evidence that Peter did not know anything about the Trinity, but was familiar with the fact that one of the names of God is “the Holy Spirit.”

[For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Act 5:4

**“*unsold*.”** Cf. Robertson[[43]](#footnote-28161) and ESV, NAB, NASB, NIV, NRSV. Although there is no Greek word for *unsold*, this is clearly the meaning. The literal reading is, “remaining for you did it not remain?” The NASB, like the REV, puts “unsold” in italics, “While it remained *unsold*, did it not remain your own?”

**“contrived.”** The Greek word is *tithēmi* (#5087 τίθημι), and means, “to set, put, or place; to make or to make (or set) for one’s self or for one’s use; to set, fix, establish.” Although many versions have “conceived,” Lenski points out that this is not broad enough, and it is more than conceive, it is to think through the entire process.[[44]](#footnote-25029) The argument could be made that the translation could be “put,” or “placed,” with the idea that the plan was not started in the heart but “placed” there as it developed, but it makes more sense that the idea was both conceived and planned in the evil hearts of Ananias and Sapphira.

Act 5:5

**“fell down and breathed out *his last breath*.”** When Ananias heard Peter’s rebuke, he fell down dead. Why? To get the fullness of this, it helps if we read the whole record. The context of the Ananias and Sapphira record begins in Acts 4:32 with the Christians being of one heart and one mind, and sharing their possessions. In fact, a good argument could be made that the whole Ananias record would be better understood if Acts 5:1 were placed where Acts 4:32 is now.

Many people assume God killed Ananias because of his sin, but the Bible never says that. The Bible is full of sinners who God does not kill, so why would He kill Ananias and Sapphira? After all, basically all they did was lie. They sold a piece of land for an amount of money, then told the apostles they had sold it for less than they actually sold it for, and they did that so they could keep part of the money. But the money was theirs to keep if they wanted; they were under no obligation to give any of their money to the apostles. Their sin was to lie about the amount they gave. Frankly, this sin probably happens almost every Sunday in our churches: people say they tithe (give ten percent) when actually they give less than the tithe. Yet we do not see Christians dying in churches every weekend.

The Bible never says God killed Ananias and Sapphira, so how did they die? Although it is possible that they both died of heart attacks from the shock of being publicly discovered and reproved, that is not likely. What almost certainly happened is that Satan killed them. That would be consistent with the scope of Scripture. The Bible says that Satan holds the power of death (Heb. 2:14). Furthermore, it says Satan controls this fallen world (1 John 5:19), and that he has authority over the world (Luke 4:6).

It is precisely because Satan controls the world that it is such a dangerous, heartless place. If God controlled the world, it would be a wonderful place. The world reflects the nature of the one who controls it. Before the Fall of Adam and Eve, the world was a wonderful and safe place because God was in control. After the Fall, when Satan became “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4) and the “ruler of the authority of the air” (Eph. 2:2), the world became a difficult place to live. For example, animals became dangerous and plants developed thorns. After Jesus Christ conquers the world in the Battle of Armageddon and controls it, and Satan is no longer in control, the world will return to being a wonderful and safe place (Isa. 11:1-9; see commentary on Matt. 5:5, the meek will inherit the earth).

The Bible shows that when demons get into the mind or body of a person, there are times when they exert a lot of power over that person. They can cause physical diseases such as epilepsy (Matt. 17:15), muteness (Matt. 9:33), or deformities (Luke 13:11). They can occupy the mind and feed it information (Acts 16:16; this is how psychics and false prophets operate). They can also produce wild behavior and insanity (Mark 5:1-15). What happened to Judas is in some ways close to what happened to Ananias. When Satan entered into the heart of Judas, he betrayed Jesus and later killed himself (Luke 22:3, 4; John 13:2).

The Bible does not tell us every detail about the Devil and his demons, but it tells us enough that we can surmise what happened to Ananias and Sapphira. Just as a demon can cause disease and cripple the body, a demon can shut down organs and produce death. There is evidence in the Old Testament that there is a demon of death. The Hebrew word “death” in Isaiah 28:15, 18, and in Jeremiah 9:21, is *maveth* (#04194 מָוֶת), and it is personified as if it were a living being, a demon. The Holman Christian Standard Bible handles the personification very well by having “Death” with a capital “D.” Furthermore, Proverbs 16:14 mentions angels [messengers] of death, and Revelation 6:8 mentions a demon named “Death.” These verses, in combination with the New Testament statement that the Devil holds the power of death, are good evidence that there is a demon of death. Still further evidence for a demon of death is that lots of ancient mythologies had a “god” of death, and in Ugaritic mythology, there is a “god” of death that had a similar name to *maveth*. In studying Isaiah and Jeremiah, we see they are an example of the word “death” referring to the natural event, death, and also the demon that often causes it.

In reading Acts 5 in light of the scope of Scripture about the Devil and demons, we can see that Satan killed Ananias and Sapphira, and his reason for killing them, and his timing, could not have been better to fulfill his purposes. The Church had been growing consistently since the Day of Pentecost, when about three thousand people got saved (Acts 2:41). A couple thousand more were added by Acts 4:4. Satan was no doubt very upset about the spread of the Gospel, and looked for a way to stop it. That opportunity presented itself when Ananias and Sapphira, who had allowed Satan into their hearts and had plotted together to lie about their gift to the Church, went in to see Peter.

What Peter spoke by revelation when he spoke to Ananias is a very important key to knowing what happened to Ananias and Sapphira. First, we must remember that the only way Peter knew Ananias lied and kept part of the money for himself was by direct revelation from God. He had no other way to know Ananias was lying. Second, we need to notice that Peter said, “Why has Satan filled your heart...?” Like Judas, Ananias was demonized, “possessed,” by a demon, and Satan took advantage of the opportunity and killed Ananias. Why would Satan do that? The results speak for themselves.

If newspapers existed at the time of Christ, we can imagine the headline in the Jerusalem Gazette the next morning: “Cult leader kills faithful followers after they donate their life savings!” Remember, everyone thought Ananias and Sapphira gave all the money they had from the sale of their land; no one knew they were hiding part of the profit. Furthermore, medical forensics was not very developed in those days. All people knew was that Ananias, and later Sapphira, went to see Peter and other Church leaders to give them a lot of money, and then turned up dead later that day.

**“great fear came on all.”** The result of the death of Ananias and Sapphira was immediate and profound. The Word of God had been spreading rapidly since the Day of Pentecost, but now, “great fear came on the whole church and on all those who heard these things” (Acts 5:11), and “no one dared join himself to them” (Acts 5:13). The word “fear” in the Greek can mean either “fear” or “respect, awe,” and here it likely means both. Faithful Christians who believed what the apostles said, that Ananias had lied about his gift to the Church and had “just dropped dead” were filled with awe, while borderline Christians and unbelievers were filled with genuine fear, which is why no one else dared to join the Christians. Thus the spread of the Gospel in Jerusalem was stopped—at least for a while.

The paragraph structure in most versions of Acts, and the paragraph headings that many versions have to help the reader understand the Bible, are misplaced in Acts 5, and actually make the Bible harder to understand. Most Bibles start a new paragraph with Acts 5:12, and in doing so break away Acts 5:12-13 from the record of Ananias and Sapphira. But verses 12 and 13 are not a new subject; they are the conclusion of the Ananias and Sapphira record. Bibles that have paragraph headings make the division in the record even worse. For example, the NIV has a break before verse 12, with a paragraph heading that reads, “The Apostles Heal Many.” The ESV, NET, NKJV, and most other English versions make their paragraph break in the same place, and also add a paragraph heading that makes a clear split between verses 11 and 12.

The result of the paragraph break and the paragraph title is that almost no one connects Acts 5:12-13 with the death of Ananias and Sapphira. Almost no one connects their death with the fact that the Church stopped growing for a time. However, there is no reason to separate Acts 5:12-13 from the Ananias and Sapphira story except for the tradition that breaks the paragraph in that place. Nothing in the Greek text dictates a split between Acts 5:11 and 5:12, and the context dictates that the new paragraph should start with Acts 5:14, not verse 12.

If we put the break in this section after Acts 5:13, the effect that the death of Ananias and Sapphira had on the spread of the Gospel becomes much clearer. Also, we can more clearly see how the apostles continued to showcase the power of the Gospel in spite of the setback. Here’s the progression: in Acts 5:10, Sapphira died. In Acts 5:11, great “fear” came upon the people—both Christian and non-Christian. In Acts 5:12, the apostles countered the Adversary’s attack by gathering the Church together in the Temple and doing signs and wonders. In Acts 5:13 we learn the unbelievers were still fearful and would not join the Christians, but they saw the miracles and held them in high regard. The Bible does not say how long there was a pause in the growth of the Church, but by Acts 5:14 we see that the people’s fear subsided and the church was expanding again.

With the death of Ananias and Sapphira and the temporary pause in the growth of the Church, the peaceful “honeymoon period” that the Church had enjoyed since it began on the Day of Pentecost was over. The Church was in a spiritual and physical war. Soon after Satan killed Ananias and Sapphira to stop the move of the Word, the High Priest, the one who had had Jesus executed, put the apostles in prison (Acts 5:17-42). Although the apostles were released from prison, they were publicly whipped, a harsh action that would have caused more timid Jews not to join the Church. By Acts 6, there was a division in the Church over the distribution of goods that came to the Church. In Acts 7-8, Stephen, one of the leaders of the Church, was stoned to death. In Acts 9 there was a “great persecution” against the Church. And the controversies and persecution of Christians have never stopped since that early time.

Act 5:6

**“and buried him.”** This seems abrupt to us, but it reflects the Eastern custom that people were buried the same day they died (see commentary on Luke 9:60). Of course, people would have searched for Sapphira, but if she could not be found, family and friends would have gone ahead with the burial.

Act 5:9

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Act 5:10

**“breathed out *her last breath*.”** See commentary on Acts 5:5, “fell down and breathed out *his last breath*.”

Act 5:14

**“Now more believers were being added to the Lord.”** At first blush, Acts 5:14 seems to contradict Acts 5:13, which says that people were not joining the apostles. The key to fitting the two verses together is to realize that there is a time break between the two verses, and besides that, it seems that Acts 5:13 is very local to Jerusalem, while Acts 5:14, because of its use of “multitudes,” is referring to the growth of the whole church, not just the local Jerusalem church (note Acts 5:16).

Act 5:20

**“to the people.”** This seems to be a reference to everyone in the Temple, rather than using “people” as a title for the Jewish people.

**“in the Temple.”** The Temple was the natural place to tell the message about Christ because the people there believed in God and many of them would have been waiting for the Messiah.

**“the whole message.”** The full message. The apostles were not to reduce the message to what was acceptable and what might keep them out of trouble. They were to speak “all the words,” that is, the whole message.

**“of this *new* life.”** The context of the angel’s message is clear. The apostles were telling about the new and everlasting life a person could have through Jesus Christ when they were arrested, and now the angel tells them to proclaim the full message “of this *new* life,” that is, of the life they had been talking about that got them into trouble in the first place.

[For more on the word “life” sometimes being used for “life in the Age to Come” or “everlasting life,” see commentary on Luke 10:28.]

Act 5:21

**“But when the high priest arrived.”** The trial was to be in the Temple, just as the daybreak trial of Jesus Christ had been in the Temple (Luke 22:66-71).

**“they called together the Sanhedrin and the whole body of elders.”** This would have likely taken several hours. During that time the apostles were also in the Temple teaching the people, but the Temple complex was very large, some 37 acres, and it had many courtyards, rooms, and porticos, so the High Priest and his cronies did not know the apostles were there.

**“sent to the prison house to have them brought.”** The location of the prison is not known, but Jerusalem was about a square mile, so it would not have taken an inordinate amount of time to send to the prison and then have news brought back that the apostles were not there. This would have likely taken an hour or less.

Act 5:22

**“*Temple* police.”** For more on the Temple police, see commentary on Luke 22:4.

Act 5:24

**“commander.”** The Greek word is *stratēgos* (#4755 στρατηγός), in the singular form, and it refers to the top commander of the Temple police. See commentary on Luke 22:4.

Act 5:25

**“Then someone came and told them.”** By this time, the “them” includes the whole Sanhedrin and the elders of the Jews (Acts 5:21). This helped the apostles because the whole group got to hear their testimony and make sure that what was done was fair and upright.

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Act 5:26

**“*Temple* commander.”** The Greek word is *stratēgos* (#4755 στρατηγός), in the singular form, and it refers to the top commander of the Temple police (see commentary on Luke 22:4).

**“*Temple* police.”** The Temple police were special priests that were chosen and trained to police the Temple (see commentary on Luke 22:4).

Act 5:27

**“they made them stand before the Sanhedrin.”** The Sanhedrin met in a room attached to the Temple called “the Hall of Hewn Stones.” Historical sources say that the room had semicircular rows for seating upon which the members of the Sanhedrin sat, while people such as the apostles stood before them where everyone could see them. When Gamaliel spoke, he asked that the apostles be taken “outside,” that is, outside the room where they could not hear what was being said (Acts 5:34).

Act 5:28

**“strictly command you.”** The Greek represents the phrase “strictly command you” by the figure of speech polyptoton: “command you with a command.”[[45]](#footnote-25041)

[See figure of speech “polyptoton.”]

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching.”** This may be partially an exaggeration, but there indeed would have been many people in Jerusalem who believed Jesus was the Christ. The High Priest did not mean his statement to be a compliment, but it certainly was. Christians are supposed to be evangelizing, and these Christians were doing exactly that.

**“and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.”** The apostles did not “intend” to charge the religious leaders with having Christ crucified, as if it was an invented scenario. It was a historical fact that the religious leaders wanted Jesus crucified and threatened Pilate in order to get that done (John 19:6, 12).

Here we see the curtain pulled back on evil so we can see what it is really like. The Jews did push to get Jesus crucified when Pilate wanted to let him go. The Jews were guilty of what they were being charged with. But not only did they not admit and own that fact, they tried to blame the apostles for speaking the truth about what they did, as if speaking the truth was the real problem. Evildoers don’t admit to doing evil and blameshift the evil to others.

Act 5:29

**“We must obey God rather than man.”** Peter and the apostles learned this from Jesus, who obeyed God’s laws rather than man’s laws. For example, Jesus healed on the Sabbath (Luke 13:10-17), and did other things as well (cf. John 5:8-11). However, there are also places in the Old Testament where it is clear that obeying human law in defiance of God’s laws brings evil consequences. For example, in 2 Kings 17:6-8, the people of Israel suffered terrible consequences for disobeying God even though they were obeying their kings.

Act 5:30

**“The God of our fathers raised Jesus.”** A vital part of the Christian message is that God raised Jesus from the dead, and if Christians want to get unbelievers saved, we have to preach the resurrection.

**“tree.”** The Greek word is *xulon* (#3586 ξύλον pronounced 'zoo-lon) and it means a tree, log, a piece of timber (1 Cor. 3:12), a piece of wood (Rev. 18:12), or something made from wood such as a beam, a cross, a club (Mark 14:48), or even the stocks that Paul’s feet were placed in (Acts 16:24). Since Jesus carried his cross for a distance, then it was given to Simon of Cyrene, the translation “tree” is not exactly correct, since Jesus did not carry a tree. This has caused some translators to use the word “cross” (DBY, NASB; NIV). However, *xulon* can mean “tree,” and Peter was making a point to the religious leaders that they had taken the Messiah and hanged him on a “tree” as if he were accursed of God, since the Law said that anyone who was hanged on a tree was accursed (Deut. 21:23). Thus we can assume that Peter used “tree” (which can also refer to the cross) deliberately, to heighten the sense of evil committed by the religious leaders. The shape of the cross Jesus was crucified on was most likely the common cross shape we are familiar with.

[For more on what we know about the shape of the wood on which Jesus was crucified, see commentary on John 19:17, “cross.”]

Act 5:31

**“He is the one.”** This is emphatic in the Greek; the sentence starts with “This one.” It is less wordy to say, “God exalted him,” but it loses the emphasis of the Greek text.

**“God exalted to his right hand.”** This was what the prophets had taught (e.g., Ps. 110:1, cf. Mark 12:36) and it was what Jesus said would happen (Matt. 26:64; Mark 14:62), and it was a consistent message of the Church (e.g., Acts 2:33; 5:31; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 1 Pet. 3:22) and it was the revelation that God showed Stephen just before he died (Acts 7:55-56).

Act 5:32

**“the holy spirit that God has given.”** Refers to the gift of holy spirit poured out on the Day of Pentecost.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Act 5:34

**“a Pharisee named Gamaliel.”** Gamaliel was the grandson of the great Jewish teacher, Hillel the Elder. He was a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews. Although here in Acts 5 he urges the Jews to use restraint when dealing with the apostles, there is no evidence he ever became a Christian or believed that Jesus Christ was the Messiah.

**“People.”** The Jews were referred to as “the People.” See commentary on Matthew 2:4.

Act 5:35

**“consider carefully.”** Cf. NIV, NRSV. Literally, the phrase is “pay close attention to yourselves,” “take care to yourselves,” but the meaning is “consider carefully” what you are going to do.

Act 5:40

**“they flogged them.”** This flogging was likely the traditional 39 lashes taken from Deut. 25:3—the Jews traditionally subtracted one lash from the 40 lashes in the Law in case the person doing the whipping miscounted. However, the Jews sometimes used a whip with 13 cords and whipped the person three times, equaling 39 lashes. By the time of Christ, this kind of public whipping was more a public humiliation than a severe punishment, and in the honor-shame society of the first century, the punishment and the shame it caused were designed to deter rebellion against authority. Craig Keener writes: “For fully free men, however, official beatings were an act of public humiliation, even seen as making one comparable to a slave (Josephus, *Antiquities* 4:238).”[[46]](#footnote-20249) That the beatings were designed to produce shame explains the apostle’s reaction, that they rejoiced they “were counted worthy to suffer dishonor” for Jesus (Acts 5:41).

The apostles’ reaction to the public beating is a wonderful example to Christians today, who are often so afraid of being humiliated, shunned, or gossiped about that they will not speak about Jesus Christ. The apostles understood what was at stake if people did not know about, or rejected, Jesus Christ—they would die in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15). So they boldly proclaimed Jesus Christ as Lord, and had the correct attitude when they suffered for it. They did not become angry or bitter, but rejoiced. They remembered Christ’s words: “Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil things against you because of me. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, because your reward in heaven is great” (Matt. 5:11-12).

Act 5:41

**“for the sake of the Name.”** In the Jewish writings and in the Old Testament (cf. Lev. 24:11, 16), “the Name” was a circumlocution for the name of God, Yahweh, but in the New Testament, “the Name” refers to Jesus Christ.

**Acts Chapter 6**

Act 6:3

**“brothers.”** Sometimes the word “brothers” includes women, and should be understood as “brothers and sisters,” but that is unlikely the case here. In the Jewish culture and even as the Christian Church developed, voting for leaders was only done by men. In both the Greek and Roman world, and in early Christianity, women were usually excluded from voting.

Act 6:5

**“and of holy spirit.”** This refers to God’s gift of holy spirit**.**

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Act 6:7

**“And the word of God increased.”** The primary meaning of this phrase is that the Word of God continued to spread as more and more people got saved. However, it also almost certainly includes the increase, or growth, of the Word of God in the believers as they kept on growing spiritually.

**“of the priests.”** The majority of the priests in Jerusalem were Sadducees, and the Sadducees traditionally believed that there was no resurrection from the dead (see commentary on Matthew 22:23). For them to go from believing that there was no resurrection to believing in the resurrection of Christ and then, of course, to believing they would be themselves resurrected, was a huge shift. The Word of God makes no statement about the impact that converting a large number of the priests to the Faith had on the Temple services there in Jerusalem, or even whether or not some of them quit working in the Temple or were forced to leave.

Act 6:12

**“and brought him to the Sanhedrin.”** The Sanhedrin in Jerusalem met in the Hall of Hewn Stones in the Temple complex and judged various kinds of cases involving Jewish law and customs. The meetings were apparently open to the public to some extent, although the evidence is that the Sanhedrin held some closed meetings as well. People accused of crimes were brought to the Sanhedrin, as we see here in Acts 6. There were no attorneys; the accusers spoke up for themselves and brought their witnesses if they had any, and the accused spoke up for themselves, like Stephen did, and brought witnesses to support their defense. The commotion around Stephen was great enough that even if Saul had not been with the Sanhedrin in the Temple when Stephen was brought in, he would have come quickly to the trial. A blasphemy trial was a serious affair, and the Jews and Christians had clashed before (Acts 4:1-22; 5:27-43), so the trial of Stephen would have had great interest to many people. The Bible does not specifically say that Saul was there at the trial and heard Stephen’s speech. However, the fact that the witnesses who accused Stephen laid their clothes at Saul's feet when Stephen was dragged out of Jerusalem and stoned to death suggests that Saul was closely involved in the situation. It is highly unlikely that Saul only joined the mob as they were going out of Jerusalem to where they could stone Stephen, and much more likely that he was in the Temple with the Sanhedrin when Stephen was on trial, and so heard Stephen’s speech. The reason that the garments of the “witnesses” were laid down at Saul’s feet (Acts 7:58) was that according to the Law of Moses, if there was an execution due to a capital crime, the witnesses were to be the first ones to throw stones to execute the criminal (Deut. 17:2-7).

Act 6:13

**“Place”** is capitalized (and in Acts 6:14) because it is a designation of the Temple. The word “place” was a designation of the Temple. See commentary on Matthew 24:15, “*topos.*”

Act 6:14

**“this Place.”** The word “Place” is capitalized because it is a designation of the Temple. The Greek text of Acts 6:14 says, “Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this Place,” meaning the Temple. Jesus did indeed say that the “Place,” the Temple, would be destroyed (Matt. 24:1-2).

[For more on the Temple being called the “Place,” see commentary on Matt. 24:15, “*topos.*”]

Act 6:15

**“the face of an angel.”** There are times when the passage of time and different cultural norms affect the way we think about the Bible. In the Western world in modern times, when we think about someone “being an angel” or “looking like an angel,” we think of soft, pleasant smiles, kind eyes, and an innocent-looking face. Thus, when we think of Stephen, about to die, having “the face of an angel,” we think of an innocent, pleasant face gazing up into heaven. This is not, however, what someone from the culture of the first century would think. Angels appear many times in the Bible and are never portrayed with pleasant, innocent faces. John Calvin, writing around 1550, pointed out that people who were condemned in court usually became pale, stammered, and showed signs of fear, but “Luke teacheth that there was no such thing in Stephen, but that there appeared rather in him a certain majesty.”[[47]](#footnote-12297)

When angels appear to man, they either blend into mankind so well they are unnoticed (Gen. 19; Lot and the angels), or they inspire awe and even fear in those who see them. Samson’s mother was told by an angel she would have a son, but she did not know she was speaking to an angel. She thought she was speaking to a man of God, but she reported the incident to her husband, saying, “A man of God hath come unto me, and his appearance *is* as the appearance of a messenger of God, very fearful…” (Judg. 13:6 Young’s Literal Translation). We would not say “fearful,” we would say, “causing fear.” The modern translations usually say something such as “awesome” or “awe-inspiring.” When the angel appeared to Cornelius, he became afraid even though he was a Roman centurion trained to look death in the face without fear (Acts 10:4). Psalm 103:20 refers to angels as “mighty ones,” and no doubt the expression of their face reflects their power. They are often portrayed as being God’s warriors, ready to fight for Him (Num. 22:31; 2 Sam. 24:16; 2 Kings 19:35; Ps. 35:5, Dan. 6:22). When they do appear to people, they often cause them to be afraid, and have to calm them down, usually by saying “Fear not” (Matt. 28:5; Luke 1:13, 30; 2:10).

From what we know of angels, Stephen’s face would have reflected the majesty that Calvin pointed out, and supernaturally radiated with power, determination, resolute confidence—an awe-inspiring sight.

**Acts Chapter 7**

Act 7:5

**“but he gave him no inheritance in it.”** Abraham lived in the Promised Land but did not own any of it except the cave he bought to bury his wife Sarah in. Acts 7:5 is an important verse when it comes to understanding inheritance and rewards on the future earth. Abraham lived in the Promised Land and enjoyed its bounty, but never “owned” any of it, he did not have an inheritance in it. This should be somewhat comforting for Christians who are afraid of losing their salvation. Christian salvation is by birth and is permanent, but many Christians believe they can lose their salvation if they sin, and those Christians often use verses such as Galatians 5:21 to prove their point: “those who practice such things [as the list in Gal. 5:19-21] will not inherit the Kingdom of God.” But not “inheriting” the Kingdom of God does not mean a saved person will not be saved and in the Kingdom any more than Abraham not inheriting any of the Promised Land meant he did not live there—he did live there! Furthermore, God specifically told the Levites that they would not have a portion or inheritance in the Promised Land (Deut. 10:9). But the Levites got to live in the land even though they did not own it like the other tribes of Israel owned their land. So the Levites lived in the land but did not “inherit it.” Similarly, everyone who has believed in Christ and gotten born again and sealed with holy spirit will be in the Kingdom, but if they have lived an ungodly life after they got saved they may end up with no inheritance in it.

Once a person believes in Jesus Christ and gets born again, their salvation is secure. Salvation is by grace. But Christ is going to come to earth and set up his kingdom on earth, and at that time all the saved people will receive repayment for what they have done on earth (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10). Some people will be greatly rewarded and some people will get nothing. One of the kinds of rewards that people will receive clearly seems to be land (cf. Act 7:5; Dan. 12:13; Mic. 4:4), while another reward will be positions of authority in the Kingdom.

[For more on Christian salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.” For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on salvation vs. rewards, and rewards in the Kingdom, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.” For more on inheritance in the Kingdom, see commentary on Gal. 5:21.]

Act 7:6

**“400 years.”** The time of the sojourning of the children of Israel from the time of the weaning-feast of Isaac (Gen. 21:8-13) until the Exodus from Egypt and giving of the Law was 400 years. Israel was not enslaved in Egypt for 400 years, as most people believe. See commentary on Exodus 12:40.

Act 7:11

**“causing.”** The Greek text just has *kai*, “and” but here it is translated as a causal conjunction, logically indicating the result of the famine (cf. NET, NIV).

Act 7:14

**“75.”** Stephen was disputing with Jews who were part of the diaspora, the Jews who had been dispersed over the Mediterranean world. They were from “Cyrene” in North Africa, “Alexandria” in Egypt (where the Septuagint was translated), “Cilicia,” a Roman province in what is southeast Turkey today, and “Asia,” which was the name of the Roman province on the far west end of what is Turkey today (Acts 6:9).

Because the Jews Stephen was speaking to were part of the diaspora, their “Bible” would have been the Septuagint, and so Stephen accommodated the beliefs of those diaspora Jews by quoting from the Septuagint and not the Hebrew text when he spoke. So, for example, the Septuagint says that 75 people of Jacob’s family went to Egypt, while the Hebrew text says 70 people went to Egypt.

But actually, there were more people who went into Egypt than either Acts 7:14 or Genesis 46:26-27 mention (see the REV commentary on Gen. 46:27). Stephen, who was a Jew speaking to Jews, would not mention the other people any more than Genesis would.

[For more on the Septuagint and the original text of the New Testament being in Greek, see commentary on Luke 3:4.]

**“souls.”** Here, “souls” means people; individuals. See commentary on Acts 2:41.

Act 7:16

**“they were carried.”** This refers to some of the “fathers” (Acts 7:15), not Jacob himself.

Act 7:20

**“beautiful before God.”** For the meaning of this phrase, see commentary on Exodus 2:2.

Act 7:30

**“an angel appeared to him.”** This angel is referred to as God in Exodus 3:4. It was common in the ancient world for representatives of God to be called “God.” This is the custom of the Author-Agent (see commentary on Gen. 16:7 and Matt. 8:5).

Act 7:38

**“words.”** The Greek word is *logion* (#3051 λόγιον, pronounced 'log-ee-on), and it is the diminutive of *logos*, “word” or “message.” Literally, it is “little words.” We can see why the Bible uses the word *logion* for communications from God, because the Greeks used *logion* for the divine utterances of the oracles, particularly the Oracle of Delphi. The reason for that was that the messages from the oracles were typically short. Thus in time, *logion* was used of the communications that came from the gods. The translation “oracle” is too obscure for our English translation, although it occurs in many English Bibles, because the English word “oracle” has many meanings that do not apply. The REV went with “words” because it accurately represents that it is the words coming from God, and whereas the “word” of God means His entire communication, “words” of God can refer to smaller pieces of His revelation. The word *logion* occurs four times in the New Testament: Acts 7:38; Romans 3:2; Hebrews 5:12; and 1 Peter 4:11.

Act 7:43

**“worship.”** See commentary on Matthew 2:2, “pay homage to him.”

Act 7:45

**“Joshua.”** Joshua brought the Israelites into the Promised Land. The King James Version makes this verse a little hard to understand because it says “Jesus” was the one who brought the Israelites into the Promised Land. This is a case of mistranslation. The name “Jesus” and the name “Joshua” are the same in Hebrew and Greek, even though they are different in English. On two occasions the translators of the KJV put “Jesus” when they should have put “Joshua,” and Acts 7:45 is one of them. This point is well established by William Barclay, a professor, and author at Trinity College in Glasgow. He writes:

To us the name Jesus is a holy and sacred name, and we would count it almost blasphemy to give it to any child or call any person by it. But in New Testament times it was one of the commonest of names. It is the Greek form by which three Hebrew Old Testament names are regularly represented—Joshua (*e.g*., Exod. 17:10); Jehoshua (*e.g*., Zech. 3:1); Jeshua (Neh. 7:7). There are indeed two occasions in the AV [the KJV] in which Joshua is very confusingly called “Jesus.” In Acts 7:45, we read that the fathers brought the tabernacle into the land of Palestine with Jesus. In Hebrews 4:8, it is said that if “Jesus” had been able to give the people rest, there would have been no need to speak of still another day. In both cases, “Jesus” is Joshua, a fact which is made clear in all the more modern translations. By the second century, the name “Jesus” was vanishing as an ordinary name. Amongst the Jews it vanished because it had become a hated name by which no Jew would call his son; and amongst the Christians it has vanished because it was too sacred for common use.[[48]](#footnote-32115)

One of the easiest and most accessible keys to correct biblical interpretation is the context. Examine the context of Acts 7:45, and it becomes exceedingly clear that the verse is not speaking of Jesus.

**“possession of the nations**.” The “possession of the nations,” until Israel took it back from them, was the Promised Land, which we know as Israel today, although modern Israel is not nearly as large today as the land promised to Abraham.

Act 7:51

**“resist the Holy Spirit.”** Here, Holy Spirit is referring to God. “The Holy Spirit” is the name for God that emphasizes His power in operation. God is called “the Holy Spirit” in a number of verses in the NT, including Matthew 1:20; 12:32; and Hebrews 9:8.

[For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Act 7:53

**“delivered by angels.”** The Greek word translated “delivered” is *diatagē* (#1296 διαταγή), and it refers to the fact that the Law was given to the Jews by angels who were under the direction of God.[[49]](#footnote-32602) Although the Old Testament is clear that some of the Law, such as the Ten Commandments themselves, was given by God, we also know that parts of the Law came through angel intermediaries (cf. Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2). There were times when angels brought the Word of God to people, and sometimes these angels representing God are referred to as “God” (see commentary on Gen. 16:7 and Matt. 8:5).

Act 7:55

**“full of holy spirit.”** This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

**“the glory of God...God.”** The “glory of God” (in the OT, “the glory of Yahweh”) is the brilliant light that surrounds God. Here in Acts 7:55-56, Stephen sees the brilliance around God and God Himself in His cloud of light, much like Ezekiel did (see commentary on Ezek. 1:4, 28; Luke 2:9). The fact that the text has both the “glory of God” and “God” emphasizes the fact that Stephen did see God, but He was surrounded by His glory. Many times in the Old Testament when one of God’s people was in trouble, as Stephen was, God showed up in His glory (e.g., Exod. 16:7-10; Num. 14:10; 16:19, 42). In this case in Acts 7:55-56, God only revealed Himself to Stephen, the others could not see what Stephen saw.

**“Jesus standing at the right hand of God.”** In his last minutes alive, Stephen saw God sitting on his throne with Jesus Christ standing beside Him. That God was seated while Jesus stood in His presence would have been according to custom (1 Kings 22:10). God sits on His throne (e.g., 2 Chron. 18:18; Isa. 6:1; Dan. 7:9-10; Rev. 4:2; 5:7). Acts 7:55-56, and other verses like it are a problem for Christians who have been taught that no one has ever seen God. The key to understanding what Stephen saw is realizing that God does occasionally come into concretion in a human form that we can see and understand. He does this so that He can better relate to, and fellowship with, His creation. God created humankind so He could intimately fellowship with us, so it is reasonable and scriptural that He occasionally becomes visible and takes on human form to be intimate with His creation. There are Old Testament verses in which Yahweh appears in the form of a man, and those appearances continue in the New Testament. In fact, Scripture records a number of people to whom God appeared: Adam and Eve (they heard His footsteps, Gen. 3:8), Abraham (Gen. 12:7; 15:1; 17:1; 18:1), Isaac (Gen. 26:3), Jacob (Gen. 28:13), Moses and the elders of Israel (Exod. 24:9-11), Moses (Num. 12:8); Samuel (1 Sam. 3:10), Solomon (two times: 1 Kings 3:5; 9:2; 11:9), Micaiah (1 Kings 22:19-22), Isaiah (Isa. 6:1-5), Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:26-28), Amos (Amos 7:7), Daniel (Dan. 7:9-14), Stephen (Acts 7:56) and the apostle John (Rev. 5:1-8). In contrast to many great men and women of God who saw God in a visible form, Jesus upbraided the unbelieving Jews by saying: “You have never heard his voice at any time nor seen his form” (John 5:37).

Much of the confusion about the subject of God appearing as a man comes from John 1:18, which says, “No one has ever seen God.” It is helpful to read the context to understand the verse. John 1:17-18 say: “For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, who is in a most intimate relationship with the Father, he has explained *him*.” In *Don’t Blame God!*, the language of that phrase is examined and explained:

Please note that truth, in its fullness, came not with Moses, but with Jesus Christ. It was he who for the first time in history made God truly understandable. It is not that the Old Testament believers knew nothing of God, but rather that their knowledge and understanding of Him were quite limited (“veiled”). Since truth came by Jesus Christ [“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus,”], we believe that the first part of John 1:18—“no man hath seen God at any time”—means that no man had “known” God [as He truly is] at any previous time. It is Jesus Christ who reveals, or makes known, God to man.

In many languages, “to see” is a common idiom for “to know.” In the Hebrew language, one of the definitions for “see” (Hebrew = *ra’ ah*) is “see, so as to learn, to know.” Similarly, the Greek word translated “see” in verse 18 (*horaō*) can be “to see with the eyes” or “to see with the mind, to perceive, know.” Even in English, one of the definitions for “see” is “to know or understand.” For example, when two people are discussing something, one might say to the other, “I see what you mean.”

The usage of “see” as it pertains to knowing is found in many places in the New Testament. Jesus said to Philip, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Here again the word “see” is used to indicate knowing. Anyone who *knew* Christ (not just those who “saw” him) would know the Father. In fact, Christ had made that plain two verses earlier when he said to Philip, “If you really knew me you would know my Father as well” (John 14:7).[[50]](#footnote-22990)

Further evidence that “see” means “know” in John 1:18 is that the phrase “no one has ever seen God” is contrasted with the phrase “has explained *him*.” So from the context and vocabulary in John 1:18, we can see that it is not talking about “seeing” God with one’s eyes; it is saying that the truth about God came by Jesus Christ. Before Jesus Christ came, no one really knew God as He truly is, a loving heavenly Father. We agree with the text note on John 1:18 in the NIV Study Bible (1984 edition), which says, “Since no human being can see God as He really is, those who saw God saw Him in a form He took on Himself temporarily for the occasion.”

The Bible also calls God “the invisible God.” This is true because God’s natural state is invisible to us. However, that does not prevent Him from occasionally becoming visible. Angels and demons are also naturally invisible, but they become visible at certain times. If angels and demons can become visible, then God certainly can too.

It is often stated that people could not have really seen God because a person will die if he sees God. This idea comes mainly from the conversation Moses had with God. Moses asked to see the glory of God, and God responded, “You cannot see my face, for no one can see me and live” (Exod. 33:20). It is clear from the context that the “face” of God was the “glory” of God because that is what Moses asked to see. We agree that human beings are not equipped to comprehend God in all His fullness, and exposure to everything that God is would be lethal. However, we know that God created us humans so that He could fellowship with us, and we assert that the human-like form that He sometimes assumes so we can relate to Him is not all of God’s fullness.

When the Bible says that people saw God, they saw “God.” They were not seeing Jesus Christ in some other form (although some Trinitarians teach that). There are records that clearly show both God and Jesus at the same time; one such record is in the Old Testament. In Daniel 7:9-14, “the Ancient of Days” is God, and “the Son of Man” is Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, here in Acts 7, Stephen saw Jesus Christ standing at the right hand of God (God would almost certainly have been sitting on His throne, as He is usually portrayed in Scripture). Also, Revelation 4-5 shows God sitting on a throne surrounded by elders and other spiritual creatures, and He is holding a scroll in His right hand. Then “a Lamb,” which the context shows is Jesus Christ, approaches God and takes the scroll from Him. Records like this show us that God can and does occasionally take on the form of a human being, and He does that so we can better identify with Him.

Once we understand that God can and does take on a human form so that we can relate to Him, we are able to understand the passages that show God in the form of a man. We can also better understand what “heaven”—the place where God and angels live and demons go to accuse us (Rev. 12:10)—may look like. We know that angels come into concretion like humans, and the Bible gives us a picture of “heaven” that contains a Tent of Meeting (“Tabernacle”), and also a throne on which God sits.

Our first glimpse of the heavenly throne is in Exodus 24:10; when the elders of Israel climbed part way up Mount Sinai, “They saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was like a paved work of lapis lazuli, like the skies for purity.” Here we see God in human form and He has feet and a “hand” (Exod. 24:11). The pavement of heaven is blue in color. We again see blue in Ezekiel 1:26, where it is the color of the throne of God. Also in Ezekiel, in the radiance around God, who is sitting on His throne, we see colors like those of a rainbow.

The blue pavement, with the great throne on it, must have looked like the “floor” of heaven to anyone who saw it in a vision. Jacob was one such person, who saw a great “staircase” going into heaven (not a “ladder” like a fireman’s ladder, even though some English Bibles say “ladder”), with angels walking up and down it, some going down to earth and some going back up to heaven (Gen. 28:12). At the top of the staircase stood Yahweh, the God of Israel, who spoke to Jacob. God would have been standing on some kind of floor at the top of the staircase, and although the Bible does not give the color in Genesis, it would make sense that, if it appeared in Jacob’s dream vision, it was blue.

In Revelation 4 we again see God on the throne, and again we see the colors of a rainbow around Him (Rev. 4:3). In fact, Revelation 5:13 refers to God as “him who sits on the throne” letting us know that it was a common understanding that God would take on human-like form and sit on His throne. Revelation also clearly shows us that there is a Temple in heaven (Rev. 11:19; 14:15, 17; 15:5-8; 16:1 and 16:17), and Hebrews 8:1-5 indicates that the Tent of Meeting (Tabernacle) and Temple on earth were made after the pattern of the Temple that already existed in heaven.

Having seen that God appears in human form, and also that the “picture” of heaven the Bible paints for us both in the Old and New Testament is consistent, we are in a position to understand more about what likely happened in Acts 7:55-56. Stephen was being stoned by the religious Jews, and God gave him a revelation vision of the situation in heaven. Stephen saw God, surrounded by glory, and Jesus standing at God’s right hand, ready to give advice and carry out orders the same as any oriental vizier would do. From that short vision, we get the idea that God, the Creator and One True God, was sitting on his throne, and Jesus Christ, to whom He had given “all authority,” was standing at His right hand. The text does not say, but one could imagine the “floor” looked blue, and the throne was surrounded by the colors of the rainbow, as we saw in Exodus, Ezekiel, and Revelation.

There is much information wrapped up in Stephen’s vision. From a fleshly perspective, it certainly looked like the Jews had the upper hand in the Stephen situation, but God shows that although sin and death are powerful now, God is the Power, and will have the last word. By his very presence in the vision, Jesus shows that the Devil’s “best punch,” which is death, has been overcome—he is alive, not dead. The vision was certainly an inspiration to Stephen, the first martyr of the Christian Church, and it should be an inspiration to us as well.

Also part of the vision was God’s love for His enemies, and His efforts to bring them to Himself. Although many in the audience seemed hardened beyond repentance, there was at least one man whose heart was stirred. No one in the audience could doubt that the vision was real to Stephen, and therefore possibly a genuine reality, and if that was the case, then Jesus was not a dead imposter but the living Messiah. So it was that sometime later, when Saul met Jesus face to face, he said, “Who are you, Lord?”

Another message of hope we should get from this record is that God will not always remain as distant as He now sometimes seems. The Bible tells of a time when “The tabernacle of God is with man, and he will live with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them, *and be* their God” (Rev. 21:3). The future will not be like today, when God is mostly invisible to us but rarely, oh so rarely, appears in a form we can relate to. In the future, God will dwell openly with us.

[For more information on God coming into concretion, see commentary on Gen. 18:1. For more information on Jesus being the fully human Son of God and not being “God the Son,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more information about the Holy Spirit, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

Act 7:56

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Act 7:58

**“stoned him.”** The standard method of killing a criminal was to stone them with stones (cf. Lev. 20:2; 24:23; Num. 15:35; Deut. 13:10; 21:21). Some people have asserted that the Jews just dropped one huge stone on the person, but there is no evidence for that in the Bible. Also, stoning with stones was how Achan and his family were killed (Josh. 7:25), and how the Jews killed Stephen (Acts 7:58-60).

[For more on stoning people to death, see commentary on Lev. 20:2.]

**“at the feet of a young man named Saul.”** The reason that the garments of the “witnesses” were laid down at Saul’s feet (Acts 7:58) was that according to the Law of Moses, if there was an execution due to a capital crime, the witnesses were to be the first ones to throw stones to execute the criminal (Deut. 17:2-7). The heavy outer robes worn by most men would have made it difficult to throw stones effectively, so they would have taken off those outer robes. The “witnesses” would have been the ones to hear Stephen speak, so it seems that they were Greek-speaking Jews (Acts 6:9-11). It is almost certain that Saul would have been with the Sanhedrin in the Temple when Stephen was on trial. If he was not there, he would have had to have somehow joined the mob of angry Jews just at the time they were leaving Jerusalem to stone Stephen, which is very unlikely (see commentary on Acts 6:12). Although the Bible does not say that what Stephen said affected Saul in any way, it may well have gotten him thinking about history and the Jewish Messiah.

That Saul is called a “young man” here in Acts does not give us too much help in determining his age. A person in Saul’s position as a leader among the Jews was considered a young man until at least age 30.

Act 7:59

**“he was calling on *the Lord* and saying, “Lord Jesus.”** To “call on” was a common prayer formula. Stephen was asking the Lord Jesus for help, as we all should. For more on the formula, “calling on,” see commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:2.

[For more information on prayer to Jesus, see Appendix 13: “Can We Pray to Jesus?”]

**“receive my spirit.”** The Greek word for “spirit” is *pneuma* (#4151 πνεῦμα). Here “spirit” refers to the natural life of the body. Stephen was being stoned to death, and made a last cry to the Lord Jesus to receive his “life.” Although the vocabulary is different, this is in essence what Jesus said on the cross when he said to God, “into your hands I commit my spirit” (Matt. 27:50; Luke 23:46). Jesus would “accept” or “receive” Stephen’s life in the sense that he would remember it and restore it at the resurrection. In that sense, Stephen’s life would be similar to the treasure we store up in heaven as we live for God (Matt. 6:20). There is no actual “treasure” in heaven being stored for us. Rather, saying that we store up treasures in heaven is a way of saying God remembers what we do and keeps an account, and we will be given treasure at the Judgment. Similarly, Stephen saying “receive my spirit” does not mean his “spirit” goes to the presence of Jesus and lives there. Rather, Stephen is asking Jesus to accept his life and remember it, and give Stephen life again in the resurrection. For more on “spirit” in this sense see the commentary on Luke 23:46.

Act 7:60

**“fell asleep.”** Falling asleep or being asleep was a common biblical euphemism and metaphor for death (cf. 1 Cor. 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20, 51; 1 Thess. 4:13-15; 2 Pet. 3:4). Note that the text says, “he” fell asleep. It is the person who dies, and he dies in every sense of the word; he is totally dead. The life in his body is gone, and his soul and spirit are both gone, they cease to exist.

[For more on the dead being dead and not alive in any form, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more on “soul” and that soul and spirit can cease to exist, see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Death is so horrible that we can understand why people use the euphemism and say “asleep” rather than “dead.” Although death is called “sleep,” the metaphor, like all metaphors, is imperfect. There are similarities, which is why “sleep” is used for death, but there are also big differences. We will examine the similarities first.

* Both death and sleep are overpowering forces. We cannot prevent our death, and we cannot help falling asleep when we are tired. Even if we try to force ourselves to stay awake, eventually sleep will overpower us.
* There is no awareness of time in either death or sleep. Time passes and we do not know it. Those who are dead and those who are asleep may have been so for a few minutes, a few hours, a few days, or many years, but they are not aware of the passing of time.
* No productive work can be done when we are dead or asleep. The Bible warns people not to be lazy and sleep instead of getting work done, and the dead do no work either.
* In both death and sleep, there is a continuity of the person. We know that when a person falls asleep, he is the same person when he wakes up. The process of sleep did not change him into someone else. Similarly, the person who dies and is resurrected is the same person, which is why after the resurrection we will be repaid for what we did in this life. We see this in Jesus Christ. He was the same person after his resurrection as he was when he was alive on earth, he just had a different body and more capabilities.
* Both death and sleep come to an end. Our death ends when we are resurrected, just as our sleep ends when we wake up.

Now that we have seen the similarities between sleep and death that are the reason death was called “sleep,” we must keep in mind that the metaphor is not totally accurate: death is not sleep. In sleep, the person’s bodily functions continue, and he will wake up on his own when his body is rested. In death, the body, soul, and spirit are all dead. The person cannot wake up on his own but must await the resurrection power of God.

Sometimes people use the phrase “soul sleep.” That was a term that was popularized by John Calvin (1509-1564 ), who used it in a pejorative way, criticizing the belief. Calvin believed that the soul lived on after a person died.[[51]](#footnote-20128) Due to the pejorative nature of the term “soul sleep,” people who believed the soul ceased to exist when the body died generally referred to their belief in other ways, including “materialism,” “conditional immortality,” and since the 1970s, “Christian mortalism.” Some of the “greats” of Christianity believed the soul did not live on after a person died, including William Tyndale, John Wycliffe, and Martin Luther.

Not only was the term “soul sleep” pejorative, it is not accurate. The phrase “soul sleep” never occurs in the Bible. It is always the person, the individual, who sleeps, and he is said to be asleep because he is dead—every part of him. It is inaccurate to suggest that only the soul sleeps as if the rest of the person did not.

[For more on the fact that when people die they are totally dead and awaiting a resurrection, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

**Acts Chapter 8**

Act 8:2

**“*deeply* religious.”** The Greek is *eulabēs* (#2126 εὐλαβής); see commentary on Acts 10:2, “godly man.”

Act 8:5

**“a city.”** There is a textual variant that reads “the city,” rather than “a city.” This reading is portrayed by such versions as ASV, ESV, KJV, NASB, and NRSV. In this case “the city of Samaria” would not be referring to the city Samaria itself, because by New Testament times the city no longer went by that name; it had been called Sebaste since the time of Herod the Great.[[52]](#footnote-22567) All through the NT, Samaria refers to the district and not the town. So the understanding would be “the (main) city of Samaria,”[[53]](#footnote-30748) which is how the NET translates the phrase.

We feel, however, that the original reading was most likely “a city” (cf. HCSB, NIV, NJB, YLT). As Kistemaker notes, “the historical context seems to favor a less important city, perhaps Shechem (or Sychar).”[[54]](#footnote-31614) Shechem would have been the center of religious activity of Samaria, it is “here the magician Simon would most naturally establish himself.”[[55]](#footnote-32425) Given the fact that it was most likely not the “main” city of Samaria, and given the problems with the textual witnesses for the reading “the city” (“Aleph has the reading ‘Caesarea’ in place of ‘Samaria,’ and B has ‘Paul’ instead of ‘Phillip’ in v.6”[[56]](#footnote-31812)) we have rendered the phrase “a city of Samaria.”

Act 8:12

**“the name of Jesus Christ.”** This phrase means, in essence, “the authority of Jesus Christ.” It is a cultural phrase that refers to the authority a person has due to his relationship with the one being named, who in this case is Jesus Christ. In Christian culture, “the name of Jesus Christ” gave the user authority, just as using the name of any other ruler or great person would give the one who used it authority.

[For more on the name of Jesus Christ, see commentary on Acts 3:6.]

Act 8:14

**“had accepted the word of God.”** The word “accepted” is a translation of the Greek word *dechomai*, which here means to accept, which the people of Samaria did; they believed Philip and thus accepted the Word of God (see commentary on Acts 8:15).

Act 8:15

**“receive holy spirit.”** A section of Scripture that has caused people to think that someone may receive the holy spirit as a separate event after they are saved is Acts 8:14-17.

Acts 8:14-17 (REV): 14Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted [*dechomai*] the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, 15who, when they had come down, prayed for them to receive [*lambanō*] holy spirit *into manifestation*, 16for as yet it had not rushed onto any of them, they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17Then they laid their hands on them, and they received [*lambanō*] holy spirit *into manifestation*.”

These verses seem to say that the disciples in Samaria “accepted” (or “received”—*dechomai*) the Word of God but had not “received” (*lambanō*) holy spirit. But every Christian receives the gift of holy spirit when they believe (Acts 1:8; Eph. 1:13). However, that does not mean that every Christian outwardly manifests the gift of holy spirit at that time. For example, some people speak in tongues when they are saved, but most do not. The reason for the confusion in Acts 8 is that most English versions translate two different Greek words, *dechomai* and *lambanō*, by the same English word, “receive,” which hides the clear meaning of the Greek text in this context and causes the whole passage to be misunderstood. The Greek words *dechomai* and *lambanō* need to be properly understood in the context of the gift of holy spirit to understand Acts 8. Both *dechomai* and *lambanō* have a wide lexical range, and both can mean “receive.” For example, meanings that *lambanō* can have include “take, receive, grasp, acquire, get, obtain, remove, choose, select, comprehend.” Meanings that *dechomai* can have include “take, receive, grasp, accept, welcome, put up with, tolerate, accept, approve, be open to.”[[57]](#footnote-32586) However, there are some important differences. The word *lambanō* can have an emphasis on the *action* taken by the one receiving. *Vine’s Dictionary of New Testament Words* notes:

“There is a certain distinction between *lambanō* and *dechomai* (more pronounced in the earlier, classical use), in that in many instances *lambanō* suggests a self-prompted taking, whereas *dechomai* more frequently indicates “a welcoming or an appropriating reception.”[[58]](#footnote-12994)

*Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon* adds, “...the suggestion of self-prompted taking still adheres to *lambanō* in many connections ...in distinction from [*dechomai* being] a receiving of what is offered.” The descriptions in Vine’s dictionary and Thayer’s lexicon of *lambanō* as a “self-prompted taking” is important, and in this context here in Acts 8, *lambanō* refers to outwardly manifesting the gift of holy spirit that was already born on the inside. In other words, to *dechomai* the gift of holy spirit is to “accept it,” to receive it on the inside, which happens when a person is born again, but to *lambanō* the gift of holy spirit the Christian must take what is born on the inside and manifest outwardly. It is a sad fact that many Christians do not outwardly manifest holy spirit because they are waiting for God to move them when they should take hold of what God has already given them and use it.

Studying the uses of *lambanō* in connection with the gift of holy spirit shows us that when someone “receives” or “takes” the holy spirit, there is often a visible manifestation of it. The record in Acts 8 is a case in point. Under the ministry of Philip, many people in the city of Samaria were saved. This is quite clear because Acts 8:14 says they “had accepted [received] the word of God.” The word “accepted” is *dechomai.* The people of Samaria had accepted the Word of the Lord and were saved, but there was something missing, there was still a “self-prompted taking” that had not occurred. The people were saved, but they had missed *doing* something, that is, “receiving” the gift of holy spirit into manifestation. However, we need to remember that since the gift of holy spirit can be received in the New Birth without any awareness on the part of the one who is saved, without an outward manifestation, it is completely possible to deny the reality of having inwardly received holy spirit at all.

Peter and John came to Samaria and ministered to the people who were saved and thus had already “accepted,” or “received” (*dechomai*), the gift of holy spirit, and then when Peter and John personally ministered to them, then the Samaritans “received” [*lambanō*] the holy spirit, that is, they actively took the gift of God that was inside them and manifested it outwardly.

When the people of Samaria “received” [*lambanō*] the holy spirit, something visible in the senses world occurred, because Simon the sorcerer “saw” that the people “received” (Acts 8:18). Since no one can “see” when someone gets saved, the people of Samaria did not get saved at that time, something else happened—the people “received,” [*lambanō*], outwardly manifested, holy spirit. In fact, Simon offered Peter and John money to buy the power to lay hands on people and have them “receive” [*lambanō*], outwardly manifest, holy spirit.

This record in Acts 8 is similar to what happens in the lives of many Christians today. They are born again under the preaching ministry of one person, but they do not outwardly manifest holy spirit at that time. Then later, after being ministered to by someone else, they go ahead and “receive,” actively take and manifest holy spirit, often by speaking in tongues, interpreting tongues, or prophecy.

God’s gift of holy spirit is not something a person receives after he is saved. We Christians receive it when we are saved. No one has to earn holy spirit because, like salvation, it is a free gift (Acts 2:38; 10:45), not a reward for good works. We do not earn it, we do not have to pray for it to come into us, and we do not have to be “spiritually qualified” to receive it. It was God’s idea to give it to us as a free gift at the moment we are born again. However, as we have seen, it is possible to have the gift of holy spirit born inside and not “receive” (*lambanō*) it into manifestation, i.e., outwardly manifest it.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Act 8:16

**“it had not rushed onto any of them.”** In most English versions, Acts 8:16; 10:44 and 11:15 say that holy spirit “falls” on people. While it is true that the word *epipiptō* can be understood as someone or something falling on someone, a better way to understand it in this context seems to be that it “rushed” upon the people. This fits with the many times holy spirit came on people in the Old Testament.

The *EDNT* says that the literal meaning of *epipiptō* is “fall upon,” “throw oneself upon,” or to “rush at” someone.[[59]](#footnote-25465) The meanings of *epipiptō* given in Thayer’s lexicon include, “to fall upon,” “to rush upon,” and “to press upon,” and Thayer notes that *epipiptō* is used of the inspiration and impulse of the holy spirit.[[60]](#footnote-20559) Friberg adds that *epipiptō* is used of unexpected events, and thus can mean “come on, seize, happen suddenly.”[[61]](#footnote-22279) For example, Luke 1:12 describes what happened to Zechariah when he saw the angel in the Temple. The KJV says that fear “fell” on him, but it did not fall on him as if it were coming from the sky. Fear is what suddenly happened to Zechariah; it was his own response when he unexpectedly saw the angel; it came upon him suddenly, or rushed upon him. In the New Testament, there are times when the power or influence of the holy spirit “suddenly happens” to someone, and the holy spirit is said to “rush upon” them, for example, Acts 19:6 says the holy spirit “came on” the believers (see commentary on Acts 19:6).

A number of verses in the Old Testament show the sudden influence of holy spirit and say that the holy spirit “rushes upon” someone. For example, Judges 14:6 (ESV), speaking of when Samson was attacked by a lion, says, “Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat” (cf. Judg. 14:19; 15:14; 1 Sam. 10:6, 10; 11:6; 16:13). Demons can also influence people very suddenly and powerfully, and are sometimes said to rush upon people (1 Sam. 18:10 ESV). Interestingly, the Septuagint does not use the word *epipiptō* in the places the Hebrew text says that the spirit rushes upon someone, instead, it uses the word *allomai*, “to leap.” So, where the Hebrew text says the spirit “rushes upon” someone, the Septuagint says it “leapt upon” someone.

A careful study of Acts 8:16; 10:44 and 11:15, shows us that the holy spirit did not “fall” from the sky upon the believers, but rather that they had a sudden and powerful experience of the influence of the gift of holy spirit. In the case of the believers in Acts 8, they were already born again and had the gift of holy spirit within them (Acts 8:12 says they believed, and even had been baptized). But now they had a powerful experience with that holy spirit and they spoke in tongues. When Peter and John laid hands on them they all “received into evidence” (*lambanō*; Acts 8:17)*,* the holy spirit they had already “received internally” (*dechomai* Acts 8:14).

Act 8:17

**“received holy spirit.”** This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Act 8:19

**“receives holy spirit.”** This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Act 8:22

**“Therefore, repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that the intent of your heart is forgiven you.”** Cf. F.F. Bruce’s translation: “So repent of this wickedness of yours and pray to the lord that the intent of your heart may be forgiven”[[62]](#footnote-19929) (see also HCSB). The Greek of this phrase has a condition, the sense of which most versions misunderstand entirely. It is often rendered as something like the NIV84: “Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart”; or the NASB1995: “pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.” This gives the impression that God might not forgive Simon, or that it might not be possible for Simon to be forgiven. Neither is true. 1 John 1:9 affirms that “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” There is no question as to if God will forgive. Scripture tells us he is faithful and just to do so. The question lies in whether Simon will perform the prerequisites for forgiveness. As Lenski has written, “The implication of this conditional form is not regarding the Lord’s willingness to remit but in regard to Simon’s contrition and begging as being necessary for enabling the Lord to extend remission. Unless Simon’s heart changes, he himself will prevent the Lord’s remission.”[[63]](#footnote-28138) Likewise, Kistemaker writes, “This conditional statement relates not to God’s ability to forgive sin but to Simon’s willingness to repent.”[[64]](#footnote-11745) In this case the doubt is not placed on God, but on whether or not Simon will fulfill his part.

Because of the great potential for misunderstanding, the REV has translated the sense of the conditional phrase, rather than retaining a more literal rendering, “repent… and pray… if perhaps the intent of your heart will be forgiven you [depending upon whether you fulfill the conditions].”

Act 8:26

**“Get up and go south on the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.”** Gaza was originally a Philistine city, and it was a little more than 50 miles southwest of Jerusalem as the crow flies. Gaza was close to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea in the Plain of Philistia, and to get to it one had to walk from Jerusalem through the hill country of Judea into the more desert and level shephelah, and finally through the coastal plain to Gaza. The Ethiopian eunuch that God wanted Philip to talk to was returning to Ethiopia from Jerusalem (Acts 8:27), and so we can confidently assume that he left Jerusalem and headed southwest on the road that went from Jerusalem to Lachish and from there he would travel toward Gaza, but he would naturally intersect the road going to Ethiopia shortly before reaching Gaza. God told Philip to go on that road, and Philip went and came across the eunuch reading Isaiah.

Act 8:27

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“worship.”** This eunuch was a believer in Yahweh (i.e., a God-fearing Gentile) and had likely been to Jerusalem before to worship at the temple. But his questions to Philip indicate that he had not been taught about the Messiah, Jesus. He surely had met with Jews in Jerusalem while worshiping in the temple, but apparently, he had not come into contact with the Christian community there during his visit.

[For more information, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Act 8:28

**“and sitting in his chariot.”** The Bible does not tell us how long the eunuch had been in his chariot, but if the chariot was drawn by horses, it is possible that they were affected by the heat and he was giving them rest until the day cooled off toward evening, so he could have been there quite a while. It was during that time that Philip caught up with the eunuch and heard him reading Isaiah.

Act 8:29

**“the Spirit.”** After his resurrection, one of the names of Jesus Christ is “the Spirit,” and it is most likely that “the Spirit” here in Acts 8:29 refers to Jesus Christ (see commentary on Rev. 2:7).

Act 8:30

**“heard him reading.”** It was very common in ancient times to read to oneself out loud, so it was possible that other people would hear a person reading to himself. People read out loud because the ancient scrolls were written with all uppercase letters and the sentences had no punctuation, and not even any spaces between the words. All the letters, line after line, were just in a string. Thus, Isaiah, which the Eunuch was reading, if it were English, would have looked like this:

ASALAMBTHATISLEDTOTHESLAUGHTERANDASASHEEPTHAT  
BEFOREITSSHEARERSISMUTESOHEDIDNOTOPENHISMOUTH

(That was part of Isaiah 53:7). It is quite apparent that reading any document written that way, and especially given that every manuscript was in someone’s handwriting, could be confusing. Reading out loud helped keep the eye and mind from being confused or losing the place. So as Philip approached the chariot, he could hear the eunuch reading.

Act 8:31

**“And he said, ‘How am I able to, unless someone will guide me?’”** This is very true. Most people need someone to guide them in understanding the Bible, which is why God put pastors and teachers in the Body of Christ.

Act 8:34

**“About himself, or about some other *person*?”** The confusion the eunuch was experiencing is totally understandable for several reasons. For one thing, in the prophecy of the Messiah in Isaiah 52 and 53, many verses are written with the prophetic perfect idiom. So the verbs in Isaiah 52 and 53 about the Messiah are written in different tenses. Some are past tense, some are present tense, and some are future tense. This would be confusing to any reader. Beyond that, Isaiah 53 predicts the death of the subject of that section of Scripture, but no one was expecting the Messiah to die. So we can certainly understand how the eunuch was confused.

[For more on the prophetic perfect idiom, see Eph. 2:6. For more of the prophetic perfect in Isaiah 53, see commentary on Isa. 53:1.]

Act 8:36

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Act 8:37

**“And Philip said ... the Son of God.”** This verse is not in the original Greek text. Metzger writes:

“Verse 37 is a Western addition…There is no reason why scribes should have omitted the material, if it had originally stood in the text…The formula…was doubtless used by the early church in baptismal ceremonies, and may have been written in the margin of a copy of Acts. Its insertion into the text seems to have been due to the feeling that Philip would not have baptized the Ethiopian without securing a confession of faith, which needed to be expressed in the narrative. Although the earliest known New Testament manuscript that contains the words dates from the sixth century, the tradition of the Ethiopian’s confession of faith in Christ was current as early as the latter part of the second century, for Irenaeus quotes part of it (*Against Heresies,* III.xii:8). Although the passage does not appear in the late medieval manuscript on which Erasmus chiefly depended for his edition, it stands in the margin of another, from which he inserted it into his text because he “judged that it had been omitted by the carelessness of scribes.”[[65]](#footnote-13576)

Act 8:38

**“and he baptized him.”** The text is not clear as to how Philip baptized the eunuch. He could have done so by immersing him in the water, or by pouring water onto his head and body. There is no way to be sure because we do not have enough information about exactly what water was available at that place. Most rivers and streams in that part of Judea were very small and shallow, and it seems unlikely that they would have come across some kind of pool deep enough to be immersed in, so the evidence here seems to support baptism by pouring the water. It is very likely that at least some of the baptisms mentioned in Scripture were by pouring and not immersion (cf. Acts 8:38; 9:18; 16:33).

[For more about baptism, and that it can be by immersion or by pouring water onto the head of the person, see commentary on Mark 1:4.]

Act 8:39

**“stepped up out of the water.”** The words in many versions, “came up out of the water” (ESV, HCSB, NASB, NIV), do not make it clear that the verse is not referring to Philip and the Eunuch breaking the surface of the water, but rather to them walking out of the water and up the bank after the baptism was completed. The Greek text reads *anebēsan ek tou hudatos* (ἀνέβησαν ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος), and the word “*ek*” means “out of,” in the sense that they were getting “out of” the water, not standing in it. The water would have been below the level of the bank, so in order to get into the water to perform the baptism, Philip and the Eunuch had to dismount the chariot, and they both “went down [the bank and] into the water” (v. 38). Then, after the baptism, they came up “out of” (*ek*) the water, which they did by stepping up onto the bank. If Philip and the Eunuch were standing waist-deep in water, then they were not “out of” the water, but still in it.

The Greek word *anabainō* (#305 ἀναβαίνω) means “to go up,” “to come up.” Thus, saying that Philip and the Eunuch “came up” out of the water is very literal. However, is too often misinterpreted to mean that they were both still in the water. Given the context, saying they “stepped up out of the water,” is a very acceptable translation, especially in light of the fact that it exactly describes what they did. See commentaries on Matthew 3:16 and Mark 1:10. Those verses speak of Jesus stepping up out of the Jordan River after his baptism.

**“the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip.”** In this miracle, the Lord Jesus simply transported Philip from where he was with the eunuch to the town of Azotus, the Old Testament Philistine city of Ashdod. Although we do not know exactly where Philip and the eunuch were on the road between Jerusalem and Gaza, we can assume that Jesus moved Philip about 15-20 miles to the west or northwest. Philip was an evangelist (Acts 21:8) and he started witnessing and telling the Good News about Jesus right in Azotus where Jesus took him. He eventually traveled north up the Mediterranean coast to Caesarea, the major port of Israel at that time, where he could witness to the many thousands of people from many nations who came and went from that port (Acts 8:40). He was still in Caesarea many years later when Paul stopped there (Acts 21:8).

Act 8:40

**“Azotus.”** The Old Testament Philistine city of Ashdod (see commentary on Acts 8:39).

**Acts Chapter 9**

Act 9:2

**“the Way.”** This was one of the earliest, if not the earliest, formal names for the Christian Faith recognized by both Christians and non-Christians, and it is used in Acts 9:2, 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14 and 24:22. Jesus had said he was “the Way” (John 14:6), so a follower of Jesus was a follower of “the Way.” Also, since it was common to use the word “way” (“road”) in the metaphoric sense of a way of life or way of doing things, scholars have postulated that “the Way” may be short for “the Way of Salvation” or “the Way of Life,” but there is no way to confirm that (the Hebrew word translated “way” is *derek* and the Greek word is *hodos*, both of which very literally mean “road” or “path,” but they were also used, like we do today, for a way of doing things).

Act 9:4

**“why are you.”** The original Greek text of Acts 9:4 records Jesus saying, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” It does not have the phrase about it being hard on Paul to kick against the goads. Nevertheless, under pressure to harmonize the text so that similar records read the same way, a few manuscripts added the phrase about the pricks to Acts 9:4 so that it read close to the way Acts 26:14 does. It was common to harmonize accounts of the same record so that they read the same way.

[For more on harmonization of the biblical text, see commentary on Luke 11:2, “Father.”]

One of the values of getting back to the original text is that we can get a clearer picture of what God is trying to communicate in His Word. It is important that in the actual conversion record of Paul in Acts 9, what the text communicates is that Jesus is most concerned about his Body, the Church. Jesus asks Paul why he is persecuting “me,” i.e., the Church, which is his body. We know from the fuller record in Acts 26:14 that Jesus was also concerned about Paul, but we do not see that part of Jesus’ communication here in Acts 9. Paul is, of course, also very thankful for the concern Jesus has for him as an individual, so when Paul recounts the story of his conversion, he makes sure to add the special concern that Jesus had for him in saying that it was hard on Paul to kick against the goads.

Act 9:7

**“hearing the *sound of the* voice.”** There are three accounts in the book of Acts of Paul’s encounter with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-8; 22:6-10; 26:13-18). As they are translated in most English versions, the two accounts of Paul’s conversion in Acts 9 and Acts 22 contradict each other, because Acts 9:7 says the men with Paul heard the voice, but Acts 22:9 says they did not hear the voice. However, there is no contradiction between the two accounts, instead, an apparent contradiction has been caused by not properly understanding and translating the Greek text. The Greek word *akouō* (#191 ἀκούω) has a large semantic range and can refer to both “hearing” a noise and also to “understanding” what one has heard.

*Akouō* can mean simply hearing the sound of something, as it does in Matthew 11:5, “the deaf hear.” This is how *akouō* is used in Acts 9:7; the men with Paul heard a sound. *Akouō* can also mean “understand,” as it does in 1 Corinthians 14:2, “For whoever speaks in a tongue does not speak to people, but to God, for no one understands.” From reading and comparing the records in Acts 9 and Acts 22, we discover that although the men with Paul “heard” something (Acts 9:7), they did not “understand” what they heard (Acts 22:9). Since the English translators translated *akouō* as “understand” in Corinthians, they knew it could mean “understand,” and had they translated it that way in Acts 22:9, English readers would not have to sort out the apparent contradiction the translators created. The truth of the situation would be readily apparent. The men with Paul “heard” something, but did not “understand” what was said.

It might be helpful for us to know that the semantic range of *akouō* is wider than just “hear” and “understand.” It can mean “learn” about something (cf. Matt. 14:13, “Now when Jesus heard *it* [that John had been executed], he withdrew from there”). It can mean to pay close attention to (cf. Matt. 17:5, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him!”). Furthermore, *akouō* is sometimes used as a legal technical term for hearing in a judicial sense so as to be able to pass judgment (cf. Acts 25:22, “And Agrippa *said* to Festus, ‘I would also like to hear the man myself.’ ‘Tomorrow,’ he said, ‘you will hear him.’”).

Act 9:10

**“certain disciple.”** The Greek is *tis mathētēs* (τις μαθητὴς), “someone, a disciple;” or “a certain disciple.” The Word is making a very important point here. The Lord Jesus appeared in a vision to Ananias even though Ananias did not have any particular qualification to receive that blessing other than being a faithful Christian, a “disciple.” He was not an apostle, nor did he have one of the other equipping ministries of Ephesians 4:11. Furthermore, he was apparently not the local leader in Damascus, he was “a certain disciple.” This should be great encouragement to every Christian, because this is an example of the Word teaching us how the Lord works with people and what we can expect from him. The Bible says we are to have “fellowship” with Jesus, (1 John 1:3), and that means we should communicate to him and expect him to communicate with us, just as we expect that out of anyone else with whom we have fellowship

[For more on our fellowship with Christ, see commentary on 1 John 1:3.]

One of the great lessons we should learn from this record of Ananias is how intimate and “natural” his relationship was with Jesus Christ. When Ananias saw Jesus and heard him calling his name, he spoke to him respectfully, but like he would to a friend. He simply said, “See, I *am here*, Lord.” He did not fall down, faint, or become overcome by excitement or anxiety. Ananias’ conversation with Jesus was normal, casual, and comfortable. And that was the case even though what Jesus asked Ananias to do caught Ananias off guard. Jesus told Ananias what to do (Acts 9:11-12); then Ananias questioned the Lord about the situation (Acts 9:13-14); then Jesus reaffirmed his instructions (Acts 9:15-16); then Ananias obeyed (Acts 9:17ff).

This record of Ananias factors into what we should understand about fellowship with Jesus and praying to Jesus. Ananias must have had a close relation to Jesus to feel so comfortable talking directly to him. Some people who say we cannot pray to Jesus have dealt with this record by saying that since Jesus appeared to Ananias first, then Ananias could talk with him directly. But Jesus told us he is with us all the time (Matt. 28:20), and that is true whether we actually see him or not. The fact that he is with us means we can openly communicate with him.

**“and in a vision the Lord said.”** This phrase needs explaining because it is not immediately clear how the Lord “said” something in a “vision.” The answer is that the Lord Jesus appeared in a vision to Ananias, and in that vision, the Lord spoke. This is a familiar scene to those who read the whole Bible because similar visions are recorded a number of times from Genesis onward.

In order to be intimate with His creation and fellowship with us, God sometimes appeared to people in human form. In fact, Scripture records a number of people to whom God appeared: Abraham is one such person, and the fact that Yahweh had appeared in human form to Abraham several times earlier explains how Abraham knew the “man” who approached his camp in Genesis 18:1 was Yahweh—Abraham recognized him the same way we recognize people whom we have met before (Gen. 12:7; 15:1; 17:1; 18:1). God also appeared to Jacob (Gen. 28:13), Moses and the elders of Israel (Exod. 24:9-11), Samuel (1 Sam. 3:10), Solomon (two times: 1 Kings 3:5; 9:2), Micaiah (1 Kings 22:19-22), Isaiah (Isa. 6:1-5), Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:26-28), Amos (Amos 7:7), Daniel (Dan. 7:9-14), Stephen (Acts 7:56) and the apostle John (Rev. 5:1-8). In contrast to many great men and women of God who saw God in a visible form, Jesus upbraided the unbelieving Jews who thought they knew God so well, saying to them: “You have never heard his voice at any time nor seen his form” (John 5:37). (It is not well-known among Christians that God Himself appears to people in human form, so for more on that, see commentary on Acts 7:55).

There are times when God or Jesus “appear” to people and times when they “appear in a vision.” The difference is that if God or Jesus are really present, then other people could see them too, but if it is a vision, even though they can be plainly seen by the one having the vision, no one else could see them. Thus, Stephen saw a vision of God and Jesus (Acts 7:55), because although he could clearly see them, no one else could. In Genesis 15:1, “the word of Yahweh came to Abram in a vision,” that is to say, Abram received instruction from Yahweh, who appeared to him in a vision. In Acts 10:3, an angel appeared to Cornelius in a vision and spoke to him. In Acts 16:9 a man from Macedonia appeared to Paul in a vision and spoke to him. In Acts 18:9 the Lord Jesus appeared to Paul in a vision. Here in Acts 9:10, the Lord Jesus appeared to Ananias in a vision and spoke to him.

**“See.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Act 9:11

**“look”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Act 9:14

**“call on your name.”** This phrase refers to prayer, and here people in Damascus were praying to Jesus.

[For more on “calling on the name of Jesus,” see commentary on 1 Cor. 1:2; for more on prayer to Jesus, see commentary on John 14:14. Also see Appendix 13: “Can We Pray to Jesus?”]

Act 9:17

**“filled with holy spirit.”** This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Act 9:18

**“and was baptized.”** The text is not clear as to how Paul was baptized. He could have been baptized by being immersed in water, or baptized by having the water poured onto his head and body. There is no way to be sure because we do not have enough information about exactly what water was available where Paul was staying. It does seem the most likely that Paul was baptized by having water poured onto him. There was likely no pool in the house or immediate vicinity where Paul could be immersed, and even if there was a Jewish synagogue nearby where Paul could have been immersed, it is unlikely that the believers would have taken him there due to the fact he might have been recognized and some kind of trouble started. Also, the text does seem to indicate that he was baptized where he had been staying and did not go anywhere to be baptized. It is very likely that at least some of the baptisms mentioned in Scripture were by pouring and not immersion (cf. Acts 8:38; 9:18; 16:33).

[For more about baptism, and that it can be by immersion or by pouring water onto the head of the person, see commentary on Mark 1:4.]

Act 9:23

**“many days.”** What Paul records as “three years” in Galatians 1:18, Luke records as “many days” here in Acts. But the records may be closer than they first appear, because a “year” could be a part of a year, just as a “day” in biblical reckoning could be a part of a day. So the three-year period Paul records in Galatians could have been quite a bit less than that. In Galatians, Paul gives much more detail, saying that he started in Damascus, went to Arabia, and came back to Damascus, whereas here in Acts, Luke is not as interested in the specifics of Paul’s early travels as he is in getting to Paul’s visit to the leaders in Jerusalem.

Act 9:26

**“And when he had come to Jerusalem.”** This was Paul’s first trip to Jerusalem after his conversion. It only lasted 15 days (Gal. 1:18-20). Paul made five trips to Jerusalem after he got born again. First trip: three years after his conversion: Acts 9:26-30; Gal. 1:18-20. Second trip: 14 years after his conversion for a famine relief visit: Acts 11:28-30; Gal. 2:1-10. Third trip: in AD 49, for the Jerusalem council: Acts 15. Fourth trip: between his second and third missionary journeys: Acts 18:22. Fifth trip: after his third missionary journey when Paul was arrested and sent to Rome (Acts 21:17).

Act 9:28

**“going in and going out.”** This phrase is both an idiom and the figure of speech polarmerismos. Polarmerismos occurs when two extremes are put for what happens between them, thus indicating a totality. A polarmerismos in English is, “That is the long and short of it,” meaning that is all there is to the situation. A polarmerismos in the Bible occurs in Genesis 1: “And there was evening, and there was morning.” The evening and morning are put for the whole day. In the case of “going in and going out,” the reference is an idiom and primarily refers to the daily life of going in to one’s house, and out of it, in other words, living all of daily life. Solomon used almost the exact words when he became king. He prayed, “And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I *am but* a little child: I know not *how* to go out or come in” (1 Kings 3:7, KJV). Solomon said to God he was not confident as a king, he did not know how to live his life in front of the people, but God stepped in and gave him great wisdom. Here in Acts, the verse is saying that Paul lived daily life with the apostles; he went in and out with them.

[For more on polarmerismos, see commentary on Josh. 14:11.]

Act 9:29

**“And he was talking and disputing with the Hellenistic *Jews*.”** Verses such as Acts 9:29 show us that Paul was fluent in Greek.

Act 9:31

**“encouragement of the holy spirit.”** This “holy spirit” in Acts 9:31 refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. The genitive phrase translated “of the holy spirit” is a genitive of source of origin; the encouragement that comes from the holy spirit. The Greek text uses a genitive definite article in this case, and not a preposition such as *ek*, and thus paralleling the phrase “fear of the Lord” earlier in the verse.

There are many ways that the gift of holy spirit would encourage the believers. The believers would receive revelation from God and the Lord through the gift of holy spirit and also manifest the power of holy spirit in various ways, including speaking in tongues and prophecy, all of which are very encouraging.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Act 9:38

**“Lydda was close to Joppa.”** Joppa is 9-10 miles (14.5-16 km) northwest of Lydda and could have been easily reached in a 3-4 hour walk.

**“sent two men.”** Although the record in the Bible seems to indicate that Dorcas was already dead, she may have not been dead when they left, but only really sick and failing fast. This is indicated by the fact that they said, “Do not delay.” Of course, it is possible that she was dead, and the men wanted Peter to have an opportunity to raise her before she was buried, which would have happened by nightfall. It seems the disciples would have had more confidence that Peter could heal her than raise her from the dead, since there is no record of Peter having raised anyone else from the dead before Dorcas.

**“Do not delay.”** A litotes (meiosis), in this case a nice way to say, “Hurry up.”[[66]](#footnote-17482)

**Acts Chapter 10**

Act 10:1

**“a centurion.”** A centurion was over 100 men. Caesarea was the largest port city on the eastern Mediterranean Sea, and the residence of the governor of Judea, who would have been well protected by Roman soldiers, thus the presence of Cornelius at Caesarea. There would have been many more soldiers at Caesarea than just 100, so Cornelius would have been only one of a number of centurions at Caesarea.

Act 10:2

**“godly man.”** The word comes from *eusebēs* (#2152 εὐσεβής), which emphasizes the outward actions of one’s devotion. It can be contrasted with *eulabēs* (#2126 εὐλαβής), a similar word that denotes one’s inward attitude of reverence and devotion to God. Vine writes, “While *eulabēs* especially suggests the piety which characterizes the inner being, the soul, in its attitude toward God, *eusebēs* directs us rather to the energy which, directed by holy awe of God, finds expression in devoted activity.”[[67]](#footnote-17607) Bullinger points out that *eulabēs* is more about the “avoidance through godly fear of doing anything contrary to right”[[68]](#footnote-30929) than performing one’s devotion in deeds; thus it concerns the type of person one is. On the other hand, he writes that *eusebēs* is “reverence for God which shows itself in actions, practical piety of every kind.”

**“a God-fearer.”** This means that Cornelius was what the Jews referred to as a “proselyte of the gate.” The Jews had two different categories of proselytes: “proselytes of righteousness” and “proselytes of the gate.” A “proselyte of righteousness” was someone who became circumcised and fully kept the Law. Except for their non-Jewish heritage, they were considered fully Jews. These are apparently the proselytes mentioned in Acts 2:10. In contrast, a “proselyte of the gate,” also known as a “God-fearer,” was a Gentile who did not get circumcised, and these proselytes were restricted in their worship. They were called, “proselytes of the gate” because although they kept much of the Law, they were still thought of as Gentiles, and so when they were in the Temple in Jerusalem, they could not enter the Temple area restricted to Jews, but had to remain in the Court of the Gentiles. According to Acts 10:2, Cornelius and all his household were God-fearers. However, when he gathered his family and friends to meet with Peter, we do not know if the entire group were God-fearers as his family was. God-fearers are also mentioned in Acts 13:16, 26.

Act 10:3

**“ninth hour.”** This is roughly our 3 p.m. Acts 3:1 tells us it was an hour of prayer (see commentary on Acts 3:1).

Act 10:5

**“Joppa.”** Joppa was the original port city of Judea and about 35 miles south of Caesarea. Although it would have been possible for the men sent from Cornelius to Joppa to make it there in one very long day, the fact that they arrived in Joppa around noon or shortly after (Acts 10:9) means they made the trip a two-day journey and arrived about noon the second day. The soldiers stayed with Peter that one night and then left for Caesarea the following day (Acts 10:23), arriving at Cornelius’ house the day after that (Acts 10:24). So from the time Cornelius saw the angel until Peter arrived at his house was four days—two days each way. When Cornelius saw Peter, he told him the angel appeared to him “four days ago” (Acts 10:30).

Act 10:7

**“godly soldier.”** See commentary on Acts 10:2, “godly man.”

Act 10:8

**“related.”** See commentary on Luke 24:35, “related.”

Act 10:9

**“sixth hour.”** This is roughly our 12 noon. Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 a.m.

[For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48.]

Act 10:10

**“a state of suspended consciousness.”** One of the definitions of *ekstasis* is a “state of suspended consciousness.” Most versions say “trance.” The word “trance” is correct in some contexts, but not in this one. There are many reasons for suspended states of consciousness, but the two we are concerned with as students of Scripture are those caused by God or the Lord Jesus when they give a person an experience by revelation, and the kind caused by demons, which we refer to as a “trance.” When God or the Lord Jesus give such a profound and inclusive revelation that a person’s conscious experience of the other things happening around him are suspended, the person still maintains control of themself, is aware of what is happening, like Peter can participate in the experience by talking, etc., and will remember what has occurred. In contrast, a demonically produced trance is a type of suspended consciousness, but the person is usually not in control of himself, and frequently has no memory of what happened, including any actions he took while in the trance.

Act 10:12

**“and birds of heaven.”** Many varieties of birds were clean and could be eaten, but some were unclean and were forbidden to be eaten. Given the meaning of this vision, we can safely assume that the birds in the vision were unclean birds (cf. Lev. 11:13-19; Deut. 14:11-18).

Act 10:13

**“Kill.”** The word is from the Greek word *thuō* (#2380 θύω), meaning “to sacrifice.” It is used to refer both to the Pascal Lamb (Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7) and pagan sacrifice (Acts 14:13, 18; 1 Cor. 10:20). The same word can describe “pure” and “impure” religious sacrifice. Nevertheless, the Jews had very strict rules as to which animals were clean and able to be offered as sacrifice, and which animals were unclean and thus unfit for sacrifice. It is also helpful to remember that many of the animals that were sacrificed were eaten by the people in part, or in whole. The Lord is making a point in a way that would be very powerful to Peter, a first-century Jew. By telling Peter to kill as a sacrifice and eat these unclean animals, Jesus was showing Peter that even things that had been considered unclean were acceptable to God; even though he had felt they were unfit for religious use, the Lord was showing he had made them clean.

Act 10:14

**“Lord.”** This refers to the Lord Jesus, not the Lord God. Peter was in the habit of dialoguing with Jesus and referring to him as Lord, which in part explains the tenor of the conversation and Peter’s willingness to argue, as in, ‘Surely not, Lord,….” It is difficult to imagine Peter arguing with God in that manner. Further, Acts 10:19 says “the Spirit said…,” which would be Jesus Christ. See commentary on Romans 8:26.

Act 10:17

**“behold.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Act 10:19

**“the Spirit.”** In this case “the Spirit” refers to Jesus. Peter spoke frankly with him just as he had when Jesus lived among the apostles. Here the Bible refers to Jesus as “the Spirit” as it does in many other places after the resurrection. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Act 10:21

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20. This *idou* is very hard to translate in this verse. In the culture, *idou* was a common attention-getter, and Peter was using it to get the attention of the people. “Pay attention” would have missed the heart completely, and frankly, “Look” is not the best. Given the revelation he had been given of the sheet let down from heaven, Peter was trying to be friendly, and yet there would have been a stiffness in the situation because of the cultural norms. Given the vernacular, “Hey there!” or “Yo!” or even “Hello there!” might capture the sense better than “Look,” but they seemed too colloquial.

Act 10:22

**“instructed.”** The Greek word is *chrēmatizō*, see commentary on Matthew 2:12.

Act 10:25

**“Now it came to pass that when Peter entered.”** A difficult construction in Greek. A Hebraism.[[69]](#footnote-27366)

**“and bowed down before *him*.”** The way of bowing down was to either get on one’s knees and put one’s chest to the ground, or it was to lay prostrate with the whole body on the ground. See commentary on Matthew 2:2.

Act 10:30

**“ninth hour.”** This is about our 3 p.m. Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 a.m.

[For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48.]

**“look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Act 10:35

**“is doing what is right.”** The Greek is literally, “is working righteousness,” but in this context that means “is doing what is right.”

[For more on “righteousness” having the meaning of doing what is right or just (“justice”), see commentary on Matt. 5:6.]

Act 10:36

**“who is.”** The Greek is more literally, “this one is Lord of all,” but it is awkward at the end of a written statement. Some versions put it in parenthesis, but that is confusing and leaves us to wonder if it was Peter’s statement or Luke’s commentary. It clearly seems to be Peter’s statement to the Gentiles about Jesus being Lord of all, and beginning with the “who” and ending with an exclamation point brings out the emphasis.[[70]](#footnote-24044)

Act 10:38

**“how God anointed him with holy spirit.”** Jesus was anointed with the holy spirit after he was baptized by John. For the complete record, see the commentary on Matthew 3:16.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

**“Devil.”** The Greek word is *diabolos* (#1228 διάβολος), which literally means “Slanderer,” but *diabolos* gets transliterated into English as our more familiar name, “Devil.” Slander is so central to who the Devil is and how he operates that one of his primary names is “the Slanderer.”

[For more information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

Act 10:39

**“tree.”** The Greek word is *xulon* (#3586 ξύλον, pronounced 'zoo-lon) and it means a tree, log, a piece of timber (1 Cor. 3:12), a piece of wood (Rev. 18:12), or something made from wood such as a beam, a cross, a club (Mark 14:48), or even the stocks that Paul’s feet were placed in (Acts 16:24). However, *xulon* can mean “tree,” and Peter was making a point to the Gentiles that the religious leaders had taken the Messiah and hanged him on a “tree” as if he were accursed of God (see commentary on Acts 5:30, “tree”).

Act 10:41

**“from among the dead.”** See commentary on Romans 4:24.

Act 10:42

**“he commanded us to proclaim to the people and to solemnly testify that he is the one who has been appointed by God to be the Judge.”** This command of Jesus to his followers to testify that he is the one to be the judge of the living and the dead is not specifically stated in Scripture, but we can certainly see how Jesus would have commanded his followers to testify of that fact, and here in Acts 10:42, Peter testified that Jesus made that command.

The word “people” sometimes applies to the Jews, but in this case, and especially because Peter was speaking to Gentiles at the time he said this, the word “people” is broader than just “Jews.” Before he ascended, he told his followers to be witnesses to all nations (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8).

**“Judge of the living and the dead.”** Jesus will judge “the dead” when he raises up those who are currently dead and they stand before him to be judged (cf. John 5:25-29; Rev. 20:11-15; Acts 24:15).

However, there are times when Jesus will judge “the living,” because at the different judgments, not everyone will be dead. One example is the Rapture of the Christian Church. When the Rapture occurs, not every member of the Church will be dead (cf. 1 Cor. 15:51-53; 1 Thess. 4:15-17), but every Christian will be judged (2 Cor. 5:10). Also, at Jesus’ Second Coming, when he comes and fights the Battle of Armageddon and conquers the earth (Rev. 19:11-21; Ps. 2:4-9; 110:1-6; Dan. 2:34-35; ), there will be lots of people who will still be alive on earth who have survived the Tribulation and Armageddon. Those people will be gathered before Jesus and separated into two groups, “sheep” and “goats.” The “sheep” will be judged to be righteous and will be allowed to enter Christ’s kingdom on earth (Matt. 25:31-34, 46), but the “goats” will be judged to be unrighteous and thrown into the Lake of Fire (Matt. 25:41, 46).

Act 10:44

**“the holy spirit.”** This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

**“rushed.”** See commentary on Acts 8:16.

Act 10:45

**“the Circumcised.”** This is a circumlocution for “the Jews.”

**“the gift of the holy spirit.”** This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God, poured out on the Day of Pentecost.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Act 10:46

**“speaking in tongues.”** For a much fuller explanation of speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:5.

**“and exalting God.”** Speaking in tongues is a language given by the Lord to his people, and when a believer speaks in tongues the message exalts God. The English word “exalt” is not used much, and different versions translated the Greek differently, trying to capture the sense of the Greek text. Translations include “exalting” (NASB); “magnify” (ASV, KJV); “praising” (CJB, NET, NIV, NLT); “declaring the greatness of” (CSB); “extolling” (ESV, NRSV, RSV); and “glorifying” (NAB). The idea is that when people speak in tongues, the greatness of God is declared.

Act 10:47

**“received the holy spirit.”** This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Act 10:48

**“in the name of Jesus Christ.”** This phrase means, in essence, “by the authority of Jesus Christ.” It is a cultural phrase that refers to the authority a person has due to his relationship with the one being named, who in this case is Jesus Christ. In Christian culture, “the name of Jesus Christ” gave the user authority, just as using the name of any other ruler or great person would give the one who used it authority.

[For more on the name of Jesus Christ, see commentary on Acts 3:6.]

**Acts Chapter 11**

Act 11:2

**“those from among the Circumcised.”** Peter was criticized by the apostles and elders, who were Jewish Christians. There is an element of euphemism in the phrase, because the ones who would feel free to criticize Peter were his peers, who would include those who had been apostles with him, likely including John and James (James was shortly martyred in Jerusalem; Acts 12:2). In fact, when Acts 11:17 says “he [Jesus] also gave to us when we believed,” the text could well indicate some of the original apostles who spoke in tongues on the Day of Pentecost.

Act 11:5

**“state of suspended consciousness.”** See commentary on Acts 10:10.

Act 11:7

**“Kill.”** See commentary on Acts 10:13.

Act 11:11

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Act 11:15

**“the holy spirit.”** This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

**“rushed.”** See commentary on Acts 8:16.

Act 11:16

**“how he used to say.”** A more literal rendition of the Greek would be, “how he was saying,” using the perfect tense, active voice of the verb. We might idiomatically say something like, “he was always saying….” The NASB does the same thing the REV does in this verse.

“**baptized with holy spirit.”** This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Act 11:17

**“I, who was I.”** There is a double use of I here. Lenski notes that there are two questions fused into one: “Who was I” and “Was I able.”[[71]](#footnote-23367) Peter aggressively defends his actions to the Jews, as well he should. However, his humanity shows through later when he gives in to pressure from the Jews about eating with Gentiles (Gal. 2:11).

Act 11:18

**“life.”** This refers to “everlasting life”. See commentary on Luke 10:28.

Act 11:20

**“Cyprus and Cyrene.”** Cyprus was an island in the Mediterranean Sea off the south coast of what today is Turkey. The Jews there primarily spoke Greek, not Hebrew. Cyrene was a city on the north coast of Africa west of Egypt. The Jews there mostly spoke Greek. Now the Greek-speaking Jews of Cyprus and Cyrene begin to speak to the Greeks in Antioch, who subsequently believed.

Act 11:23

**“the purposes of their hearts.”** The Greek word translated “purposes’ is *prothesis* (#4286 πρόθεσις), and here means, that which is planned or purposed in advance. The heart can have plans or purposes, things it plans for the future.

Act 11:24

**“full of holy spirit and trust.”** This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Act 11:25

**“diligently search.”** See commentary on Luke 2:44.

Act 11:26

**“called.”** The Greek word is *chrēmatizō* (#5537 χρηματίζω), and it meant “to transact business,” or “to transact business under the name of,” thus, go under the name of, or simply “to be called.”

**“Christians.”** According to the chronology in Acts, the name “Christian” was coined in either AD 43 or AD 44, 16 or 17 years after Jesus was crucified (given an AD 28 crucifixion). The name would have been coined by the Greeks because the Jews would never have given the people whom they thought were heretics a name that meant a follower of their Messiah—they thought the Christians were deceived and deceivers.

It is unknown whether the name “Christian” was given to the believers by the unbelieving Greeks or if the believers who were Greek called themselves Christians to identify themselves, but it seems more likely that since they had been already known as disciples or followers of “the Way” (cf. Acts 9:2), that the term “Christian” was given to them by unbelieving Greeks who wanted an easy way to identify them. Much has been written on the grammatical form of the Greek and Latin words for “Christian,” but the basic meaning is “follower of Christ.”

Since the term “Christian” was coined by Greeks in Antioch of Syria in AD 43 or AD 44, Jesus never called himself a Christian; neither did the early apostles and disciples.

It is not known how quickly the name “Christian” spread, but it did spread. It is only used three times in the New Testament, but all three are significant. The first use tells us how the term came into existence. The second use is by Herod Agrippa II, great-grandson of Herod the Great and the man appointed by the Romans to be the ruler of territory in northern Israel (Acts 26:28; his father, Herod Agrippa I, was the Herod who executed the Apostle James; Acts 12:1-2). Herod Agrippa II may have more or less passed himself off as a Jew, but he was living in incest with his sister Bernice, and his relationship with her was part of the society gossip even back in the city of Rome. The fact that Agrippa would use the term “Christian” in his dialogue with Paul indicates that by that time it was a clear descriptor for those people who believed in Jesus and followed a specific set of beliefs. Agrippa said, “You are trying to persuade me to become a Christian,” and by that, he meant everything that “Christian” stood for. He did not say, “You are trying to get me to believe Jesus was raised from the dead,” which is a vital part of Christianity, but not all there was to “Christianity” even at that time.

The third and last time “Christian” appears in the Bible is in the First Epistle of Peter (1 Pet. 4:16). Peter wrote to the Jewish Christians scattered throughout the area we know as Turkey today (1 Pet. 1:1). The fact that Peter used the term “Christian” when writing to the Jewish Christians shows that they had wholeheartedly accepted Jesus as the Messiah, and also were well-known to be distinct from the Jews who did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. The way Peter used “Christian” in the phrase “if *any of you suffers* for being a Christian” shows that the term Christian was well-known and Christians were known to suffer persecution.

We do not know why Paul did not use the term “Christian” in any of his writings. Perhaps because he was trying to win Jews to Christ, he did not want to immediately alienate them by referring to himself by a term they would likely find offensive. It is also possible that if “Christian” had a pagan origin then Paul felt it best not to use the term.

The term “Christian” was generally known by the time of Josephus (*Antiquities*, 18.3.3) because he used it without much description, and shortly thereafter it was used by Pliny the Younger, Tacitus, and Suetonius. Since we have these widespread surviving references to the term and know that the people who read “Christian” would know what it meant, we can assume that at least by the end of the first century, people knew what a “Christian” was. Actually, it was likely that during the persecution started by Nero in AD 64, the term “Christian” came into widespread use.

Nero did something that no emperor had done before him—he made a religion illegal. There had been occasions in Roman history when the practitioners of a given religion got out of the bounds of decency and had some of their religious practices made illegal. There were other times when the religious practitioners of a certain location became rebellious and were executed, as happened when the Jews in Jerusalem rebelled against Rome, and Rome responded by killing those Jews and burning their Temple, but Rome did not also make Judaism illegal—it was based on the worship of a god. It was always assumed that religion was based on the existence of a god or goddess, so you could not make the belief system itself illegal. In contradiction to that logic, Nero made the belief in Christ as Messiah illegal, and all practices and worship associated with belief in Christ illegal too. That act no doubt caught the attention of the average Roman—it certainly did with the various Roman senators, prefects, procurators, governors, etc., who had to carry out Nero’s orders. By Nero’s time, or in Nero’s time, the common people knew the term “Christian.” The term “Christian” had been coined at least 20 years earlier (coined in AD 43 or AD 44), and the Roman historian Tacitus (c. 56-c. 120) wrote about Nero’s torture of “people hated for their shameful offenses, whom the common people called ‘Christians.’” So by the time of Nero’s persecution, the common people referred to followers of the Way as “Christians.”

At this point, it is helpful to understand why Christians were considered to be hateful and enemies of society. Of course, many lies and exaggerations were being told about them, but also the Christians were a new group, and Romans always held new groups under suspicion. Beyond that, however, Christians would not participate in, and sometimes even openly spoke out against, many of the Greco-Roman customs such as the gladiator games, drinking bouts, and orgies, and also many of the common sexual customs including prostitution, homosexuality, and having sex with one’s slaves. Also, they refused to sacrifice to the Roman gods and to the Emperor. This was very offensive to the Romans because they were very superstitious and believed that without the favor of the gods, there would be famines, plagues, defeat in battle, and all sorts of other horrible consequences.

Since the Romans believed the favor of the gods was essential to Rome’s national well-being, any group that refused to honor the gods was considered not only unsociable, but actually dangerous to Rome. Thus the Christians were held in suspicion and hated for their beliefs and practices (the Jews were also disliked by the Romans for many of the same reasons, but there were mitigating factors. First, Judaism was an ancient religion, and thus gained respect on that account. Also, they had a Temple, priests, sacrifices, and things that the average Roman could identify with. Lastly, many Jews did not actually practice their religion, but instead went to the games, the theater, etc., and that assuaged the fears of many of the Romans.)

There is a problem with the word “Christian” being used in the Bible, even though it is clearly in the New Testament. That problem is the danger of historical anachronism. When people read “Christian” in the Bible, they need to be educated that a first-century Christian did not believe all the doctrines that modern Christians do, nor did they have all the practices of modern Christians. The “Christians” at the time of Paul did not have big churches (they were persecuted and usually met secretly or at least quietly in houses or other places). Also, their worship and beliefs had not been diluted or changed by thousands of years of “orthodoxy,” so, for example, they did not believe in the Trinity, or transubstantiation, or that Jesus was born on December 25, etc. The Bible was not even completed when many of them lived, so they focused on good works and turning from evil practices like idolatry and sexual immorality, and they focused on Jesus Christ being raised from the dead.

It is also important to answer the question, “What is a Christian?” Different groups, including unbelievers, have answered this question in different ways, but since a Christian has everlasting life and a non-Christian doesn’t, it is important that we get the answer correct. Furthermore, that answer does not come from historical precedent or popular opinion, and this explains why many of the definitions given in dictionaries are biblically inaccurate. The meaning of “Christian” must come from the Bible itself, and it does: a “Christian” is a child of God, which means that it refers to a person who has been born of God and thus experienced the New Birth.

Christian salvation occurs in a moment of time. When a person confesses Christ is Lord and believes God raised him from the dead, they are instantly born of God, born again, which is often called being “saved” (Rom. 10:9). God uses the terms “New Birth” and “born again” very accurately. In birth, the nature of the parent is passed to the child, and that is true with the New Birth. God is holy, and God is spirit, and when God gives birth inside a person, what is born inside them is the very nature of God, the gift of God’s very nature, “holy spirit.” The holy spirit inside the Christian is why Christians have a new “divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4) and why they are then referred to as “holy ones,” which is often translated “saints” (see commentary on Phil. 1:1).

So, when an unsaved person becomes saved they change dramatically, but the change is spiritual, not “in the flesh.” The new Christian now has a divine nature born in them, but it does not change the flesh. That is why so many people do not know whether or not they are actually saved. Although some people change mentally or physically when they get born again, most do not notice any permanent change at all. Like God Himself, God’s divine nature in the believer is invisible and cannot be “felt” by our natural bodies.

The new nature in the believer is holy and is spirit, which is why the Bible says we are sealed with holy spirit (Eph. 1:13-14; cf. Acts 2:38). Furthermore, God giving birth in us is an act of creation—God creates His nature inside us—and that is why the Bible says we are “new creations” (2 Cor. 5:17). We also immediately become a member of the “Body of Christ” and come into a spiritual union with Jesus Christ. Our union with Christ due to being part of his “body” is why the Bible says that we were circumcised with Christ, baptized with him, crucified with him, died with him, buried with him, raised with him, and in God’s eyes are even seated in heaven with him (Rom. 6:1-10; Eph. 2:5-6; Col. 2:10-13).

Our old flesh nature does not change when we are “born again,” we just get a second nature, a divine one. These two natures war against each other inside us (Gal. 5:17), which is why sometimes it seems hard to “act Christian.” Also, because our flesh does not change when we are saved and we cannot “feel” the spirit inside us, many Christians doubt their salvation, especially when they have sinned or are feeling disconnected from God. That is why it is important to believe what God says in the Bible about being saved. It also helps if we outwardly manifest the gift of holy spirit, especially by speaking in tongues. That is a primary reason God gave the Christian Church the manifestation of speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 12:10), and why God says He would like every Christian to speak in tongues (1 Cor. 14:5, 23-24). Speaking in tongues should give Christians confidence that they are saved, because speaking in tongues is the external manifestation of the internal presence of the gift of holy spirit, and it shows that they have the gift of holy spirit and are saved.

One thing that can be confusing about Christian salvation is that a Christian is a child of God and is saved by faith resulting in his being “born again,” but then the person does not have to act “Christian.” We understand how that occurs in the natural world, and the spiritual world is no different. We know that many “bad people” come from good homes and good parents, and we understand that the way a person behaves does not change their birth parent. That is also true of God. Many Christians behave very badly, but that does not change their New Birth (it does, however, affect the rewards they will receive in the next life). Many people assume that if a person does not behave “like a Christian,” then they are not a Christian and are not saved. But a person does not become a Christian by doing good works, and they do not lose their New Birth if they do bad works. Many Christians allow their flesh nature to dominate their lives, and thus in their flesh, they live very unholy lives. It is because Christians have two natures that the New Testament calls believers “holy ones,” but then spends so much time instructing Christians in how to live holy lives. Believers are called “holy ones” (“saints”) and at the same time God commands us to “be holy” (Rom. 12:1; Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:15-16).

Christians are children of God (1 John 3:2), children by birth (1 Pet. 1:23), and that birth cannot be undone. We did not do it, and we cannot undo it. But God’s children will be judged for how they lived, and if they have lived badly they will enter the kingdom with few or no rewards to enjoy (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

[For more on salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.” For more on rewards in the future, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.” For more about the New Birth, see commentary on 1 Pet. 1:3.]

Act 11:29

**“And the disciples.”** This was the first time we see the Jews and Gentiles, as Christian disciples, acting in concert with one another.

Act 11:30

**“by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.”** This was Paul’s second trip to Jerusalem after his conversion. Paul made five trips to Jerusalem after he got born again. First trip: three years after his conversion: Acts 9:26-30; Gal. 1:18-20. Second trip: 14 years after his conversion for a famine relief visit: Acts 11:28-30; Gal. 2:1-10. Third trip: in AD 49, for the Jerusalem council: Acts 15. Fourth trip: between his second and third missionary journeys: Acts 18:22. Fifth trip: after his third missionary journey when Paul was arrested and sent to Rome (Acts 21:17).

**Acts Chapter 12**

Act 12:1

**“Herod *Agrippa I*.” “**Herod Agrippa I” (reigned AD 37-44) was the grandson of Herod the Great (the Herod who tried to kill Jesus as a baby). He was the son of Aristobulus (the Son of Herod the Great and Mariamne) and Bernice (daughter of Herod’s sister Salome and Costobarus). Herod Agrippa I was born in 10 BC and died in AD 44. The Roman emperor Caligula liked him and gave him the region of Philip the tetrarch, and the territory of Lysanius, and gave him the title “king.” He eventually gained the territory of Herod Antipas (who imprisoned and executed John the Baptist) as well. The emperor Claudius added Judea and Samaria to Agrippa’s domain, so he ended up with the territory of his grandfather, Herod the Great.

Act 12:2

**“James.”** This is the apostle James, who was the brother of the apostle John (Matt. 10:2). This was a huge loss to the Church. James was not just one of the twelve apostles; he was one of the three who were closest to Jesus. Jesus often took Peter, James, and John to places where he did not take the other apostles. For example, only Peter, James, and John went with Jesus to the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1); only those three were with Jesus when he raised the synagogue leader’s daughter from the dead (Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51); and he took those three away with him to pray on the night of his arrest (Mark 14:32-33). James is mentioned with Peter, John, and Andrew as being in Jerusalem before Pentecost.

Only after the apostle James is killed is James the Lord’s brother mentioned as an elder in the Church (see commentary on Acts 12:17).

Act 12:3

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ.

[For more information, see commentary on John 1:19.]

Act 12:7

**“look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“suddenly stood next to him.”** For the translation “suddenly stood next to him,” see commentary on Luke 2:9, “suddenly stood before them.”

Act 12:17

**“James.”** This is James the Lord’s brother. This is the first time he is mentioned as a leader in the Church. The apostle James had been killed by Herod (see commentary on Acts 12:2). James was leading the church at Jerusalem by Acts 15:13. It is worth noting that it is almost certain that James did not believe that his half-brother Jesus was the Messiah until sometime after the resurrection. He did not believe in Jesus as late as the Feast of Tabernacles, less than a year before Jesus’ death (John 7:5). Furthermore, the evidence is that when Jesus was dying on the cross, James still did not believe, which is why Jesus told John to take care of Jesus’ mother Mary (John 19:27). The first time we see James with the believers is in Acts 1:14, when James is with his mother Mary and the other disciples in Jerusalem in the days before Pentecost. It is generally believed that James and the other brothers of Jesus saw him after his resurrection when he went to Galilee, and believed at that time.

It is generally believed that by Acts 12:17, the persecution against the Church was so heavy that the original apostles could not stay in Jerusalem and so James was leading the church there, which is why Peter told the disciples to tell James he had gotten out of prison (Acts 12:17).

It seems that James did not have the heart to move forward with the revelation that his half-brother Jesus was giving from heaven. While Jesus was giving wonderful revelation to the apostle Paul about the Church and there being neither Jew nor Gentile in Christ, James was still pressing Christians to keep the Law (Acts 21:20). For more on James and the Church, see commentary on Galatians 2:2.

Act 12:25

**“having fulfilled their service.”** Barnabas and Saul had been ministering the Word in Antioch of Syria, and were sent to Jerusalem with money to support the believers in Judea. Agabus the prophet had foretold that there would be a famine, and so the believers in Antioch decided to support the believers in Judea (Acts 11:27-30).

**Acts Chapter 13**

Act 13:1

**“Antioch.”** This is Antioch in Syria.

Act 13:2

**“serving the Lord.”** The phrase “serving the Lord” occurs only here in the NT. “Serving” is translated from the Greek word *leitourgeō* (#3008 λειτουργέω), and it was a common expression in the OT to refer to the “service” (i.e., worship) that was performed by the priests and Levites in the Tabernacle (cf. Exod. 28:35; 29:30; 30:20; 35:19; 39:26; Num. 1:50; 3:6, 31) and Temple (cf. 2 Chron. 31:2; 35:3; Joel 1:9, 13; 2:17). However, in a NT context, the phrase can be taken to mean “religious devotion,” consisting predominantly of prayer, as is likely the case here because it is directly mentioned in Acts 13:3. But the phrase may also refer more broadly to Christian service in general among the believers.

**“the Holy Spirit.”** The early Greek texts do not have lowercase letters, and so the meaning of the phrase, “THE HOLY SPIRIT” needs to be determined by the context. In this case, God is directing His church by speaking to them via His gift of holy spirit, so in a sense, both meanings are built into one phrase.

[For more information, see commentary on Acts 16:6.]

The three places in Acts where the phrase “the Holy Spirit says/said” occurs are in Acts 1:16; 13:2 and 21:11. But in Acts 28:25, a similar construction also appears, “the Holy Spirit rightly spoke,” which unambiguously refers to God speaking through the prophet Isaiah in the OT (cf. Isa. 6:8-9).

Luke begins verse 2 by saying, “as they were serving the Lord.” It is sometimes difficult to distinguish when “Lord” (*kurios*) refers to God and when it refers to Jesus. But in the immediate context of Acts chapter 13, “Lord” appears 8 times (Acts 13:2, 10-12, 44, 47-49). Out of these occurrences, only verse 2 seems to be possibly ambiguous. The others have clear contextual clues pointing toward the referent being “God.”

In Acts 13:10-12, the “paths of the Lord” is a common OT expression referring to the “ways of God” (cf. Hos. 14:9; Ps. 18:21). And in verses 11-12, the idea of “the paths of the Lord” appears to be carried through to verse 12 amounting to “the teaching about the Lord.”

The phrase “word of the Lord” in Acts 13:44 is paralleled by “word of God” in Acts 13:46. And in Acts 13:47-49, Luke begins by saying, “the Lord has commanded us,” referring to the prophecy that God gave through Isaiah concerning the Messiah (cf. Isa. 49:6).

Therefore, in light of this contextual evidence, the “Holy Spirit” speaking in Acts 13:2 refers to God giving the revelation to believers at Antioch that Barnabas and Saul have been chosen to accomplish a specific task for him.

[For more information on the Holy Spirit, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” For more on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Act 13:4

**“the Holy Spirit.”** This meaning is derived primarily from “the Holy Spirit” in verse 2, which we felt primarily refers to God.

[For more information see commentary on Acts 13:2.]

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

**“Seleucia.”** This is Seleucia Pieria, which served as a seaport of Antioch about 16 miles (26 km) further upstream, at the mouth of the Orontes River.

Act 13:5

**“they also had John as their attendant.”** This “John” is also known as “John Mark,” and is the writer of the Gospel of Mark (see commentary on Acts 15:37).

Act 13:9

**“filled with holy spirit.”** This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Act 13:10

**“Devil.”** The Greek word is *diabolos* (#1228 διάβολος), which literally means “Slanderer,” but *diabolos* gets transliterated into English as our more familiar name, “Devil.” Slander is so central to who the Devil is and how he operates that one of his primary names is “the Slanderer.”

**“enemy of all righteousness.”** Elymas the sorcerer had committed the unforgivable sin and was a child of the Devil. As such, he was an enemy of all righteousness and manifested the nature of his father as did the religious leaders Jesus spoke to (John 8:44). Elymas was full of every kind of deceit—he was an accomplished liar—and also every kind of wickedness. We see the nature of the Devil in him as he persistently makes the way of the Lord “crooked,” that is, perverted and hard to live by. Perverting the ways of God is a common trait of the Devil, and we see that the religious leaders at the time of Christ did the same thing and made the way of God difficult to live (Luke 11:46-48).

[For more on the unforgivable sin, see the REV commentary on Matt. 12:31; Gen. 4:8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15. For still more on the children of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil,” under “Belial” and “Father.”]

Act 13:11

**“look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“the hand of the Lord.”** This is a common idiom for the power of the Lord.

Act 13:12

**“teaching about the Lord**.” A very good example of a genitive of relation, well translated as “the teaching about the Lord” (NIV).

Act 13:16

**“*Gentiles* who are God-fearers.”** The Jewish religion had much that was attractive about it. In contrast to the religion of the Greeks, Romans, and pagans, which was generally cruel and cold and did not have any kind of “manual” from the gods that told people how to live, the Jews had a “manual,” a book of clear do’s and don’ts (the Old Testament), and their religion was full of mercy and goodness. Thus there was a great interest in Judaism among the Greeks and Romans, some of whom became full proselytes (the men got circumcised) and some of whom were called “God-fearers.”

A “God-fearer,” also known as a “proselyte of the gate,” was a Gentile who followed the Law but did not get circumcised, and so God-fearers were restricted in their worship. They were called, “proselytes of the gate” because although they kept much of the Law, they were still thought of as Gentiles, and thus when they were in the Temple in Jerusalem, they could not enter the Temple area restricted to Jews, but had to remain in the Court of the Gentiles (see commentary on Acts 10:2). It shows how much Paul wanted everyone to believe in Christ that when he went into the synagogue to teach, he spoke directly to everyone there, both the Jews and the God-fearers, who were still thought of as Gentiles.

Act 13:25

**“look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Act 13:26

**“*Gentiles* among you who are God-fearers.”** A “God-fearer,” also known as a “proselyte of the gate,” was a Gentile who followed the Law but did not get circumcised, and so these proselytes were restricted in their worship. See commentaries on Acts 13:16 and 10:2.

Act 13:29

**“tree.”** The Greek word is *xulon* (#3586 ξύλον, pronounced 'zoo-lon) and it means a tree, log, a piece of timber (1 Cor. 3:12), a piece of wood (Rev. 18:12), or something made from wood such as a beam, a cross, a club (Mark 14:48), or even the stocks that Paul’s feet were placed in (Acts 16:24). However, *xulon* can mean “tree,” and Paul was making the point that the religious leaders had taken the Messiah and hanged him on a “tree” as if he were accursed of God (see commentary on Acts 5:30, “tree”).

Act 13:30

**“from among the dead.”**[[72]](#footnote-19804) See commentary on Romans 4:24.

Act 13:33

Psalm 2:7 is also quoted in Hebrews 1:5; 5:5.

**“Today I have become your Father.”** The Greek for “have become your Father” is *gennaō* (#1080 γεννάω) and Friberg correctly notes that when it is used of men, it means to become the father of; and when used of women it means to give birth to.[[73]](#footnote-29467)

The understanding of this verse is debated by scholars, but the context seems to make the meaning quite clear. Although there are some very competent scholars (cf. Fitzmyer; Haenchen; Meyer; etc.), who believe that *anistēmi* (“raised up”) refers to the resurrection of Christ, there are also some very competent scholars (cf. Lenski; F. F. Bruce), who believe that in verse 33 the word *anistēmi* (#450 ἀνίστημι), “raised,” does not refer to Jesus’ resurrection, but his birth. However, it is clear that the word *anistēmi* refers to the resurrection in both Acts 13:33 and 13:34.

It is true that *anistēmi* is a very general term for rising up, getting up, putting up (a building), and appearing in history (“there arose another king” Acts 7:18). However, many things militate against it being used for Jesus’ physical birth in this verse. First, the next verse (Acts 13:34) uses *anistēmi* of the resurrection of Christ (“raised [*anistēmi*] him from among the dead”), and it seems unlikely that two uses of *anistēmi* in such close conjunction would refer to two different events.

Second, if Acts 13:33 were about Jesus’ birth, it would be out of place in Paul’s teaching. Paul was teaching the people of Antioch about Jesus. In Acts 13:27 he spoke of the trial and condemnation of Christ; then in Acts 13:28 he spoke of Jesus’ being put to death; then in Acts 13:29 he said Jesus was placed in a tomb; then in Acts 13:30 he said God raised Jesus from the dead; then in Acts 13:31 he said Jesus appeared to many people who are now witnesses; then in Acts 13:32-33 he said God had fulfilled his promises by “raising up” Jesus. It seems that if Paul wanted to make the point that it was the birth of Christ that fulfilled the promises, he would not have presented the facts about Jesus the way he did (Acts 13:30 and 13:34), nor would he have left out mentioning the birth of Christ. People who say Acts 13:33 is about the birth of Christ are forced to say that Paul started his argument over again, but this seems like a weak argument, especially since Paul never mentioned Jesus’ birth earlier, but started with his arrest and condemnation.

Third, the New Testament never uses *anistēmi* of anyone’s birth, but uses it 25 times for Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, and many other times for other people, such as Lazarus, being raised from the dead. This is strong evidence that *anistēmi* is used for the resurrection in Acts 13:33.

Fourth, Acts 13:33 says God has “fulfilled” His promises “by raising up Jesus.” Even in the context, it is clear that Jesus’ birth did not “fulfill” the promises made to Israel. One of the promises was that Jesus would be condemned so that he would die for the sins of all people, and that promise was “fulfilled” when the religious leaders in Jerusalem condemned him, as Paul told the people in Acts 13:27. Meyer writes: “*By this resurrection of Jesus*, God has completely fulfilled to us the promise.”[[74]](#footnote-24937) It was Jesus’ resurrection from the dead that “fulfilled” the promises to Israel, not his birth.

We must not be confused by thinking that “become your Father” in this context has to refer to Jesus’ birth. It is clear that Psalm 2 is a prophecy of the future and shows God not only speaking with Jesus, but that in that future time he will be established as king (Ps. 2:6). The word “today” in the quotation from Psalm 2 helps us understand the figurative use of “have become your Father.” If Jesus is reigning as king when God says, “**Today** I have become your Father,” then “have become your Father” is not speaking of the day of Jesus’ birth. Meyer writes that “have become your Father” here means, “installed Thee into this divine Sonship by the resurrection, Romans 1:4, – inasmuch as the resurrection was the actual guarantee, excluding all doubt, of that Sonship of Christ.”[[75]](#footnote-23031) Bengel agrees and says the phrase, “Today I have become your Father,” in this context means: “This day I have definitely declared that Thou art my Son.”[[76]](#footnote-30452) On the day of Jesus’ resurrection, God did not literally become Jesus’ Father, but He did from the standpoint that because of Jesus’ resurrection, God’s being the Father of Jesus could no longer be logically doubted, nor could Jesus’ authority as the Son of God be denied. From the people’s perspective, it was the resurrection that declared beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus was the Son of God.

**“by raising up Jesus.”** In the Greek text, *anistēmi* (#450 ἀνίστημι; “raise, raise up”) is a participle, and this is the instrumental use of the participle, thus, “by raising up” (cf. ESV, HCSB, NAB, NET, NIV).

Act 13:34

**“from among the dead.”**[[77]](#footnote-24039) See commentary on Romans 4:24.

**“sacred promises.”** The word “sacred” is *hosios* (#3741 ὅσιος), see commentary on Acts 13:35, “Devout One”.

Act 13:35

**“Devout One.”** The Greek word is *hosios* (#3741 ὅσιος), not *hagios* (#40 ἅγιος), which is the usual word for “holy” (and occurs over 230 times in the New Testament). *Hosios* occurs 8 times in the New Testament and means “devout, pure, dedicated, holy.” When used of people, it is used of those who observe their duty to God and fulfill their obligations to Him. *Hosios* has a range of meanings and can also refer to things that are generally used in worship to God and are “pure” (“pure hands” 1 Tim. 2:8), or “sacred” (Acts 13:34, “sacred promises”). *Hosios* also sometimes refers to the outward standard of that which constitutes holiness, and in those cases, because English does not have a good equivalent for hosios, “holy” may be the best translation even though an English reader cannot tell it from *hagios*.[[78]](#footnote-21089) *Hosios* is also used to refer to the inner nature of God and Christ, which is pure and devout.

[For more on *hosios* and how it differs from *hagios*, “holy,” see commentary on Titus 1:8.]

Act 13:36

**“sleep.”** The Greek verb is *koimaō* (#2837 κοιμάω), to fall asleep, to be asleep. Sleep is used as a euphemism and metaphor for death. See commentary on Acts 7:60.

Act 13:39

**“declared righteous.”** Being declared righteous by God is a judicial decision. It does not mean that we do not sin or that our sin does not matter; it does matter. See commentary on Romans 3:20.

Act 13:43

**“God-fearing.”** The Greek is *sebomai* (#4576 σέβομαι). In the New Testament, *sebomai* is always used of worship or veneration of a god or deity, but in the Greek literature, it is also used of veneration or respect of a person. It has two distinct meanings in the New Testament; the basic meaning in the Greek literature—and the one that occurs in Matthew 15:9; Mark 7:7; Acts 18:13; and Acts 19:27—is “worship; venerate.” However, the Rabbis used the word in a specific sense, usually to indicate a Gentile who worshiped the God of Israel, but usually without becoming circumcised and thus becoming a full-fledged proselyte, and that use of the word spread throughout the Biblical world, even appearing in the New Testament. Robertson says the word *sebomai* was used “of the uncircumcised Gentiles who yet attended the synagogue worship…the rabbis used it also of proselytes of the gate who had not yet become circumcised.”[[79]](#footnote-12414)

“*God-fearers, worshipers of God”* is a term applied to former polytheists who accepted the ethical monotheism of Israel and attended the synagogue, but who did not obligate themselves to keep the whole Mosaic law; in particular, the males did not submit to circumcision (Jos., Ant. 14, 110).[[80]](#footnote-30129) These “God-fearers,” or “God-fearing Gentiles,” are mentioned six times in the book of Acts (Acts 13:43, 50; 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:7), and often their connection with the Jews in the synagogue shows up in the context. For example, in Acts 13:43, these God-fearing people obviously heard Paul speak in the synagogue, and followed him after the service ended. In Acts 13:50 the Jews agitated the God-fearing women. The Jews had significant influence over those particular women because they were the ones who worshiped in the synagogue.

In Acts 16, Lydia, a seller of purple cloth, was worshiping outside the city of Philippi (which did not have a synagogue), and was open to Paul’s teaching about the Messiah, because she herself was already a God-fearing Gentile (Acts 16:14). At Thessalonica, Paul went into the synagogue and taught. Quite a few people believed, not only among the Jews, but of the God-fearing Gentiles as well, who were in the synagogue and heard Paul teach (Acts 17:1-4). In Athens, Paul went into the synagogue and talked with “the Jews and God-fearing *Greeks*” (Acts 17:17). In Corinth, Paul went into the house of Titus Justice, a God-fearing Gentile whose house was right next to the synagogue (Acts 18:7). Once we know that the “God-fearing” Gentiles were not just “devout” as some versions say, but were actually committed to the God of Israel, we can better understand the verses that mention them. It would be possible for a Gentile to be “devout” to pagan gods without having any relationship to the God of Israel; however, that is clearly not the case with these Gentiles who were devoted to Yahweh.

Act 13:45

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ.

[For more information, see commentary on John 1:19.]

**“slandering *him*.”** The Greek verb is *blasphēmeō* (#987 βλασφημέω, pronounced blas-fay-'meh-ō). Blaspheming, in Greek, is a general word that means to defame someone, to hurt someone’s reputation (see commentary on Matt. 9:3). Although some versions say “insulting him” or “reviling him” (i.e. Paul), that is not the likely meaning of *blasphēmeō* in this context. Paul was preaching Christ, who the Jews took to be an impostor and now a dead criminal, and the text says that they “contradicted” the things that were spoken by Paul. Thus, they were twisting his words, trying to get people to not believe him. Therefore, the most accurate rendering of *blasphēmeō* here is “slandering *him*.”

Act 13:46

**“life in the age *to come*.”** This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom.

[See Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

**“look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Act 13:47

**“a light for the Gentiles.”** The salvation and everlasting life given by the Messiah was not just for the Jews, even though many of them thought that it was. The first prophecy of the Messiah is the one God made to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3:15, and that was thousands of years before the Jews existed. About 2,000 years after that first prophecy of the Messiah, God promised Abraham that all the people of the earth, not just the Jews, would be blessed through him (Gen. 12:3). Then God repeated that promise to Isaac (Gen. 26:4); and to Jacob (Gen. 28:14). Besides those promises, the Old Testament had a number of verses that spoke of Gentiles being included in the Messianic Kingdom, which meant they were granted everlasting life (Ps. 102:15; Isa. 2:2-4; 19:23-25; 42:6; 49:6; 51:4-5; 56:3-7; 60:3; 66:18-21; Ezek. 39:21, 27; Mic. 4:2; Hag. 2:7; Zech. 8:22).

Act 13:48

**“and as many as.”** Almost every modern translation puts the phrase “as many as” in connection with the word “appointed,” however, the evidence is that the sentence becomes a very misleading translation of the Greek if this is done.

This is an equative statement. As many as were appointed believed and as many as believed were appointed. In other words, the number of people who believed is the same as the number who were appointed. Furthermore, as will be shown below, when the people believed is when they were appointed to life in the age to come. Therefore, there is freedom to move the “as many as” to the front of the sentence to modify “believed.” If the phrase “as many as were appointed” is moved to the front of the sentence, it makes it sound as if this happens before the belief occurs, but the evidence from the scope of Scripture and from the pluperfect participle in this verse is that that is not true. However, these two events are concurrent. They happen at the same time. The concurrent nature of the pluperfect periphrastic participle is shown below in the commentary.

**“and as many as believed were *at that time* appointed to life in the age *to come*.”** There is a debate about the translation and meaning of Acts 13:48, and at issue in the verse is the way to understand the Greek pluperfect periphrastic participle in the verse. The Greek text reads “ἦσαν τεταγμένοι” (*ēsan tetagmenoi*). The verb *ēsan* is the imperfect form of the Greek verb *eimi* (#1510 εἰμί) and *tetagmenoi* which is the perfect participle of the Greek verb *tassō* (#5021 τάσσω). Together the verb and the participle make the pluperfect periphrastic participle, which in the REV is translated “were *at that time* appointed.”

The scholars are divided as to the correct translation and interpretation of the Greek, and that division is usually based on their theology and the way they approach the text.

The Greek verb *tetagmenoi* has a large semantic range that includes “to put in order, to arrange, to appoint, to ordain (in the sense of “appoint to a position”). A. T. Robertson writes about *tetagmenoi*, and says it is the “paraphrastic past perfect indicative of *tassō*, a military term, ‘to place in orderly arrangement.’ The word ‘ordain’ is not the best translation here. ‘Appointed,’ as Hackett shows, is better. The Jews here had voluntarily rejected the word of God. On the other side were those Gentiles who gladly accepted what the Jews had rejected, not all the Gentiles.”[[81]](#footnote-23635)

Some scholars understand *tetagmenoi* to best be translated as “disposed” (or inclined), for example, “as many as disposed themselves for eternal life, believed.” However, “disposed” is outside of the normal semantic range of the verb *tassō* and is not listed as an interpretive option in prominent Greek lexicons like BDAG, Moulton and Milligan, *EDNT*, and *NIDNTTE*.

One point of contention on how to translate Acts 13:48 occurs with whether to understand *tetagmenoi* as a middle voice participle (“appointed themselves”) or passive voice participle (“were appointed”). The form of the participle is used for both the middle and passive voice, so the decision comes down to context and word meaning. It seems that specifically with the word “to appoint,” it is less likely that someone appoints themselves and more likely that someone is appointed to something. Also, throughout the rest of the New Testament, *tassō* is most often used as a passive (Luke 7:8; Acts 22:10; Rom. 13:1). Although many scholars who believe in free will have used the middle voice to get around this seemingly Calvinistic passage, the evidence indicates that there is a better way to understand the Greek text in a way that supports human free will.

This better understanding comes about when we realize that a pluperfect periphrastic participle almost universally occurs at the same time as the main verb. Thus, in this case, the “appointing” happens at the same time as the “believing,” unlike the way that Calvinists understand this verse as referring to the “appointing” happening before the creation of the world. Many Calvinist scholars believe the “appointing” happened in eternity past and the “believing” happened when Paul and Barnabas shared the word of the Lord. But this is simply not the normal use of the pluperfect periphrastic construction. What the pluperfect periphrastic does is give the background or state of the main verb at that given time. There are a number of examples in the New Testament of the pluperfect periphrastic being used that way.

1. Mark 6:52: The REV translation is: “for they had not gained any insight from *the miracle of* the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.” The periphrastic participle translated “were hardened” is *ēn…pepōrōmenē* (**ἦν** αὐτῶν ἡ καρδία **πεπωρωμένη**). The verse is describing the state of the hearts of the disciples at the time Jesus multiplied the food and why they did not gain any insight from Jesus’ miracle. The text is describing why, at that time, they did not gain insight, and the point the text is making is that they did not gain insight because their hearts were hardened. The text is not addressing the issue of when their hearts were hardened, but instead is saying that they did not gain insight because at that time of Jesus’ miracle, their hearts were hardened.
2. Acts 9:33: The REV translation is, “And there he [Peter] found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been laid on his bed for eight years, *because* he was paralyzed.” The periphrastic participle translated “was paralyzed” is *ēn paralelumenos* (ἦν παραλελυμένος). The aorist verb “found” is the verb describing the action, while the periphrastic participle “was paralyzed” was the state of that man during the action of the main verb; he was paralyzed when Peter found him. The pluperfect periphrastic participle is not addressing how long the man had been paralyzed, but rather just stating that he was paralyzed when Peter found him.
3. Acts 4:31: The translation in the REV is, “the place in which they were gathered together was shaken.” The periphrastic participle translated “were gathered” is *ēsan sunēgmenoi* (ἦσαν συνηγμένοι). The aorist verb “was shaken” is describing the action, while “were gathered” is the periphrastic participle that describes the background or state during which the shaking occurred. The pluperfect participle just states that they were gathered when the shaking occurred, it does not address when they gathered.
4. Galatians 4:3: The translation in the REV is, “So we also, when we were minors, were enslaved by the elemental spirits of the world.” The periphrastic participle translated “were enslaved” is *ēmetha dedoulōmenoi* (ἤμεθα δεδουλωμένοι). The main verb is “were” in the phrase “were children.” The pluperfect periphrastic participle describes their state when they were children, i.e., that they were enslaved. The verb is not making the point that the people had been enslaved in the past, but only that they were enslaved when they were children.

The normal use of the pluperfect periphrastic is to denote a state which existed in the past—the people “were appointed”—with implication of a prior occurrence which produced it—the people believed.[[82]](#footnote-11095) Stephen Levinsohn agrees, saying that when a pluperfect periphrastic occurs, they are usually “portrayed as an ongoing state (which results from a completed event).” In this case, some of the Gentiles listening to Paul were appointed to everlasting life because they believed.[[83]](#footnote-30812)

This is exactly what we find in Acts 13:48. What is the prior instance that produced their being appointed to everlasting life? Their belief. They believed and then were appointed to everlasting life. One might ask, “What is the status of these believers?” They are now appointed to life in the age to come, because of their belief. The pluperfect periphrastic participle is a specific construction that is concerned with the current state during the action of the main verb. In this case, the main verb is believing, and so their state of being (or status) when they believed was being appointed to everlasting life.

Thankfully, in this case, we have help in the interpretation of this verse in the immediate context, which is Acts 13:46, the translation of which is quite clear. Paul was sharing about Jesus Christ in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia, and the Jews there rejected his message, but the Gentiles believed it. In response to that, Paul said to the Jews, “you judge yourselves unworthy of life in the age to come.” According to what Paul said, he understood that the Jews had a choice to believe or not believe in Christ, and they chose not to believe and thus he said they judged themselves unworthy of salvation. There is no indication that Paul thought that the Jews did not really have a choice in the matter but were simply following a course of behavior that had been preordained for them in eternity past. It is in that context, then, that the Gentiles are said to have chosen to believe and thus are then appointed to life in the age to come.

The Bible has many verses that point to God giving people the choice to believe or not believe. Deuteronomy 30:19 says, “Today I call heaven and earth to be witnesses against you, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse; therefore choose life so that you will live.” Similarly, at the end of his life, Joshua confronted the people of Israel and said, “choose this day whom you will serve,” either Yahweh or pagan gods (Josh. 24:15). Also, Elijah challenged the people to choose the god they would serve: “How long will you leap *back and forth* between the two sides? If Yahweh is God, follow him, but if Baal, then follow him” (1 Kings 18:21). There are dozens of verses in the Bible like these, and Acts 13:46-48 is no different. The Jews chose to reject God, the Gentiles chose to accept Him and believe. God gave His only Son so that whoever decides to believe in Him would have everlasting life (John 3:16)

Therefore, in conclusion, there is no reason to understand this verse as teaching predestination. It is not concerned with that. The verse is concerned with the new status of believers who are appointed to life in the age to come because of their belief in Jesus Christ.

[For more on Calvinism and predestination, see Appendix 9: “On Calvinism and Predestination.”]

**“life in the age *to come*.”** This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom.

[See Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

Act 13:50

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ.

[For more information, see commentary on John 1:19.]

**“God-fearing.”** See commentary on Acts 13:43.

Act 13:52

**“filled with joy and holy spirit.”** This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

**Acts Chapter 14**

Act 14:2

**“souls.”** The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the person himself, so many versions have “minds” instead of “souls,” but properly understood, “souls” is more inclusive of the feelings and emotions as well as the thoughts.

[For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Act 14:3

**“Therefore.”** This important word shows that Paul and Barnabas stayed in Iconium because of the persecution by the Jews mentioned in verse 2. Paul and Barnabas were not ones to abandon their new converts to the pressures and persecutions of the Jews and unbelievers. They stayed “a long time,” and fought for them, “speaking boldly for the Lord.” The Lord Jesus honored their fearless, selfless commitment by energizing signs and wonders that further testified to the truth of what they were teaching. This verse teaches a wonderful lesson about how important it is to raise up new converts in the Lord, and help them grow in the faith.

Act 14:12

**“chief”** is actually a participle in the Greek, “leading speaker.”

Act 14:15

**“worthless things.”** The Greek is *mataios* (#3152 μάταιος), and it means “devoid of truth, or force, or success; worthless, useless.”

Act 14:18

**“crowd.”** The Greek is plural, technically “crowds,” but although that is the way the Greeks would say it, in English we use “crowd” as a collective singular for a lot of people.

Act 14:19

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ.

[For more information, see commentary on John 1:19.]

**“having persuaded the crowd.”** The Scripture does not elaborate as to how this was done. We surmise it was a combination of things. Lies and exaggerations as to what Paul and Barnabas were teaching, lies about how they had destroyed the peace of the places they had recently been and divided the people, pointing out that they defamed traditional worship and called the traditional gods “worthless,” and likely threw in that since they were not gods come in the flesh, they healed by witchcraft, using names that were not lawfully recognized.

**“dragged.** The Greek is *surō* (#4951 σύρω) to drag or to draw.

Act 14:21

**“returned to Lystra, and to Iconium, and to Antioch.”** Paul and Barnabas had just been driven out of Antioch (Acts 13:50); had to flee Iconium (Acts 14:6), and Paul was stoned in Lystra (Acts 14:19), so how could they return to those cities so quickly? Although some commentators have suggested that the leadership in those cities changed even in that short time, that is unlikely, and besides, not everyone who was in leadership and who had participated in getting rid of Paul and Barnabas would have been gone. The answer is in Acts 14:22, which says that Paul and Barnabas strengthened the disciples. So when the two missionaries returned to those cities they had just been ousted from, they kept to themselves and just met quietly with the disciples, whereas on the earlier visit, they had openly proclaimed Christ in public places. Paul and Barnabas understood that if the disciples were strong and felt supported, evangelism would continue, and they used wisdom in the way they journeyed instead of acting with reckless bravado in the name of Christ.

Act 14:22

**“souls.”** In this usage, “soul” means the thoughts, attitudes, and emotions of people. See commentary on Acts 14:2.

**“we cannot avoid.”** The Greek word is *dei* (#1163 δεῖ, pronounced day). It expresses compulsion, necessity, or inevitability.[[84]](#footnote-12378) The Greek text of this verse is arranged in such a way it is hard to put literally into English and have a clear meaning. The KJV follows the syntax of the Greek text fairly closely: “we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God,” and the NIV follows that pattern in more modern English: “We must go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God.” A problem with literally following the syntax of the Greek text like those versions do is that the verse can then be misinterpreted to mean that if we do not go through many hardships, we cannot enter the Kingdom of God, which is not at all what the verse is saying. The HCSB gets much of the sense of the verse well: “It is necessary to pass through many troubles on our way into the Kingdom of God.”

Another problem with bringing the Greek into English is translating the Greek word *dei* itself. Saying that “it is necessary” to go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God is not bringing the meaning of the Greek into English as clearly as possible, because the Greek *dei* refers to necessity, inevitability, or unavoidability, while the English word “necessary” has a connotation of both need and even desirability.[[85]](#footnote-12118) It is only “necessary” that we have hardships because of the fallen nature of the world, our enemy the Devil, and our own sin nature, not because of the will or plan of God.

Many versions say “we must” go through hardships to enter the Kingdom of God, which is better than “it is necessary,” but “we must” makes it sound like something we could avoid if we did not want to get into the Kingdom, which is not the message. “Much hardship” is an unavoidable part of life whether a person is saved or not.

The REV could have used “inevitable,” and stayed with a definition of *dei* that is found in the lexicons, but “cannot avoid,” seems clearer and carries the sense in this context. We cannot avoid experiencing “many hardships” on our way into the Kingdom of God. Jesus taught the same thing at the Last Supper (see commentary on John 16:33).

Act 14:26

**“and from there they sailed to Antioch.”** It is likely that Galatians was written from Antioch of Syria at this time, which was before the Jerusalem council was held.

Act 14:28

**“no little time.”** This is the figure of speech tapeinosis (“demeaning”),[[86]](#footnote-12016) and is a way of understating “a long time.” The long time is unknown, but it would have had to have been many months. It would have almost certainly been during this time that Peter came to Antioch and was eating with the Gentiles until people came from James, and Paul confronted him (Acts 15:1-2; Gal. 2:11-14).

[See figure of speech “tapeinosis.”]

**“with the disciples.”** The chapter break here can cause the reader to lose the connection between the end of Acts 14 and the beginning of 15. We need to continue reading from Acts 14 right on into Acts 15.

**Acts Chapter 15**

Act 15:1

**“If you are not circumcised.”** This kind of Jewish legalistic evangelism was likely a major part of the reason for the writing of the Epistle to the Galatians, which was most likely written between the end of Paul’s first missionary journey and the Jerusalem council. The Judaizers came all the way from Judea (i.e., Jerusalem and the surrounding area) to Antioch in Syria, where Paul was staying, and taught that the Gentiles had to be circumcised to be saved. Jews did evangelize, as we learn from Jesus Christ himself (Matt. 23:15).

It is also very likely that other Jews, teaching that same circumcision doctrine, had gone out to the places where Paul had been and were teaching the Gentiles they had to be circumcised to be saved. F. F. Bruce writes that it is “probable that others who wished to press the same line [of legalistic doctrine] visited the recently formed daughter-churches of Antioch, not only in Syria and Cilicia, as the apostolic letter indicates (Acts 15:23), but also in South Galatia.”[[87]](#footnote-27404) That kind of Jewish legal evangelism, which was contrary to the doctrine Paul received from Christ, combined with news that he received from the churches he had just planted in Galatia that his converts were deserting what he taught, could have well been a major reason for the Epistle to the Galatians. We know Paul got news from Galatia because that was how he knew the disciples were being “so quickly” turned away from the grace he had taught them about.

Act 15:2

**“no small.”** Figure of speech, tapeinosis (demeaning, or understatement).[[88]](#footnote-17680)

[See figure of speech “tapeinosis.”]

**“the people.”** The Greek text has the verb “appointed” in the third-person plural, more literally, “they appointed,” but writing that in English makes it seem like Paul and Barnabas appointed themselves, which is not what happened. The REV is nuanced to read “the people appointed.” Other English versions handle the verse in various ways, for example, “the church appointed.”

Act 15:3

**“sent.”** The Greek word is *propempō* (#4311 προπέμπω), and it has two distinct meanings: “to send on ahead, send on one’s way;” and “to accompany or escort.” The KJV and the ASV of 1901 opted for the second definition, “to accompany.” However, that does not fit this particular context, which is why other versions opt for the first definition, “send on one’s way.” Acts 15:2 makes it clear that Paul, Barnabas, and a few others were appointed to travel from Antioch to Jerusalem. Since they were specifically appointed for the journey, it makes no sense that others in the congregation who were not appointed to go would go anyway, even part of the way.

Act 15:4

**“And when they came to Jerusalem.”** This was Paul’s third trip to Jerusalem after his conversion. Paul made five trips to Jerusalem after he got born again. First: three years after his conversion: Acts 9:26-30; Gal. 1:18-20. Second: 14 years after his conversion for a famine relief visit: Acts 11:28-30; Gal. 2:1-10. Third: in AD 49, for the Jerusalem council: Acts 15. Fourth: between his second and third missionary journeys: Acts 18:22. Fifth: after his third missionary journey when Paul was arrested and sent to Rome (Acts 21:17).

Act 15:5

**“rose up.”** Although this certainly refers to standing up, which is how many versions translate it, it may refer to more. It probably also refers to a “rising” of indignation, self-righteousness, etc. In that case, simply saying “stood up” is weak.

Act 15:8

**“testified on their behalf.”** God “testified on behalf” of the Gentiles by giving them the gift of holy spirit, showing that He had accepted them. “testified on their behalf” is a good translation here, as it reflects both that God testified to the Gentiles themselves and that He also testified to the Jews about His acceptance of the Gentiles. The concrete evidence that the Gentiles had received holy spirit was that they spoke in tongues.

**“giving them the holy spirit.”** This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Act 15:9

**“by trust.”** Understanding “by trust,” is important. “Trust” (*pistis,* #4102 πίστις) is a noun, but most people read it in this verse as if it were a verb, i.e., that trust (or “faith,” as most versions have) was something they did to purify their hearts. The “trust” that purifies the heart starts with our trust in Christ for salvation, which gets us born again; saved. Then as we continue to trust God, which is evidenced by our obeying Him, our hearts become more and more pure. When an unbeliever becomes a Christian, he or she almost always enters the Christian Faith with an impure heart. However, as that person trusts God day by day and lives the Christian lifestyle, learns, and believes the Word of God, his or her heart will be purified.

Act 15:12

**“as they were recounting.”** See commentary on Luke 24:35, “related.”

Act 15:14

**“Simeon.”** “Simeon” is the Hebrew form of Peter’s Jewish name. “Simon” (#4613 Σίμων) was considered the equivalent of the Hebrew patriarchal name Symeon (#4826 Συμεών), and was widely used by both Greeks and Jews. It is likely that Simon Peter acquired the name “Simon” due to the Greek influence in the Galilee and in his hometown, Bethsaida. It is noteworthy that his brother also has a Greek name. “Andrew” means “manly” in Greek. Peter is usually referred to as “Simon,” but here and in 2 Peter 1:1, Simeon is used instead of Simon. It is likely that James used “Simeon” to good effect on his Hebrew audience, anchoring Peter’s good Hebrew name to the perspective he had just given on the subject (Acts 15:7-11).

**“related.”** Same word as “recounting” in Acts 15:12. See commentary on Luke 24:35, “related.”

**“a people.”** Israel had been the “people” of God. Now God was making his “people” out of both Jews and Gentiles.

Act 15:17

**“who are called by my name, says the Lord.”** The ending of verse 17 and how it relates to Acts 15:18, and what is the proper Greek text of verse 18, are debated by scholars. Verse 18 is almost certainly textually, “γνωστὰ ἀπ᾿ αἰῶνος” (“known from the ages,” i.e., “known from long ago.”) This short sentence was expanded in time to make the longer ending that appears in the Byzantine text (cf. KJV), and other longer textual variants were produced as well.[[89]](#footnote-26802) The problem is that the quotation from Amos was well-known, and ended with the Greek words “ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιῶν ταῦτα” (“God, who makes all this” or “God, who does all this”; the Greek word ποιῶν can be “do” or “make”). However, that makes verse 18 the short and disconnected sentence, “known from the ages.” The question is, when James quoted Amos, did he modify it, giving it a new ending, and making it end: “the Lord, who is making this known from long ago” (as per ESV, NASB, RSV), or would James have left the quotation from Amos intact, and then said something that is represented in the NT text with the figure of speech ellipsis, thus making the end of 17 and verse 18 read, “the Lord who had done all this. *This has been* known from of old.”[[90]](#footnote-19236)

To us, it makes more sense that James would quote Amos as it was known, and then add his point: “*This has been* known from of old.” James is arguing to make a point, and it would weaken his argument to misquote an OT verse, trying to make a point using his changed verse. We believe that James would correctly quote Amos (except the “Yahweh” is changed to “Lord” (*kurios*) in the New Testament Greek text) and then add the fact that what he was saying had been known for a long time. The real confusion, then, is caused when Acts is written, and Luke (by revelation) uses the figure ellipsis in recording James’ words, leaving out “This has been.” The figure ellipsis emphasizes what is in the text, and de-emphasizes what is left out. To God, the fact that it was known for a long time that God would rebuild the tent of David is very important, so that gets emphasized.

Act 15:18

**“*This has been* known from of old.”** See commentary on Acts 15:17.

Act 15:20

**“that they abstain from the pollutions of idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what is strangled, and from blood.”** These words of James were not necessary for salvation, but seem important if one is going to live a godly life. Earlier, when Peter spoke, he had the right idea when he talked about reaching the Gentiles and them being brought to Christ by trust (faith) and grace (Acts 15:7-11). Peter badly wanted to make sure that the overly religious Jews would not make it difficult for the Gentiles to enter the Faith and join the fellowship of the believers. Thus, Peter was primarily speaking to the Jews who wanted the Gentiles to be circumcised and obey Jewish law (Acts 15:1-5) when he said, “why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we could carry?” (Acts 15:10).

Peter had been raised to obey Jewish Law, but was taught by the Lord not to call the Gentiles “unclean” (Acts 10:9-16), and was shown that God accepted the Gentiles (Acts 10:34-48). In spite of that, and in spite of the fact that Peter, Barnabas, and other Jews had been eating with the Gentile believers at Antioch, when people came from James (Acts 15:1-2), Peter stopped eating with the Gentiles. That act of hypocrisy upset Paul, who confronted Peter and the other Jews to get them to more fully recognize the grace of God upon the Gentiles (Gal. 2:11-21), a grace that Peter acknowledged later at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:11). It is not directly stated, but it seems that Peter and James had a falling out about the Law after the Jerusalem council, because after that, Peter is never said to be in Jerusalem again.

After Peter and Paul took their turns speaking at the Jerusalem council, James spoke (this is not the apostle James who was dead (Acts 12:2), but James the half-brother of Jesus). James did not directly contradict Peter (Acts 15:14-15), but added on to what Peter said. In what he referred to as “my judgment,” James added things that were included in Jewish food laws and also added things about proper sexual behavior that were standards of the Jews (Acts 15:19-20). In doing this it might seem that James is being overly religious, but he seems to be going back to the covenant that God made with humankind through Noah (Gen. 9:1-7) and adding a couple of things that seem to be part of a generally accepted moral law (Rom. 2:14-16).

Although James could try to justify what he said by saying that the Gentiles did not have any law code in their mythology that guided them like the Mosaic Law guided the Jews, at this time in history that would not be the case. For one thing, by the time of Acts 15, Paul, Barnabas, and other Jews had been bringing Gentiles to Christ for many years, and in fact, the label “Christians” was first coined in a mixed congregation of Jews and Gentiles in Antioch of Syria (Acts 11:19-26). Perhaps even more to the point, Paul and Barnabas had already traveled among the Gentiles and made many converts. In fact, there is very strong evidence that Paul had already written the Epistle to the Galatians before the Jerusalem council, which meant that the Gentiles already had guidance from God and the Lord Jesus Christ about how to live in obedience to God.

For reasons that are unstated in the Bible, James did not want to give up living by the Law of Moses, even though the Church Epistles being written by Paul made it clear that no one could be righteous by the Law. So, by the time Galatians was written (before the Jerusalem council of Acts 15), Paul was receiving the revelation to the Church about freedom in Christ while James and the church at Jerusalem were still focused on the Law (cf. Gal. 2:2-12). Sadly, even many years later, after Paul’s second missionary journey and the Epistles to the Romans and Corinthians were written, as well as Galatians, James was still focused on the Law (Acts 21:20). But a study of Scripture reveals that even as early as Galatians (c. AD 48), the leaders in Jerusalem who were held in high regard and had been the genuine leaders in the past were no longer keeping up with what the Lord was revealing to Paul (Gal. 2:6-9). God says this by saying they had once been held in high regard: “whatever they were at one time….” In other words, at one time, years ago perhaps, they had been God’s true leaders and living by the revelation he was revealing, but now they were only regarded as leaders by the people. That rings true to what we read in the Bible. There is no doubt that people like Peter had been the true leaders of the Church. But for whatever reason, as the Christian Church developed and God moved powerfully to include the Gentiles, James, Peter, and the other leaders in Jerusalem resisted God—at least around the time Galatians was written. That is understandable because they were proud of their Jewish heritage and loved the Temple and the way it centralized religion and worship, but the fact that their actions are understandable does not make them right. God was including the Gentiles in the Church, moving from Law to Grace, revealing the Body of Christ, and making it clear that the “Temple” in the Age of Grace was the body of believers, not a building. Church leaders needed to respond to that and recognize that Paul wrote his Epistles by revelation from God and Christ (Gal. 1:1, 12), but they apparently did not. But that erroneous attitude seems to have shifted in Peter when he came to Antioch and was confronted by Paul, as we see by his speech at the Jerusalem council and also by his apparent separation from James (he is never said to be with James after the Jerusalem council. He may have been, but it is never stated, a glowing absence if Peter was there with James (cf. Acts 21:18).

In contrast to Peter, James and the Jewish Christians at Jerusalem held to the Law and misunderstood and refuted Paul’s teaching that there is “neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you all are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28, cf. Rom. 10:12). They misunderstood the grace of God that Paul was teaching about, and they wanted him to affirm that he kept the Law and recognized the difference between a Jewish Christian and a Gentile Christian (Acts 21:18-25). This religious tendency of James to keep the Mosaic Law in contrast to what is written in the Church Epistles showed up early on, here in the Jerusalem council, when James added dictates from the Law to what the Gentiles were to do when they became followers of Christ. There is no evidence that Paul and Barnabas taught such things when they went on their first missionary journey and reached many Gentiles.

Acts 15:20 has many textual variants, and there has been much theological discussion on what this Apostolic Decree means. Bruce Metzger[[91]](#footnote-13094) has a well-written section on the most probable original text (represented in the REV).

[For more on James and the leaders in Jerusalem being stuck in the Law, see commentary on Gal. 2:2.]

**“pollutions of idols.”** This refers specifically to food sacrificed to idols, as Acts 15:29 and 21:25 make clear. It would not refer to idolatry as such, because the Gentiles had forsaken their idols. This was a huge part of the decision to become a Christian in the first century because other religions did not ask anyone to forsake idols. In the Roman religions, for example, if you worshiped one god you could and should still recognize other gods. What set Christianity and Judaism apart was that in those religions a person rejected other gods and exclusively recognized the God of the Bible. This was a major reason Jews and Christians were persecuted by pagans.

Act 15:22

**“decided.”** This is an idiom used at the start of decrees.[[92]](#footnote-32116) Lenski writes, “*dokeo* with the dative means that the assembly passed a formal resolution.”[[93]](#footnote-31803) This was probably done by a show of hands as in Acts 14:23.[[94]](#footnote-19203)

Act 15:23

**“brothers.”** This first “brothers” in the verse is defined as being apostles and elders, who in that culture would have been men.

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek word for “brothers” often includes men and women, and it does so here.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

**“They wrote through them.”** This is an anacoluthon, and the figure of speech idiom. The Greek is literally, “having written through their hand.” The anacoluthon is “having written, and sending the letter through their hand.” The idiom is the use of “hand” as power or agency. “Through their hand” is a very Hebraic way of saying, through them, i.e., by their power.

[See figure of speech “anacoluthon.”]

Act 15:24

**“souls.”** Here “souls” refers to the thoughts, attitudes, emotions, and feelings. See commentary on Acts 14:2.

Act 15:25

**“to one accord.”** See commentary on Acts 1:14.

**“decided.”** See commentary on Acts 15:22, “*dokeo*.”

Act 15:26

**“risked.”** The Greek word is *paradidōmi* (#3860 παραδίδωμι) and means “to hand over, give over, deliver, entrust.” Most of the commentators say it means “risk” in this context, but there is certainly the overtone that Paul had more than just “risked” his life. He had “given over” his life to the Lord.

**“lives.”** The Greek word is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), often translated “soul.” The Greek word *psuchē* has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context.

[For a more complete explanation of *psuchē*, “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Act 15:28

**“the Holy Spirit.”** Here “the Holy Spirit” is a name or title of God. The use of “Holy Spirit” as an appellative for God is directly related to the subject at hand, which is the obedience to some of the parts of the Levitical Law by the Gentiles. They were directed to avoid food sacrificed to idols, sexual immorality, things strangled, and blood, which are all commandments mentioned in the OT, given by God. Obedience to these commandments would not be a factor in the salvation of the Gentiles, but in their holiness, and their ability to fellowship with Jewish Christians, who at this time in Acts were still keeping the Law. The emphasis on “Holy Spirit” would bring to mind statements such as “You must be holy, for I, Yahweh your God, am holy.” (Lev. 19:2).

[For more information on the Holy Spirit and the gift of holy spirit, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Act 15:34

**“But it seemed good to Silas to remain there.”** This verse should be omitted from the text. It was a late addition, and even so, it has several variations. It was added to explain how Paul could have traveled with Silas if Silas went back to Jerusalem. However, Silas did go back to Jerusalem. First, it was “a necessary exigency of the commission which he had received.”[[95]](#footnote-26969) Silas would have to report back to Jerusalem about how things went in Antioch. Also, the fact that Acts 15:33 says “they were sent off” makes it clear that Silas traveled back with Judas to Jerusalem. Thus the attempt of some scribe to explain the apparent contradiction in Acts actually creates a contradiction. Silas may have returned on his own to Antioch some time later, or Paul could have sent for him before starting his missionary journey.

Act 15:37

**“John (who was called Mark).”** This “John” is much more commonly known as “Mark” and was the writer of the Gospel of Mark; he was not the apostle John, who is not mentioned in Acts 15. He is first introduced in Acts 13:5 as “John” and was the attendant to Barnabas and Paul, but left them and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13), but the reason he left is not explained. John Mark later became one of Paul’s helpers (Col. 4:10) and was very dear to Paul by the end of his life (2 Tim. 4:11). Mark was also with Peter (1 Pet. 5:13), who calls him a “son.”

Act 15:39

**“sharp disagreement.”** The Greek is *paroxusmos* (#3948 παροξυσμός) and it has three distinct definitions: 1. A rousing to activity, stirring up, provoking. 2. A state of irritation expressed in argument, sharp disagreement. 3. A severe fit of a disease, attack of fever, esp. at its high point: convulsion.[[96]](#footnote-27555) Here it means a sharp disagreement; in Hebrews 10:24 it means to stir up to action.

Barnabas was a pastor, and a Jewish Levite. His original name was Joseph, which means “He will add,” but the apostles recognized his pastoral ministry and renamed him. Acts 4:36 says: “Joseph, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas (which translated means, “Son of Encouragement”), a Levite, a man of Cyprus by race.” Although Barnabas disappears from Acts here, it does not necessarily mean he was wrong. He was a better judge of character than Paul in this case. Barnabas took John Mark and went to Cyprus (his home country) where he continued the work of the ministry. Paul later writes about Barnabas in 1 Corinthians 9:6, written later than this record in Acts. As for John Mark, he later became one of Paul’s helpers (Col. 4:10), and was very dear to Paul by the end of his life (2 Tim. 4:11). Mark was also with Peter (1 Pet. 5:13), who calls him a “son.” John Mark is best known for the Gospel of Mark, which he wrote.

**Acts Chapter 16**

Act 16:1

**“And he came.”** As Acts 16 opens up, Paul is traveling with Silas and Luke is not with him.

**“look”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Act 16:2

**“spoken of.”** The Greek is *martureō* (#3140 μαρτυρέω), to witness or testify to or about. Timothy was recommended by others, who gave a good testimony about him.

Act 16:4

**“Now while they.”** Paul and Silas had taken Timothy with them, so the “they” is now Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

**“decrees.”** The Greek is *dogma* (#1378 δόγμα), a noun that occurs 5 times in the New Testament and means: a formal statement concerning rules or regulations that are to be observed, thus a command, ordinance, or decision; an imperial declaration, a decree; something that is taught as an established tenet or statement of belief, doctrine, dogma.[[97]](#footnote-14033) The most common definition of the English word “decree” is an order having the force of law, and that definition does not exactly apply here, even though within the Christian community some leaders and congregations might try to enforce what the council declared about Christian activity. Today we generally think of Christian obedience to human councils to be a matter of personal choice rather than “obeying a law.” Today, people’s obedience to human church regulations is usually based on a feeling of duty, response to social pressures, and the charismatic influence of the leader. So because of that, some modern translations have “decisions” rather than “decrees.” But “decision” may be too weak here, especially as applied in the ancient world. Besides, the English word “decree” is also properly used of a religious ordinance enacted by a council. Especially in ancient times but often today as well, Christian leaders exercise considerable power over the lives of people in their congregation. So, for example, in 3 John 1:10, Diotrephes was throwing people he did not approve of out of his church. People were expected to obey the rules set forth by the apostles and church councils, hence, “decree” is a good translation here. The word *dogma* is also used in the New Testament for the decrees of Caesar, which did come with civil penalties for people who disregarded those decrees and thus broke the law (cf. Luke 2:1; Acts 17:7).

Act 16:6

**“And they went.”** The “they” here is at least Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Soon Luke will join them (Acts 16:10).

**“Phrygia and the region of Galatia.”** See commentary on Acts 18:23.

**“by the Holy Spirit.”** The Greek is *hupo ho hagios pneuma* (ὑπὸ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος) with *hupo* being with a genitive (the holy), thus meaning “by.” Paul was either forbidden by “the Holy Spirit” (i.e., by God); or he was forbidden “by way of the holy spirit,” referring to the gift of holy spirit. In the Greek the verse can be read either way, and it is hard to tell which is the “primary” meaning, although if there is one, the context and scope of the Scripture would point to it being “God.”

In the first century, before the doctrine of the Trinity confused Christian doctrine by making “the Holy Spirit” a separate Person in the Trinity, the distinction between “the Holy Spirit” and “the holy spirit” was not often as critical as we think it is today. In fact, in many cases it actually could be somewhat helpful to leave the meaning slightly ambiguous. Most of the time when it comes to guiding Christians, God (“the Holy Spirit”) or Jesus directs us by way of the gift of holy spirit (“the holy spirit”). Thus just having the phrase “THE HOLY SPIRIT” (in all capital letters as the early Greek texts would be) enabled readers to see both meanings, the Giver and the Gift, in the same phrase.

The Greek here in Acts 16:6 is the same as in Acts 13:4, where Barnabas and Saul were sent out, “by the Holy Spirit.” In that verse, as here, the gift of holy spirit could have been meant, but the more probable meaning, especially given the early Greek text, was God [the Holy Spirit], who communicated via His gift [the holy spirit]. Supporting evidence that the best way to translate Acts 13:4 as “the Holy Spirit” is Acts 13:2, where, τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον [“the Spirit, the Holy,” a more certain designation of God] spoke regarding Barnabas and Saul. Since God spoke in Acts 13:2, that increases the likelihood that it is God being referred to in Acts 13:4.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Act 16:7

**“Mysia.”** A region in the Roman province of Asia on the northwest coast of what is now Turkey. As a region, it did not have precise boundaries. After having visited the cities in southern Galatia where he founded churches, no doubt Paul would have liked to have gone west into Asia and preached in the major cities there such as Ephesus, but Jesus said not to preach there; as it turned out, Paul ended up going there some years later, on his third missionary journey.

It makes sense that having been forbidden to speak in Asia, Paul would have turned north, to northern Galatia or to Bithynia, which was a province on the Black Sea, but “the spirit of Jesus” did not permit them to go into Bithynia. The fact that Jesus did not want Paul to go north also sheds some light on the northern Galatian theory, that the Epistle to the Galatians was written to believers in northern Galatia. But in fact, there is no evidence that Paul ever even went to, much less founded churches in northern Galatia. In this case, Paul wanted to go north to Bithynia and Jesus told him not to go there.

[For more on Paul’s visits to the Galatian people and the Epistle to the Galatians, see the REV introduction to Galatians.]

**“the spirit of Jesus.”** This is a very Hebraic way of saying the power and presence of Jesus Christ. It is very similar to Genesis 1:2, which states, “And the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” [“Spirit” should be “spirit,” with a lowercase “s.”] In Genesis 1:2, the “spirit of God,” the active power and presence of God, moved upon the water. Here, Jesus, in his active role as head of the Church, guided Paul.

It is possible, but less likely, that “the spirit of Jesus” refers to the gift of holy spirit that Jesus received from God and started pouring out into believers when the Church started on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:33). Although we today seem to have some major problems sorting out what is meant in the verses that mention “spirit,” the believers in the first century were less confused. They understood that God gave the gift of holy spirit to Jesus, who gave it to his Church (Acts 2:33). They also understood that God and the Lord Jesus communicate with people through the gift of holy spirit. As the gift that Jesus gave, and the gift through which he operates, calling the gift of holy spirit, “the spirit of Jesus” seemed very natural. It was the spirit promised by, and sent by, Jesus to his Church (John 16:13; Acts 1:5, 8; 2:33). It seems very awkward to us to think that “the Holy Spirit” in Acts 16:6 is God, and “the spirit of Jesus” in Acts 16:7 is the gift of holy spirit that Jesus gives us, but it was not as awkward for the early readers of the Greek text who would seamlessly see both God and the gift of holy spirit in verse 6 and Jesus working in concert with God and via the gift of holy spirit in verse 7.

Act 16:10

**“we.”** Here the narrative of Acts changes pronoun usage from “he” (i.e., Paul), “him,” and “they” (Paul and those traveling with him) to “we” and “us.” Luke, the author of both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, joins Paul, and begins to write Acts in the first-person plural, “we.”

There are three “we” sections in Acts where Luke traveled with Paul; Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; and Acts 27:1-28:16. The first time Luke traveled with Paul is Acts 16:10-17, during Paul’s second missionary journey (Acts 15:40 through Acts 18:22). Luke joined Paul at Troas (Acts 16:10) and left him sometime at Philippi, the last “we” being Acts 16:17. For reasons unstated in the text, Luke was not arrested and imprisoned with Paul and Silas, and where he went after Philippi is not known. He might have stayed close to Philippi, because the next “we” section is Acts 20:5-21:18. Luke rejoined Paul in the middle of his third missionary journey when Paul came back to Philippi (Acts 20:6), and traveled with him back to Jerusalem, stopping at many cities. Luke is no longer recorded as being with Paul in Jerusalem after they met with James (Acts 21:18). Shortly after the meeting with James, Paul was arrested in the Temple in Jerusalem, and sent to Caesarea, where he spent two years in jail. Although Luke is not recorded as being there, it is likely that Luke stayed close by, sending Paul extra food and clothing, and tending to any needs he might have, because as soon as Paul was sent to Rome, Luke rejoined him (Acts 27:1). Luke traveled with Paul to Rome, and the last “we” is Acts 28:16, showing Paul and Luke entering Rome together. The book of Acts does not specifically say what happened to Luke, but the evidence seems to favor that Luke lived with Paul in the house they rented in Rome. It was certainly big enough to accept many guests, and when Paul wrote Colossians from this time in Rome, he sent greetings from Luke (Col. 4:14).

Act 16:11

**“So.”** The Western Text (see Stephens text) replaces the *de* (but, now, so, and) with *oun* (therefore). Later scribes changed the text in an obvious attempt to make Paul look better.[[98]](#footnote-18640) There is no necessary immediacy in *de,* but there is much more so in *oun*. That is not to say that *de* cannot happen immediately, or on the basis of verse 11, but it is not demanded by the word, whereas *oun* directly connects verses 10 and 11. This change is relatively small, but changing Scripture to make our heroes look better is bad business. Besides, as we stated earlier, the “so” does not preclude Paul’s immediate attention to the task at hand.

**“we.”** The “we” here is at least Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke.

**“ran a straight course.”** Paul would have been in a sailing ship, not one driven by oars, and it is common in sailing to speak of “running before the wind.”

**“Neapolis.”** Neapolis (*neos* = new; *polis* = city; “New City”) was a port city of the Roman province of Macedonia (before the Roman conquest it had been a Greek city of Thrace) on the western side of the Aegean Sea. It is about 10 miles (16 km) southeast of Philippi. Neapolis has the honor of being the first city in Europe ever reached by the apostle Paul. Besides being a port city, it was on the Egnatian Way, which was one of the major roads of the Roman Empire. The Appian Way (“Way” = Road) and the Egnatian Way were land and sea roads/routes. These two major routes joined together to form the Great East Road, which connected the Roman Empire and the Middle East.

The Appian Way began in Rome at the *miliarium aureum*, i.e., the “Golden Milestone” (many major Roman roads were marked by milestones, allowing travelers to tell how far they had traveled or how far they had to travel). From the Golden Milestone, it went south along the Italian coast, eventually cutting east across the Italian peninsula to Brundisium. Eastbound travelers then had to decide to cross the Adriatic Sea to either Dyrrhachium or Apollonia, cities in Macedonia (northern Greece), both of which were on branches of the Egnatian Way (the road was called the Egnatian Way as it crossed Greece). From the Adriatic coast of Greece, the Egnatian Way went east across the Balkan Mountains to Thessalonica. From Thessalonica, there were two routes heading east that travelers could take. They could go east through Macedonia into Thrace and to the strait of the Bosphorus, or they could go south, hugging the Grecian coastline and heading down into Achaia (usually Athens or Corinth), and then travel east to the Roman province of Asia and the rest of what is now Turkey.

The Appian Way was started in 312 BC by the Roman Caesar Claudius, who thought it would help Rome to establish trade with the Mediterranean cultures, and knew a paved, well-maintained road made it easier for people and goods (and armies) to travel through the empire. The Appian Way and Egnatian Way took generations to build but provided easy and usually safe east-west travel by the time of the apostle Paul.

Act 16:12

**“Philippi.”** Although Philippi was originally a Macedonian city, Macedonia (which we know as northern Greece), was conquered by Rome and Philippi became Roman. Thus, at the time Paul visited, Philippi was a Roman colony and an important city in Macedonia. It was located on the famous Roman road known as the Via Egnatia, which was constructed in the second century BC, and ran all the way across Greece, and then after one crossed the Adriatic Sea, on to Rome. Philippi was located about 10 miles inland from the Aegean Sea and the port city of Neapolis. At the time Paul visited Philippi, many of its citizens were retired Roman soldiers. That in part explained their love for purple and was no doubt a reason that Lydia, a seller of purple cloth, lived there. Philippi was a proud city and had received many honors. Perhaps the most notable was the *Ius Italicum*, which gave it rights that were equivalent to those of cities in Italy.

Philippi was well-known for being the scene of the battle between Octavius and Mark Anthony versus Caesar’s assassins, Brutus and Cassius. That battle put an end to the Roman Republic and led to the formation of the Roman Empire.

Act 16:13

**“And on the Sabbath day.”** This would have been the first Sabbath after Paul and Silas arrived in Philippi.

**“outside the gate by a riverside.”** The Gangites River (pronounced Gang-ites) was a little over a mile from the gate of the city of Philippi.

**“habitually used for prayer.”**[[99]](#footnote-26066) The word “*nomizō*” relates to law, custom, habit. It is translated as “assume” many times because people make assumptions based on what is done by law or custom. However, in this case, Paul did not “assume” there was prayer by the riverside. He would have asked in Philippi, and been told that prayer was made “by custom” at the riverside, thus the translation “habitually.”

**“and spoke to the women who had come together.”** Paul would not have spoken to the women if men had been there, so we can safely assume that there were no male Jews, or at least male Jews interested in worshiping God, in Philippi. Also, it took ten men, ostensibly heads of households, to form a synagogue according to Jewish law, and there was no synagogue in Philippi, so we know there were not ten Jewish households run by observant Jews in Philippi.

Act 16:14

**“God-fearing woman.”** Lydia was a Gentile woman living in Philippi who had become attracted to the worship of Israel’s God Yahweh. The fact that Lydia had already seen enough truth in Judaism to become interested shows that Lydia was searching for truth. And so, when she hears Paul proclaim the truth of the good news about Jesus, she believes and is converted. See commentary on Acts 13:43.

**“from the city of Thyatira.”** Thyatira is in western Turkey, at that time the Roman province of Asia.

**“a seller of purple cloth.”** Purple dye was rare and very expensive, so Lydia was not a common merchant of ordinary things, but a dealer in very valuable goods (see commentary on 2 Chron. 3:14). Philippi was a Roman colony founded to provide a home for retired Roman soldiers, so there would have been a brisk demand for purple cloth in Philippi.

**“kept listening.”** The Greek text says that Lydia “kept listening” and kept “paying attention” to what Paul was saying. The verbs indicate something that occurs over a period of time, not immediately, so Lydia came to believe after hearing and paying attention to Paul for some time. We do not know exactly how long that time was (Lenski says it would have occurred over a couple of Sabbaths[[100]](#footnote-24266)), but Paul was there for “some days” (Acts 16:12), and that could have been a few weeks. Or it could have been that Paul spent the day with some of the women or even met with them during the week and Lydia believed in a shorter period of time; the text is not specific.

**“The Lord opened her heart.”** The Lord Jesus cannot make someone believe, but he can work, in the person or through the circumstances, to open people to pay attention to the message of the Word. The Bible does not say specifically how he did that with Lydia to the end that she paid attention to Paul, but he did. Part of our prayers for “everyone” (1 Tim. 2:1) should be that the Lord opens their hearts to pay attention to the things of God, and then go on from that point to salvation and living the Christian life.

**“paying attention to.”** The Greek is *prosechō* (#4337 προσέχω), and has three basic definitions: 1) to be in a state of alert, i.e., be concerned about, care for, take care; 2) to pay close attention to something, i.e., pay attention to, give heed to, follow; 3) to continue in close attention to something, i.e., occupy oneself with, devote or apply oneself to.[[101]](#footnote-17763) As with any word with multiple meanings, the meaning in any given verse must be determined by the context and the scope of the subject. In this context, Lydia paid attention to what Paul was saying and then continued to pay attention to it and follow Paul’s guidance.

God always honors a person’s free will, and He cannot open a person’s heart to “respond” to the message against their will. He must wait for the person to believe. However, many theologians (Calvinists, etc.) teach that a person cannot believe in God unless God first gives them the power to believe, and so according to Calvinist theology, “respond” (which occurs in some English versions) would be an accurate translation of *prosechō* here, but that kind of Calvinist theology is in error.

[For more on errors in Calvinist theology, see Appendix 9: “On Calvinism and Predestination.”]

Act 16:15

**“And when she was baptized.”** This would have been a public baptism in water and confession of Christ, likely in the river that the women went to for prayer. Lydia was Paul’s first Christian convert in Europe. Although some commentators say she was the first Christian in Europe, that is unlikely. The Day of Pentecost was many years earlier, and people from Europe had been at Pentecost, and besides that, it is likely that other people besides Paul had taken the Good News to Europe, but none as purposeful as Paul, who did three missionary journeys spreading the Good News.

[For more on water baptism see commentary on Mark 1:4.]

Act 16:16

**“slave girl.”** The Greek word can mean a servant girl or a slave girl. The context determines which is more likely. Here, the woman was owned, so slave girl is correct.

**“spirit of divination.”** The Greek reads *pneuma puthōna*, “spirit of python.” The python spirit was the spirit that was reputed to possess the oracle of Delphi, the most famous oracle in ancient Greece. According to legend, a serpent, Python, lived in Phocis, a district of ancient Greece. Python was killed by Apollo, whose followers built a city and Temple to honor Apollo on the southern side of a limestone mountain called Parnassus. The city was called Pytho at first, and Delphi later. A natural cave in the mountain, called Pythium, was part of the Temple. Over the roof of the cave was placed a tripod throne, on which the priestess of Delphi sat. A hole in the roof of the cave and beneath the tripod supposedly brought the breath of Apollo up to the priestess, who then spoke at the inspiration of Apollo (hence the saying, *ex tripode*, used of obscure sentences spoken dogmatically). When the demon took control of the priestess, “Her face changed color, a shudder ran through her limbs, and her mouth. This excitement soon turned to fury. Her eyes sparkled, her mouth foamed, her hair stood on end, and almost suffocated by the ascending vapor, the priests were obliged to retain the priestess on her seat by force; then she began, with dreadful howlings, to pour forth detached words, which the priests collected with care, arranged them, and delivered them in writing to the inquirer… [The oracle] enjoyed the reputation of infallibility for a long time…”[[102]](#footnote-29530) The designation “python spirit” was later used of anyone who revealed the future, then it eventually degenerated to refer to ventriloquists as well. This slave girl had a python spirit and was delivered of it. There are prophets in the Bible who are said to have lying spirits (e.g. Micah 2:11; 1 Kings 22:22; Acts 16:16).

Act 16:17

**“Following after Paul and us.”** Paul’s companions at this time were Silas, Luke, and Timothy.

Act 16:18

**“And she did this for many days.”** This would have been very disturbing to Paul and his companions. It brought a mocking kind of attention to them that would have tended to keep otherwise inquisitive people away. So why did Paul wait “many days” to cast the demon out of the woman? Casting out a demon is a miracle (Mark 9:38-39), and miracles can only be done by revelation, when God (or Jesus) gives the revelation and provides the power to do the miracle. The text does not tell us what had to be delayed for the situation and social context to be properly prepared for Paul to cast out the demon, but we can be sure there was a reason that God did not immediately give Paul the revelation to cast out the demon.

It seems that one unstated reason was the salvation of the jailor. The fortune teller chanted her cry, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation,” for many days. Philippi proper was a relatively small town and was only about three-quarters of a mile long at its longest point, and considerably less than that in width, and the jail was more or less in the middle of the north side. So it is very possible that during those “many days” there was much discussion and debate in Philippi about what she was saying—that is, who was the “Most High God,” and what did it mean to be “saved.” The chief jailor would certainly have been a part of those discussions, and it seems that God used that to build a hunger in his heart to be saved and to take part in a wonderful afterlife, something that Roman mythology did not promise. The jailor asked Paul, “What must I do to be saved,” and he certainly did not learn about salvation from his Roman mythology background, so it seems certain that it was part of what he learned about during the “many days” that the slave girl talked about Paul’s showing “the way of salvation.” Interestingly, if God had given Paul the revelation to cast out the demon after only a day or two, the jailor would not have found out about salvation or developed a hunger to learn about it, and thus would have never asked Paul the question about how to be saved. This is a great example of when we humans wonder why God seems to be delaying answering our prayers (for certainly Paul, Silas, Luke, and Timothy prayed that the woman would stop following them) and we later find out that if God had not delayed answering us, then wonderful things—like the salvation of the jailor and his household—would not have happened.

[For more on miracles, see commentary on 1 Cor. 12:9 and 12:10.]

**“in the name of Jesus Christ.”** This phrase means, in essence, “by the authority of Jesus Christ.” It is a cultural phrase that refers to the authority a person has due to his relationship with the one being named, who in this case is Jesus Christ. In Christian culture, “the name of Jesus Christ” gave the user authority, just as using the name of any other ruler or great person would give the one who used it authority.

[For more on the name of Jesus Christ, see commentary on Acts 3:6.]

**“And it came out that very hour.”** This is an idiom that in this context means right then and there. The power of Jesus Christ was decisive. The demon had to leave right then.

Act 16:19

**“had gone out.”** The owners of the slave girl were not Christian, but they clearly understood that their slave had the power she had because of an indwelling demon. They were very angry when Paul commanded it to leave in the name of Jesus. This is a good example of how ignorance and greed can be very hurtful to people. The owners did not care about the woman, and actually probably thought that the demon was a blessing of some sort, bringing her notoriety.

**“they took hold of Paul and Silas.”** The slave girl’s owners saw Paul’s actions as an attack on their property. Why they only arrested Paul and Silas, but not Luke and Timothy as well, is not stated.

**“marketplace.”** The Greek word is *agora* (#58 ἀγορά), pronounced ag-or-'ah (not, ag-'or- ah), and the Greek word is simply transliterated into English. Agora is an interesting word to translate because it has two distinct meanings in the Bible: an oriental marketplace and a Greek or Roman agora.

When it is used in the Gospels, *agora* refers to the oriental marketplace, or bazaar. In the oriental marketplace there were rows upon rows of shops, all crowded together, or else there were narrow streets lined with shops. Thus “marketplace” is a good translation of “agora” in the Gospels.

In contrast, in a Greek or Roman city, the “agora” was the name of a specific part of the city (the Latin word is *forum*, from which we get the English “forum.” It is related to the word *foris*, meaning “outside,” because it was an outside area). The agora was the center of town and public life. It was an open area surrounded by shops. In larger towns, it could be an acre or more in size. The open area usually had an altar (for divining the will of the gods by sacrificing an animal and looking at its liver, or some other similar ritual), statues of the gods or prominent people, a judgment seat or place for a tribunal (which is why the people dragged Paul to an agora to be judged; Acts 16:19).

Like our “malls” today, the agora in a Greek or Roman city was more than a place to shop. It was a place to meet people, hang out, get the news, see what the local government was doing, eat, and, of course, shop. Translating *agora* as “marketplace” in Acts, while helping the average reader, does not really accurately communicate the meaning of the word. Eventually, to better understand the Bible, the reader should learn that “agora” referred to a specific place in town and what kind of things happened there—certainly not just shopping as the word “marketplace” implies. One final note: although it is true that Herod the Great did try to model some Jewish cities after Roman cities and build agoras in them, those cities were few, and the nature of the Jewish religion, being against pagan sacrifice, divining, and statues, made the Jewish agoras more like the oriental marketplaces than the agoras in Greek and Roman cities.

[For more information on the agora, see: *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*; *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; *Holman Bible Dictionary*.]

**“before the rulers.”** Roman law and justice were very detailed, with people in different positions doing different things. There were “rulers” who handled small cases, and that is where the owners of the slave girl first took Paul. Upon hearing the charges and something about the situation, the rulers sent Paul and Silas up the line of authority to the magistrates, who were authorized to deal with more serious cases that involved the breaking of Roman law (Acts 16:20).

Act 16:20

**“when they had brought them to the magistrates.”** The slaveowners brought Paul and Silas to the magistrates. There were usually two magistrates in a Roman town, and they were delegated to hear cases in which Roman law had been broken. Given the rage that the slaveowners felt against Paul, the charges they brought are not surprising. There’s not a single word about their slave girl, and of course not a single word about how they themselves would be losing income because she had been delivered from a demon (although they would not have thought about it that way). Instead, they emphasized the fact that Paul and Silas were Jews and were causing a disturbance, and beyond that, the slave owners trumped up a charge that Paul and Silas were promoting customs that were not legal for Romans to observe (Acts 16:21), despite the fact that there is no evidence in the text that that was being done and, given the character of Paul and Silas, would not have been being done. Sadly, it is common for people to lie and exaggerate in court cases, and that was being done here as well.

The fact that the slaveowners emphasized to the magistrates that Paul and Silas were Jews cannot be overemphasized. The emperor Claudius, who ruled Rome from AD 41-54, had recently expelled all the Jews from the city of Rome (Acts 18:2). Philippi had a large number of retired Roman soldiers and the magistrates themselves were almost certainly retired soldiers, and Roman colonies prided themselves on replicating Rome wherever they could. So at this time in history there was a decided prejudice against Jews, and that is almost certainly part of the reason why Paul and Silas were punished so harshly.

Act 16:22

**“and the magistrates tore their clothes off them.”** The Romans were so prejudiced against Jews that there was no actual trial. The magistrates heard the charges and assumed them to be true and unjustly punished Paul and Silas. It is quite possible that if the magistrates had taken the time to actually have a trial, Paul could have said he was a Roman citizen and spared himself and Silas a lot of pain. In any case, what the magistrates did was illegal and if word got out, it would make big trouble for the magistrates. They may well have lost their jobs and/or been beaten themselves. That is why when they found out Paul and Silas were Romans they were afraid (Acts 16:38).

**“and gave orders for them to be beaten with rods.”** The magistrates were generally accompanied by “lictors”—the Latin is literally “rod-carriers”—who carried rods with which to keep order in the court setting (which was often outdoors) and beat offenders who broke the law. F. F. Bruce writes: “The lictors were the official attendants of the chief magistrates in Rome and other Roman cities. They carried as symbols of office bundles of rods, with an axe inserted among them in certain circumstances—the *fasces et secures*—denoting the magistrates’ right to inflict corporal and, where necessary, capital punishment. It was with the lictors’ rods that the two missionaries were beaten on this occasion. It was not the only time that Paul had this treatment meted out to him: five or six years later he claims to have been beaten with rods three times (2 Cor. 11:25), although we have no information about the two other occasions.”[[103]](#footnote-32151)

Act 16:23

**“many blows.”** The Bible does not say how many, but we can safely assume that the backs of Paul and Silas were full of open wounds. The Romans were not known for their mercy in such circumstances.

Act 16:24

**“fastened their feet in the stocks.”** This would not have been really necessary to prevent Paul and Silas from escaping the prison, so we can assume that it was done to continue the punishment that the lictors had already begun. Roman stocks usually had many different holes for the feet, and often the feet were placed in such a way as to cause great discomfort and cramping, especially as the hours dragged on. Since nothing is mentioned about this in the text, we do not know the exact situation of Paul and Silas, but there is no reason to assume the jailor was in a mood to be merciful to them.

Act 16:25

**“about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing songs of praise.”** Paul and Silas are wonderful examples of how Christians should conduct themselves in horrific situations. It is very likely that they were singing and praying about God’s glory and power, and praying for their own deliverance, and also that the eyes of the Romans around them would be opened to salvation.

**“singing songs of praise.”** The Greek word *humneō* means to “sing a song in praise of or praise to someone.”[[104]](#footnote-31392) See usage in Heb. 2:12.

Act 16:26

**“there was a great earthquake.”** Obviously, this was no ordinary earthquake. It was an earthquake that showed God’s power, and also it was a potential release, not just of Paul and Silas, but of all the prisoners, because even if an earthquake could jar the prison doors open, it could not unfasten the stocks that held the feet of Paul and Silas, or the shackles that held the other prisoners.

Act 16:27

**“drew his sword and was about to kill himself.”** This seems extreme to us today, but in those Roman times, a jailor who was charged with keeping prisoners in jail was executed if they escaped. Note the execution of the jailors in Acts 12:19, when the angel let Peter out of prison.

Act 16:28

**“for we are all here.”** One of the less noticeable miracles of the event in the jail at Philippi is that none of the other prisoners escaped. Normally if the prison doors are open and the prisoners are free to move about, some of them would have run out of the jail and disappeared into the night. That did not happen, no doubt because it would have reflected badly on Paul and Silas, but also because it may well have cost the jailor his life. In any case, the specifics of why the prisoners did not run away are not described because the Bible focuses on the main theme now, which is Paul and the conversion of the jailor.

Act 16:29

**“And he asked for lights.”** The primary jailor, who is the focus of the record, would have also had assistants. We know nothing specific about them or what happened to them, but the jailor in charge would have asked them to bring torches, which they did.

Act 16:30

**“what must I do to be saved?”** In the Greek this is a purpose-result clause with *hina* and the subjunctive mood (see Word Study: “hina”). The man was asking, “What must I do for the *purpose* of getting saved, which *results* in my salvation?” There is both the sense of purpose and result in the jailor’s question.

In the record, the question “what must I do to be saved” seems to come out of nowhere, but that never is the case. The jailor had to have heard about “salvation” and everlasting life from somewhere. Even if he had not been exposed to Christian beliefs in the past, it is very likely that they had been discussed in Philippi due to the slave girl who chanted for many days, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17. See commentary on Acts 16:18).

Act 16:31

**“Believe in the Lord Jesus.”** This is a shortened version of what is stated in Romans 10:9. To be saved, a person must confess Jesus Christ is Lord and believe God raised him from the dead. Here in Acts 16:31, the verb *pisteuō* (#4100 πιστεύω), translated “believe,” is in the aorist tense in Greek, just like it is in Romans 10:9, and this is very important. The aorist tense indicates a one-time action. Paul told the jailor what he needed to do to be saved, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.” In other words, the one-time action of believing in Jesus gives Christians the guarantee that they will be saved.

Christians can have complete confidence that they will be saved when Christ returns because we are completely and irrevocably changed when we confess Christ as Lord and believe God raised him from the dead. When we confess and believe, we are born again, get a new divine nature, become new creations, are sealed with the holy spirit from God, have a guarantee of everlasting life, and more. These changes in us are immediate, but they happen inside us in the spirit realm and thus are not generally felt in our flesh. Most people feel the same the minute after they get born again as they did the moment before, even though there are huge spiritual changes inside them.

The only thing that Paul is recorded to have said to this jailor was to believe in the Lord Jesus and he would be saved. Why did Paul not mention that Jesus was raised from the dead? It seems clear that Paul did not need to say that because he had been in Philippi for “many days” witnessing about the Lord Jesus (Acts 16:18), and Philippi was not a very large city. It was actually less than a half mile from east to west and less than a mile from north to south. Also, the reason Paul was in jail and under the charge of the jailor was due to his Christian activities and for casting the demon out of a slave girl, something the jailor knew very well. So, Acts 16:31 is a good confirmation that in the Administration of Grace, all a person needs to do to be saved is confess that Jesus is Lord and believe God raised him from the dead.

Comparing Acts 16:31 with the time before the Administration of Grace shows us the dramatic change that occurred when the Administration of the Law came to an end and the Administration of Grace began (this change occurred on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2). Under the Law, to be saved a person had to have faith, but that faith had to be expressed outwardly in the way the person lived. Under the Law, and until the Day of Pentecost, being “born again” was not yet available, neither was being sealed with holy spirit or being guaranteed salvation; God started those things in the Grace Administration. We can clearly see this when we compare Acts 16:30-31 with Matthew 19:16-17.

In Matthew 19:16-17, a rich young ruler asked Jesus what he had to do to have everlasting life, and Jesus said that if he wanted everlasting life he needed to “keep the commandments.” Yet Romans 10:9, written to the Christian Church, does not say that, and when the jailor asked Paul what to do to be saved, Paul never mentioned keeping the commandments but said to believe in the Lord Jesus. So there was a huge change when the Law ended and the Age of Grace began. In the Administration of Grace, salvation is through faith in Christ and is obtained when a person confesses Christ as Lord and believes God raised him from the dead, at which time he is immediately born again and guaranteed salvation.

[For more information on how to be saved and how it fits with Acts 16:31, see commentary on Rom. 10:9. For more information on Christian salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.” For more information on the Administration of Grace, see commentary on Eph. 3:2.]

Act 16:33

**“And immediately he was baptized.”** This is a place where the social context of the text implies that the jailor and his household were baptized by having water poured on them. No Roman town would have the mikvahs that the Jewish towns had where people could be ceremonially cleansed by being immersed, and there is no indication that the family would make the journey out of town to the river at night to be immersed. There would have been a well or cistern somewhere in the vicinity, perhaps even in the prison courtyard itself, and the jailor would have been baptized by having water poured on him. It is very likely that at least some of the baptisms mentioned in Scripture were by pouring and not immersion (cf. Acts 8:38; 9:18; 16:33).

[For more about baptism and that it can be by immersion or by pouring water onto the head of the person, see commentary on Mark 1:4; also cf. Acts 8:38, which would also likely have been baptism by pouring the water.]

**“he and all his *household*.”** The biblical culture, much like the Asian culture today, was very collectivist, and the whole family often followed the lead of the father or the head of the household. We see that in this verse. Although preachers have sometimes taught this verse as if it were a promise that if the father believed his wife and children would believe too, that is not what this verse is saying. Western culture tends to be very individualistic, and just because a father or parent does something or believes something that does not mean the children will follow.

Act 16:34

**“And he brought them up into his house.”** The jailor could pretty much do as he pleased with his prisoners as long as he could produce them when called upon to do so by the magistrates. So he brought Paul and Silas to his own house with no fear that they would run away.

**“because.”** The participle is sometimes causal, and that is the case here. The jailor rejoiced, “because he had believed.” Belief in Christ should bring us great joy. The NIV gets the sense of the participle: “he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God.”

Act 16:35

**“lictors.”** The lictors were men who accompanied the magistrates and kept order and punished criminals (see commentary on Acts 16:22).

Act 16:37

**“men who are Romans.”** Paul’s claim to be a Roman citizen is not challenged in the biblical record, and usually was not challenged, because to claim to be a Roman citizen and then to be discovered as a liar was a death sentence.

Act 16:38

**“they were afraid.”** The magistrates had acted hastily and illegally, and they were right to be afraid of the consequences if their actions were discovered (see commentary on Acts 16:22).

Act 16:39

**“appealed to them.”** The Greek verb is *parakaleō* (#3870 παρακαλέω), and it has a wide range of meanings, many of which apply here, and this explains the large number of English translations in the different English versions, for example, “besought,” “consoled,” “apologized,” “begged,” “entreated,” “placated,” “appeased,” and “appealed to.” The magistrates did not want word of what they had done to get around to the other Romans in town.

**“they asked them repeatedly.”** The verb indicates they asked over and over.

**Acts Chapter 17**

Act 17:1

**“Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia.”** The “they” refers primarily to Paul and Silas, but Timothy was with them also, which explains why 1 Thessalonians was addressed from Paul, Silas, and Timothy (1 Thess. 1:1).

Both Amphipolis and Apollonia were on the Egnatian Way, the great Roman road that connected Rome with the Eastern Empire, but the reason Paul did not stop to evangelize there is clear from the last half of the verse and the first part of Acts 17:2. Apparently, neither city had a synagogue. Paul’s custom was to go into synagogues in cities he visited because that is where he could be most immediately effective. He had a common background with the Jewish people; the God-fearing Greeks who were there would have already been looking to the Law for truth, and his credentials of being from Jerusalem and even being trained by the well-known and greatly respected Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) would have given him some credibility.

**“Thessalonica.”** At the time of Paul, Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia, in northern Greece (Southern Greece was called Achaia, and Corinth was its capital). It was an important port city with the best harbor on the Thermaic Gulf, off the Aegean Sea, and it was also on the very important Roman thoroughfare, the Via Egnatia (“Egnatian Way”). Traveling from Rome, the Egnatian Way started at the city of Dyrrachium on the Adriatic Sea, ran east southeast to the Aegean Sea at Thessalonica, turned north and ran through Apollonia and then Amphipolis, then ran close to Philippi (although there was a less formal branch of the road that went through Philippi, which is likely one reason Paul stopped there), then kept going east to Byzantium (which became Constantinople and then Istanbul). The Egnatian Way covered a total distance of about 696 American miles (746 Roman miles; 1120 km). Like other major Roman roads, it was about 20 feet wide and paved with large polygonal stone slabs or covered with a hard layer of sand. Traveling on this great thoroughfare would have given Paul more safety than traveling on the backroads, would have taken him to the more populated cities, and provided opportunities to witness to others who were also traveling on the road.

Paul had stopped at Philippi and met with some Jewish women, and made his next stopping place Thessalonica, which had a synagogue, and also had some Greeks who were “God-fearers,” that is, Greeks who had adopted the Jewish religion but were not circumcised.

Act 17:2

**“for three Sabbath days reasoned with them.”** The visit of Paul, Silas, and Timothy to Thessalonica only lasted just over three weeks (three Sabbath days), and yet it had a tremendous impact, as we can see from Paul’s Epistles to the Thessalonicans. Christians must never underestimate the power of the Word of God spoken to a hungry heart. Indeed, 1 Thessalonians 1:5-7 shows that the believers in Thessalonica welcomed the Word of God and became examples to other believers in both Macedonia (northern Greece) and Achaia (southern Greece).

Act 17:3

**“explaining and setting before *them* that it was necessary…”** Paul worked hard to get the people in the places he visited saved; born again. This verse records him teaching in the synagogue in Thessalonica, and his message contains both elements of what it takes to be saved according to Romans 10:9: that Christ is Lord, and that God raised Jesus from the dead. That Jesus was lord is not explicitly stated in the verse because it did not need to be in the context of a first-century synagogue. The first-century Jews to whom Paul was speaking knew very well from many verses in the Old Testament that the Messiah (the Christ) would be “lord” and would rule over God’s creation (cf. Ps. 2:7-12; 110:1; Isa. 9:6-8; 11:1-5; Dan. 7:13-14; Mic. 5:2-5). What they needed to know was that the man named Jesus was in fact their Messiah, that the Messiah had to suffer and die (many Jews did not know this about the Messiah; cf. Matt. 16:22; John 12:34), and that God had raised Jesus from the dead. Paul specifically taught all those things.

**“from among the dead.”**[[105]](#footnote-11165) See commentary on Romans 4:24.

Act 17:4

**“God-fearing.”** See commentary on Acts 13:43.

**“not a few.”** Figure of speech; tapeinosis (demeaning, or understatement).[[106]](#footnote-22320) The number of prominent women who believed Paul is understated to magnify it.

[See figure of speech “tapeinosis.”]

**“prominent women.”** Women may not have had an outwardly prominent place, such as a seat in the senate, but as always, they had great influence. Not unexpectedly, some scribes had a problem with that and altered the text to “wives of prominent men.”[[107]](#footnote-19746) The alteration is easily dismissed, but it shows that there has been a bias against women in the Church.

Act 17:5

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ.

[For more information, see commentary on John 1:19.]

**“those who loitered at the marketplace.”** The word “marketplace” does not communicate the full meaning of the word agora. The Greek is *agoraios* (#60 ἀγοραῖος), and means those who stood idle at the agora. In Greek cities, the agora was an open area (usually a large square or rectangle) at the center of town where the town business was done, some civil court was held, some sacrifices made, and more. Men who had nothing to do but to hang around waiting for daily work, or who generally were troublemakers, went to the agora to see what was going on. The Romans had a somewhat similar place, the “forum.” The agora was usually surrounded by shops or temples, and as with any town square, the shops next to the agora were generally the most expensive in town.

[For a study of the agora, see commentary on Acts 16:19.]

Act 17:6

**“dragged.”** The Greek word is *surō* (#4951 σύρω), and means to “drag, drag away, pull, or draw.” The Jews fomented a mob that was angry and dangerous, and “assaulted” (“to come near with the intention of harm; attack”[[108]](#footnote-17487)) the house of Jason. When they could not find Paul, they grabbed the disciples they could find and dragged them to the agora (where the Jews got the rabble in the first place) before the rulers. There is every indication the “dragging” was literal. Although we today use “drag” as hyperbole to indicate we did not want to go (“I got dragged to the mall by my sister”), there is no indication that it was used that way in the first century, especially in this context.

Act 17:7

**“decrees.”** The Greek is *dogma* (#1378 δόγμα), see commentary on Acts 16:4.

Act 17:9

**“had taken money as a security.”** Literally, the words mean “had taken enough.” The Greek word *hikanos* (#2425 ἱκανός) means “enough, sufficient, adequate, considerable,” but the phrase, λαβόντες τὸ ἱκανὸν, is an idiom in the Greek, and referred to the sufficient amount of money that had to be given for a bond, bail, or security. Idioms in any language do not usually make good sense when translated literally, so it is the meaning of the idiom in the original language that must be translated into the receptor language.

In this instance, the Jews had incited a mob against Paul and his companions, who could not be found at the time, so the mob brought Jason to the rulers. Especially since Thessalonica was the largest city in Macedonia and the Roman capital of the province, the rulers did not want any trouble with Rome, especially when Paul was, according to the speakers of the mob, promoting that there was another king besides Caesar, one Jesus. The rulers of the city took a large sum of money from Jason to assure (or secure) that nothing would happen, which meant that Paul’s activities in the city would have to stop. This put both Paul and Jason in a bind because if Paul did defy the rulers and continue to preach, Jason would lose a sizeable amount of money. Paul had to leave Thessalonica at night to protect both himself and Jason (Acts 17:10), and it may also explain why Paul wrote that he was “orphaned” from the Thessalonian believers, as if he had been forcibly torn from them (1 Thess. 2:17-18). The literal meaning of *aporphanizō* (#642 ἀπορφανίζω) in 1 Thessalonians 2:17 is to be separated by becoming an orphan.

Act 17:10

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek for word “brothers” often includes men and women, and it does so here. Both the men and women of the church would have been involved with sending Paul and Silas on their way.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

Act 17:12

**“along with *many* of the Greek women of high standing.”** The adjective “many” is pulled forward from the previous clause, which says many of the Jews believed, which is immediately followed by kai (“also,” “along with”), indicating many of them also. Then the text shows that men believed also, “not a few.”

This is one of the many verses that were altered by scribes and copyists because of the anti-feminine bias that entered the early Church from the culture around them. The original text read καὶ τῶν Ἑλληνίδων γυναικῶν τῶν εὐσχημόνων καὶ ἀνδρῶν οὐκ ὀλίγοι. (also *many* of the prominent Greek women, and of the men, not a few”). In codex Bezae, a fifth-century manuscript, the text was altered to καὶ τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ τῶν εὐσχημόνων ἄνδρες καὶ γυναῖκες ἱκανοὶ ἐπίστευσαν (“and many of the Greeks and men and women of high standing believed.”[[109]](#footnote-29961)) This shows us that by the 400s AD it was offensive enough to some scribes that the women were referred to as “prominent” and were placed before the men, that they would change the text so that the men and women were both of high standing and the men came before the women. The NT dramatically elevated the position of women in the family, the Church, and society.

[For more about women’s position, see commentaries on Acts 18:26; Rom. 16:7; 1 Cor. 7:2; 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:11, 12; 3:2; 5:14 and 1 Pet. 3:7. Also, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

Act 17:14

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek word for “brothers” often includes men and women, and it does so here. Both the men and women of the church would have been involved with sending Paul on his way. We can tell women would have been involved from Acts 17:12 when the women of high standing believed.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

Act 17:15

**“Athens.”** Athens was the largest city in Greece, and controlled a region called Attica, which was very fertile and also had rich mineral deposits of silver, lead, and marble. The most well-known building in Athens is the Parthenon on the Acropolis. Inside the Parthenon stood a huge statue of the city’s protector-goddess Athena, who was the goddess of wisdom, the arts, courage, inspiration, civilization, law and justice, mathematics, strength, strategy, and crafts. She was a warrior goddess, but for righteous warfare; the defense of home and society.

Act 17:16

**“his spirit was stirred up within him.”** This phrase seems to be an example of the figure of speech amphibologia, giving the verse a beautiful double meaning. The amphibologia is caused due to the fact that “spirit” can have two very different meanings, both of which are true in this instance. One use of “spirit” is our human thoughts and emotions, the other use of “spirit” is the gift of holy spirit born inside each believer.

[See figure of speech “amphibologia.”]

The phrase “was stirred up” is translated from a Greek passive verb, indicating that something stirred up, or aroused, Paul’s “spirit.” On a physical level, the thing that stirred up Paul’s “spirit,” that is, his thoughts and emotions, was all the idols he saw. However, on a spiritual level, what stirred up Paul’s “spirit,” that is, the gift of holy spirit born within him, was the Lord Jesus, who was urging him to take a stand against all that idolatry and ungodliness, and was provoking Paul by means of the gift of holy spirit born inside him.

Act 17:17

**“God-fearing.”** For the use of “God-fearing” here in Acts 17:17, see commentary on Acts 13:43.

**“marketplace.”** The Greek word translated “marketplace” is *agora*, which was much more than just a marketplace. For more on *agora*, see commentary on Acts 16:19.

Act 17:18

**“foreign divinities.”** The word for “divinities” is *daimonion* (#1140 δαιμόνιον), which for the New Testament authors meant “demons,” that is, evil spirits. However, here *daimonion* must be understood from the viewpoint of the Athenians, who would not have used the term to refer to demonic forces but to standard divinities.[[110]](#footnote-26873) The Greeks and Romans recognized the existence of spirits, and one of their names for them was “demons,” but they thought that, just like people, a demon could be good or bad, or sometimes good and sometimes bad. The use of “demons” here in Acts 17:18 gives us a look into the mind and word usage of these Greek philosophers. “This is the only place in the NT where *daimonia* has the neutral Greek sense ‘divine beings’ rather than the normal NT sense of ‘evil spirits.’”[[111]](#footnote-17775) The Athenians were so immersed in polytheism that they assumed Paul was just preaching about another set of gods.

**“Jesus and the resurrection.”** It is likely that the Athenians thought “the Resurrection” was a foreign god.[[112]](#footnote-14680) The Greek word *anastasis* (#386 ἀνάστασις) was also a female name and the Greeks were accustomed to turning concepts, such as Fate, into female gods. They had no conception of the one true God, and believed that other lands each had their own peculiar divinities. This is why they used the plural, “foreign divinities;” they thought Paul was preaching two gods, Jesus and Anastasis.

Act 17:22

**“very religious.”** The Greek is *deisidaimonesteros* (#1174 δεισιδαιμονέστερος; from *deidō* (δείδω) to fear, and *daimōn* (δαίμων) deity, or in the New Testament “demon” (although to the Greeks it just referred to a god)). It is used both in a good sense as “very devout” or “very religious,” and in a bad sense as “too superstitious.” Paul was trying to win the hearts of the people, so in this context, it should be “very god-fearing,” “very devout,” “very religious,” etc. The Greeks would have already been suspicious of Paul, who was both a Jew and from out of town, so if he started his speech to them by insulting them, they would have ignored him completely. Instead, he pointed out to them that they were “very devout,” something they were proud of, and something which would have gotten their attention.

The Athenians were indeed “very god-fearing.” The Roman Petronius said that it was easier to find a god than a man in Athens, and Pausanias, a traveler and geographer from the second century, said there were more images in Athens than in the rest of Greece combined. Wiersbe correctly says, “He [Paul] began politely by saying, “I see that you are very religious” (not “too superstitious” as in KJV). He called attention to an altar dedicated “TO AN UNKNOWN GOD,” and he used this object to preach to them the True God about whom they were ignorant.” Paul would then continue to show these Athenians that he was worthy of their attention and thinking soundly by quoting one of their own poets.

Act 17:24

**“shrines.”** This is the same Greek word usually translated “sanctuary,” *naos* (#3485 ναός). However, because the context deals with pagan worship, “shrine” is a better translation: the word “can be understood in the more restricted sense *shrine,* where the image of the goddess stood.”[[113]](#footnote-31279)

Act 17:28

**“in him.”** This is the Greek “static in,” (*en* [#1722](https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/G1722/kjv) ἐν) referring to sphere of relationship (see commentary on Eph. 1:3). In this case, Paul’s use of “in him” and the meaning of the phrase, given his pagan Greek audience, was wider than we normally see in Scripture. To any given person in his audience it could have meant, “in relation to him,” “in connection with him,” or even “in union with him.” Thus the phrase is just left as “in him” in the REV.

**“some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also his offspring.”** The quotation of being God’s offspring can be attributed to at least two Greek poets, Epimenides the Cretan and Aratus from Cilicia. That Paul quoted these poets shows that there is some truth in secular writings, and occasionally those writings can be used to help convince people of the truth of the Bible. It seems Jude did the same thing with the book of Enoch (Jude 1:14; see commentary on Jude 1:14).

Act 17:29

**“divine nature.”** The Greek word is *theios* (#2304 θεῖος), and in this context, it is a substantive—an adjective being used as a noun. It also occurs in 2 Peter 1:4, where it is translated as “divine nature.” An adjective can be masculine, feminine, or neuter, and in this case, it is neuter, so it is not referring to God or a god, in which case it much more likely would have been masculine. A. T. Robertson writes, “*To theion* is strictly ‘the divine’ nature.”[[114]](#footnote-11647)

Although there are many Bible versions that translate *theios* as if it meant “God,” many Bible versions recognize that is not what the verse is saying, and they translate it as God’s nature, or essence. Cf. “God’s essence” (CJB); “the divine nature” (HCSB, Goodspeed,[[115]](#footnote-31477) and R. C. H. Lenski[[116]](#footnote-21831)); “the Divine Nature” (NASB, NKJV, and A. Nyland[[117]](#footnote-24223)); “His nature” (C. Williams, and Weymouth).

The argument Paul is making is a sound one. Children have the nature of the parent. Since we are God’s children, we should not think that God’s nature is like that of the idols around Athens; metal, wood, and stone. Our nature is living and vital, and so the God who created us should be living and vital as well. After making that point, Paul makes a very wise shift, because Athens was covered with idols and Paul did not want to insult the people, he wanted to win them. So he continued his speech by saying that in past times people were not generally aware of what he was saying, and God overlooked that, but now, at this time, God commands everyone to repent and thus prepare for the Day of Judgment.

If we were to make the same kind of argument today that Paul was making some 2,000 years ago, we would say that if we believe that humans are somehow intrinsically valuable as humans, then we cannot have “descended” mechanistically without design from an explosion billions of years ago (the “Big Bang”) and that somehow mineral substances that form the rocks, dirt, and sand around us became alive and formed the life on earth including humans. If that theory of mechanistic evolution is true, then humans are no more valuable than the handful of dirt that they naturally return to when they die.

Act 17:31

**“in which he will judge the inhabited world.”** The phrase “inhabited world” comes from the Greek word *oikoumenē* (#3625 οἰκουμένη), which refers to the inhabited earth or the inhabitants of the earth, the people, or to the part of the earth inhabited by the Greeks as distinct from the lands inhabited by the non-Greeks. In Roman times it often referred to the Roman empire or the people in the Roman empire. Occasionally it is used of the whole earth or the people of earth, as it is here in Acts 17:31.

**“by the man whom he has appointed.”** At some future time, all the dead people who have ever lived will be raised from the dead and judged by God’s appointed judge, Jesus Christ. Jesus knew this was going to be the case even before his death and resurrection, so he said, “…the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22; cf. Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:16). There are many verses that say that people will be judged for how they live (e.g., Eccl. 11:9; 12:14; Matt. 12:36; 16:27; Rom. 2:16; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Pet. 4:4-5).

[For information on dead people being truly dead, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more on the resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15.]

**“judge … righteously.”** The phrasing in Greek is in the dative case; it is the preposition *en* and the word usually translated “righteousness,” *dikaiosunē* (#1343 δικαιοσύνη). This usage is most likely a dative of manner, meaning, “God will judge the world in a manner that is righteousness, or righteously.”[[118]](#footnote-16921) The dative of manner is meant to answer the question, “how will God judge the world?” He will judge it righteously, justly.

**“from among the dead.”**[[119]](#footnote-29943) See commentary on Romans 4:24.

Act 17:32

**“some mocked.”** The Greeks did not believe in a physical resurrection from the dead, they believed that the soul lived on after the body died.

**Acts Chapter 18**

Act 18:1

**“came to Corinth.”** Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians shortly after arriving in Corinth, and 2 Thessalonians not too long after that.

Act 18:5

**“wholly occupied with the word.”** The Greek word translated “wholly occupied” is *sunechō* (#4912 συνέχω) and in this context, it means “to occupy someone’s attention intensely; to be occupied with or absorbed in.”[[120]](#footnote-18641) It can also mean to “impel to action; direct; or urge on.” Even though Paul was working with Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:3), he was nevertheless wholly absorbed in the message and preaching of the word. The emergence of the textual variant “pressed in the spirit” as seen in versions like the KJV is likely the result of a scribal addition in the margin of a later manuscript. The word “spirit” (*pneuma*) was then either accidentally or intentionally copied from the margin into the verse in place of the word “word” (*logos*) at some later time by a copyist.[[121]](#footnote-13051)

Act 18:6

**“insulted.”** The Greek verb *blasphēmeō* (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation.

[For more on *blasphēmeō*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3.]

Act 18:7

**“God-fearing.”** See commentary on Acts 13:43.

Act 18:12

**“While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia.”** According to the Roman records, Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, southern Greece, from July of 51 to July of AD 52.

**“Jews.”** This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ.

[For more information, see commentary on John 1:19.]

**“judgment seat.”** The Greek is *bēma* (#968 βῆμα), a seat of judgment that can result in punishment or rewards.

Act 18:13

“**worship God.”** The Greek word translated as “worship” is *sebomai* (#4576 σέβομαι (σέβω)), which means “to express in gestures, rites, or ceremonies one’s allegiance or devotion to deity.”[[122]](#footnote-29463) *Sebomai* is not the usual word translated as “worship,” which is *proskuneō* (#4352 προσκυνέω), which is a compound word built from the preposition *pros*, “to, toward,” and the verb *kuneō*, ‘to kiss,’ and generally refers to the custom of bowing down before or prostrating oneself before a person of higher rank or authority (see commentary on Matt. 15:9).

Act 18:17

**“Sosthenes.”** When Paul came to Corinth, Crispus was the ruler of the synagogue (Acts 18:8), but he believed in Christ and either stepped down voluntarily or was forced out of the position, and Sosthenes took over as ruler of the synagogue, as we see here in Acts 18:17. Sosthenes stood firmly against the Good News and teaching about Jesus Christ as Messiah, and even dragged Paul before Gallio, the regional governor, to get him to stop his evangelistic activities (Acts 18:12-17). Nevertheless, something Paul and/or the Christians of Corinth said or did eventually won Sosthenes over, and he was with Paul in Ephesus when Paul wrote the First Epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:1).

Act 18:18

**“from there to Syria.”** This is a summary statement. Paul did not go directly from Corinth to Antioch in Syria. Even in Acts 18:18 itself, we see he went first to Cenchreae. He went to Israel before Antioch in Syria. He landed at Caesarea, the main port of Israel, then traveled inland to Jerusalem, then went north to Antioch in Syria, which he may have done by boat or by land, Scripture does not say (Acts 18:22). Knowing the ships of the day, which were usually quite small by our standards, it is possible he landed for the night and/or for supplies at a number of ports before reaching Ephesus, especially since Act 18:19 indicates they arrived at Ephesus, which would seem to indicate they stopped at other places first. In fact, there is no indication that the boat he was on was going from Corinth/Cenchreae all the way to Caesarea. Paul likely had to take a number of different ships to reach Israel.

**“Cenchreae.”** Cenchreae (sometimes spelled “Cenchrea”) was the port city on the eastern shore of the Isthmus of Corinth, which was the narrow isthmus that connected the lower part of the province of Achaia in what is now Greece, where Sparta was, with the northern part of Achaia, where Athens was. Cenchreae was the port that one would take from the area of Corinth to parts east, including Turkey, Israel, and Egypt. The Isthmus of Corinth itself is about 4-8 miles (6.5 to 12 km) wide, depending on where you cross it. Cenchreae was on the east side of the Isthmus, on the Saronic Gulf, which led out to the Aegean Sea. There was a good port on the west side of the Isthmus of Corinth as well, known as the Lechaeum, that was located on the Gulf of Corinth which led out to the Ionian Sea (the Adriatic Sea is north of the Ionian Sea and the Gulf of Corinth). The center of the city of Corinth was about 2 miles (3 km) east of the Gulf of Corinth and the west side of the isthmus.

The Isthmus of Corinth was so narrow at its narrowest part that in ancient times there was a wooden track across it known as the Diolkos—a primitive type of train track—that ran from the east side port of Cenchreae to the west side port of Lechaeum, and smaller boats were pulled up onto the track and then pulled by draft animals across it, saving them the time and danger of sailing around the Peloponnese peninsula to head west to ports in Italy and beyond. Since Paul was headed east, and first stopped at Ephesus in Turkey (Acts 18:19), it made perfect sense that he would be in Cenchreae and leave for Ephesus from there.

Act 18:22

**“And when he had landed at Caesarea, he went up *to Jerusalem* and greeted the church.”** Verses such as this one require the reader to be familiar with the geography of the Mediterranean. Paul sailed from Ephesus, which at his time had its own harbor not far from the city, eastward to the major port city of Israel, which is Caesarea. From there “he went up and greeted the church.” Going east and uphill from the coast, Paul would have traveled to Jerusalem, the headquarters of the Christian Church, and where some of the apostles, especially James, were located. From Jerusalem, he traveled back “down” (not “south” as in English, for he went north but downhill) to Antioch, where he had begun his second itinerary journey a couple years earlier. Robertson gets it correctly: “He went up and saluted the church (*anabas kai aspasamenos tên ekklêsian*). The language could refer to the church in Caesarea where Paul had just landed, except for several things. The going up (*anabas*, second aorist active participle of *anabainō*) is the common way of speaking of going to Jerusalem which was up from every direction save from Hebron. It was the capital of Palestine much like how people in England today speak of going up to London. Similarly, ‘he went down to Antioch’ (*katebē eis Antiocheian*, second aorist active indicative of *katabainō*) is more appropriate when leaving Jerusalem than when departing from Caesarea. Moreover, there was no special reason for this trip to Caesarea, but to Jerusalem it was different. Here Paul saluted the church in the fourth of his five visits after his conversion (Acts 9:26; 11:30; 15:4; 18:22; 21:17). The apostles may or may not have been in the city, but Paul had friends in Jerusalem now. Apparently, he did not tarry long, but returned to Antioch to make a report of his second mission tour as he had done at the close of the first when he and Barnabas came back (Acts 14:26-28). He had started on this tour with Silas and had picked up Timothy and Luke, but came back alone. He had a great story to tell.”[[123]](#footnote-28029)

Act 18:23

**“the Galatian region and Phrygia.”** The astute reader will notice that here in Acts 18:23, the description of the area is slightly different than that description in Acts 16:6. Why is there a difference in the way the territory is referred to? Why did Luke change his wording? William Ramsay gives us the reason: “He did so because the phrase in Acts 16:6 would be incorrect in 18:23. The country denoted by the phrase in Acts 16:6 is that which was traversed by Paul after leaving Lystra: it is, therefore, the territory about Iconium and Antioch, and is rightly called Phrygo-Galatic, ‘the part of Phrygia that was attached to Galatia.’ But the country which is meant in Acts 18:23 includes Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, and could not rightly be called ‘Phrygo-Galatic.’ …[The writer] He avoids the difficulty by using the simple phrase ‘the Galatic country,’ after traversing which Paul would reach Asian Phrygia.”[[124]](#footnote-29027)

Act 18:25

**“great enthusiasm.”** The Greek text is more literally that Apollos was “glowing hot in spirit,” where “spirit” refers to one’s emotions and attitude (see commentary on Romans 12:11). Apollos had great enthusiasm for the work of the Lord.

Act 18:26

**“Priscilla and Aquila.”** This is the reading of the earliest and best manuscripts, not “Aquila and Priscilla,” as some later texts and the KJV have. Metzger writes: “Apparently the Western reviser desired to reduce the prominence of Priscilla.”[[125]](#footnote-15504) As the Church developed, the attitude about women, that they were inferior to men, came back into the accepted doctrine of the Church, so it is not unusual that a later scribe would “adjust” the text so that the man came first in the list. That God put Priscilla first here is very important in understanding that in the New Testament, God elevated the status of women so that men and women were “one” in Christ (Gal. 3:28). Priscilla (this is the diminutive of her proper name, Prisca, which Paul used) and Aquila are always mentioned together, and four of the six times they are mentioned, her name precedes his. Although the Bible does not say why Priscilla is usually named first, the two most common explanations are that she was of higher rank in Roman society or she was more prominent in the Church than he was.

This verse in Acts is also important because it gives good evidence that women were not forbidden to instruct men, as is often taught in the Church today. It not only shows Priscilla instructing Apollos but can even mean she took a leading role in doing so: “But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and expounded to him the way of God more accurately” (cf. commentaries on 1 Tim. 2:11 and 2:12).

Act 18:27

**“he intended to go across into Achaia.”** Apollos intended to go across the Aegean Sea to Achaia, where Corinth and Athens were. We know he did go to Corinth (Acts 19:1; 1 Cor. 1:12).

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek word for “brothers” often includes men and women, and it does so here.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

**“had believed through grace.”** In the Greek text, the word “grace” can go with “helped” or “believed.” Although some scholars think that the verse is saying that Apollos helped the believers by grace, the majority of commentators and translators believe that “grace” goes with “believed,” and that therefore the verse is saying that the people “believed through grace.” But what does “believed through grace” mean?

In one sense, everyone who believes, believes and gets saved through grace. But that is such a fundamental truth that it is not what the text is saying here, especially since there are lots of places in the Bible that speak of people believing and being saved, and this is the only verse that says people believed by grace. This verse is parallel in meaning to what Jesus told Peter when Peter said, “You are the Christ,” and Jesus responded, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 16:16-17).

Up to that point in Jesus’ ministry, there had been some evidence that Jesus was the Messiah, but powerful prophets and miracle workers had been around before, and they were not “the Christ.” So, although there was evidence that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, it took God revealing it to a person for them to be certain, and that is what had happened to Peter. His statement, “You are the Christ” was not a guess or an “I hope so” statement. He knew it, and Jesus knew he knew it, which is why Jesus answered the way he did instead of saying something like, “Good guess, Peter. You are right!”

The people of Corinth, especially some of them, believed “by grace” in the sense that they did not have all the answers to the difficult verses and tough questions that were being asked by the Jews. They could not refute the Jews using Scripture the way Apollos did (Acts 18:28). So there were reasons to doubt that Jesus was the Christ, but through prayer, desire to know, and grace, those believers saw through the intellectual fog. Although they could not explain all the verses or what happened to Jesus and why he suffered the way he did, they heard the voice of the Lord in their heart and believed “through grace.”

This should be a great lesson to Christians. There are many difficult verses and concepts in the Bible and theologians have been arguing over them for millennia. Most people are not strongly educated in Scripture and could easily be confused over what to believe. Christians need to be confident that God and Jesus really want people to be saved and will help uneducated people learn the truth if it is presented to them with faith, love, and simplicity. Paul was an educated rabbi and could have expounded many intricate truths to the people of Corinth, who were all unbelievers when he arrived there. But instead of fine-sounding arguments, he preached the simplicity of Christ crucified and founded the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 2:1-5). Christians are ambassadors for Christ, and we need to be confident that the Lord will help hungry people believe if we reach out to them in faith and love with the simple and straightforward message of Christ.

**Acts Chapter 19**

Act 19:1

**“higher districts,”** This is a very exact geographical description. In the first century, the Romans made a distinction between the higher and lower regions of Phrygia. The great east-west trade route went through lower Phrygia, which, while easier for wheeled traffic such as carts, was a longer route. Paul took the shorter route through the mountains and the higher region, which, while being a more challenging hike, also took less time because it was shorter. Some translations say “inland country” or “interior,” and while that is true, because the higher territory was further inland and away from the coast, the more proper translation refers to the altitude (cf. “upper coasts” KJV; “upper country” NASB; “upper parts” Rotherham, YLT).

**“Ephesus.”** One of the major port cities of the Mediterranean Sea, and a very large city. At the time Paul was there, it may have had a population of 150,000-175,000 people, although older estimates are higher.

**“came to Ephesus and found some disciples.”** It is debated by scholars whether or not these were disciples of Jesus, that is, had they believed in Jesus or were they disciples of someone else. The evidence is that they were disciples of Jesus. Luke regularly uses “disciples” to mean disciples of Jesus, and Acts 19:2 shows they were disciples of Jesus because Paul asked if they received holy spirit when they believed. Since a person only received holy spirit into manifestation when they believed in Jesus, not John or anyone else, the clear implication is that these men had believed in Jesus. Furthermore, after learning that these men had not received the spirit, Paul did not instruct them about Jesus the way Peter instructed Cornelius about Jesus (Acts 10), rather he laid hands on them so they could manifest the gift of holy spirit.

There are still many unanswered questions about who these disciples were and how Paul found them. It seems he did not find them in the synagogue because the wording, “found some disciples” makes it seem like he had to look for them, and the synagogue would have been the natural place to start; besides, it would not have been likely they would have been very welcome in the synagogue if they were openly disciples of Jesus.

Were they disciples of Apollos? If so, why is Apollos not mentioned and why would Apollos not have taught them the new light he learned from Priscilla and Aquila? If not, was it because although Apollos had spoken in the synagogue he did not have the time to build a following before he left for Corinth? After all, Apollos had been teaching in Ephesus (Acts 18:25-26) and the Bible tells us he gained disciples at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:12), so Apollos was a teacher who trained disciples. It is possible that they had been introduced to Christianity by Apollos but he was simply not mentioned for some reason; perhaps because these disciples got separated from him before Apollos learned about the holy spirit, after all, Ephesus was a very large city. Or perhaps Apollos left for Corinth immediately after being taught by Priscilla and Aquila.

Were these disciples converts of Priscilla and Aquila? Likely not, even though Priscilla and Aquila had stayed in Ephesus after Paul had gone on to Israel and Syria (Acts 18:19). But Priscilla and Aquila knew about the holy spirit so it is highly unlikely they had taught these disciples who did not know about the holy spirit. The Bible does not fully inform us about the travels of Priscilla and Aquila. We know they left Rome and went to Corinth where they met and were instructed by Paul (Acts 18:1-4, 18). Then they left Corinth and traveled with Paul to Ephesus (late 51 or early AD 52), and when Paul left Ephesus they stayed there (Acts 18:18-19). We also know they were in Ephesus by the end of the more than two years that Paul ministered there (Acts 19:10; c. AD 55) because they had a church in their home there by that time (1 Cor. 16:19). It seems logical and likely that Priscilla and Aquila had simply stayed in Ephesus for the about four years between Paul’s departure from there during his second missionary journey and his arrival again on his third missionary journey. It is possible, however, that they had gone back to Corinth or another city after a while, but then Paul asked them to return to Ephesus to help him with the work that was growing so quickly. In any case, after Paul left Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila did too, and went back to Rome, because later on during this, his third missionary journey, when Paul was in Corinth or Cenchreae, he wrote Romans and addressed them in Romans 16:3. They likely left Rome after the great fire of Rome in July of AD 64 when Nero was having so many Christians arrested and martyred, and they eventually ended back up in Ephesus, where they were when Paul wrote 2 Timothy (AD 66 or AD 67), shortly before he was martyred by Nero.

So exactly who these disciples were, and how they got their start is unknown. Ephesus was such a large emporium with many people coming and going, these men could have come from many different places in the Roman empire. The fact that God does not tell us more about them means that how these men came to believe in Jesus is not important in understanding the record. It is possible that the reason this record is important is not that these were the first or only disciples in Ephesus—because we know they were not—but because Ephesus was a “spiritual power struggle” town, in which the dark powers of magic were pitted against the power of God. Magic was deeply entrenched in the culture of Ephesus, and in that situation, it generally takes more than just words to convince people to turn from darkness to light. Thus, in the particular social context of the Word moving in Ephesus and also out from there, the fact that people who believed in Jesus manifested the power of the holy spirit was essential to outreach. It certainly had been in Corinth (1 Cor. 2:4-5). Jesus said believers would get power when they got the gift of holy spirit (Acts 1:8), and it was from Ephesus that Paul wrote to the Corinthians and said, “I want all of you to speak in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy…” (1 Cor. 14:5).

Modern Christians can learn from Paul’s example. Every Christian has the gift of holy spirit born in them and the potential to manifest its power. We should certainly take advantage of that power in our outreach.

Act 19:2

**“receive holy spirit.”** This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God.

[For more information on the “holy spirit,” see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” and see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Act 19:3

**“Then with what kind of baptism were you baptized?”** This sentence is hard to translate without giving the wrong idea, and the words are packed with meaning. The sentence is more literally, “Into what, then, were you baptized,” but the Greek word *eis*, “into,” (#1519 εἰς), is being used in the “static sense” and here means “in connection with” or “in relation to,” not “into” as if motion was being indicated (cf. commentary on Rom. 6:3).[[126]](#footnote-14741) That would make the literal translation very awkward: “In connection with what, then, were you baptized?”

Paul was not asking, “How were you baptized,” as many versions say, as if he were asking whether or not they were baptized in water. Actually, as Newman and Nida write: “he was asking them what was the meaning or significance of their baptism. And the answer that they give to the question is ‘the baptism of John,’ by which they indicate that the meaning of their baptism was the same as that which John the Baptist had proclaimed.”[[127]](#footnote-29854) R. C. H. Lenski adds, “And ‘what’ (neuter gender) shows that Paul had in mind, ‘in connection with what name?”[[128]](#footnote-27377) This explains why the disciples answered, literally, “In connection with (*eis*) John’s baptism,” giving the name of John. For ease of reading we just have, “With John’s baptism.” We might say more fully, “It had to do with John’s baptism.”

The Greek sentence is hard to translate in a way that gives us the correct meaning in English. That is due in part to the difficulty of the sentence construction and that the words are pregnant with meaning, but it is also due to our general misunderstanding of baptism. If we translate the sentence, “Into what then were you baptized,” the automatic answer we give is “water.” If we translate the phrase “How were you baptized,” again, we think “water.” Even if we are a little closer to the Greek meaning and translate, “What kind of baptism did you receive,” we still tend to think the answer to the question is “water.” But the disciples did not answer saying “water;” they understood the question and answered that they were baptized in connection with John’s baptism, which, while the element was water, the baptism was a “baptism of repentance” (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 13:24; 19:4).

John baptized with a “baptism of repentance,” which is a genitive of relation, meaning a baptism related to repentance, specifically a baptism that symbolized repentance. John’s baptism was a symbolic act that portrayed and symbolized in a visible way the invisible cleansing that had occurred in God’s sight when the person repented.[[129]](#footnote-11161) Thus, if we were to paraphrase and expand the meaning of Paul’s sentence, we might say something like: “In connection with what name were you baptized, and what did it mean?” The answer, “In connection with John’s baptism” was enough, because Paul knew that John’s baptism was a baptism that symbolized repentance.

Paul was genuinely shocked when the disciples said they had not heard about holy spirit, because as long before that as the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38), Peter had taught about the coming of holy spirit. But here at Ephesus were disciples who had not heard that the gift of holy spirit had been given. It is possible that they were some of John’s disciples who moved to Ephesus before Pentecost, or perhaps they had been evangelized by one of John’s disciples who left Judea before Pentecost (perhaps after John was killed) and had not heard of the coming of holy spirit. They had almost certainly heard John, or one of John’s disciples, tell that the holy spirit was going to come (after all, the prophets had been saying that for centuries), but they meant they had not heard that it had already come.

This verse shows that in the opening decades of the Christian Church, believing in Christ was associated with “being baptized in holy spirit,” otherwise known as receiving holy spirit. People who genuinely believed in Christ’s death and resurrection were baptized in holy spirit, and the proof of that was that they then manifested the gift of holy spirit, certainly most usually by speaking in tongues, but also by interpretation and prophecy. And that is exactly what we see here in Acts 19. The disciples had confessed their sins in association with being baptized in John’s baptism. But confessing sins does not get a person saved in the Grace Administration. What gets people “born again,” i.e., “baptized in holy spirit,” in the Grace Administration is believing Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead (Rom. 10:9).

[For more information on the Grace Administration, see commentary on Eph. 3:2.]

Act 19:4

**“a baptism *that was a sign* of repentance.”** That people got baptized by John was a sign of their repentance (see commentary on Mark 1:4).

Act 19:5

**“baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus**.**”** The word “in” is the Greek word *eis*, and it is being used in the static sense (see commentary on Acts 19:3). Literally, they were baptized “in connection with the name of Jesus Christ,” or “in association with the name of Jesus Christ.” At this point it seems that Paul, or some of the people who were with him, did indeed baptize these disciples in water, but the reason for that is not stated, although several are good possibilities.

One possibility is that at that time in the Church, water baptism was the act that showed the outside world that the one who was baptized was more than a casual onlooker or visitor to Christian meetings, but a committed believer, and such a show of commitment would help the Word move in the society. It is also possible that Paul was walking by the spirit and the Lord knew that being water baptized would help solidify these men in their commitment. What the water baptism did not do was get them saved (they already were saved) or cause the gift of holy spirit to be born in them (it was born in them when they first believed). This baptism “into the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 2:38; 19:5; 8:16; 10:48) is different from being “baptized in holy spirit” (Acts 1:5; 11:16; 1 Cor. 12:13). Being “baptized in holy spirit” occurs when a person is saved, whereas water baptism is symbolic of that salvation as well as the washing away of sins. We can see this in Acts 10:47-48 because Peter baptized the house of Cornelius “in the name of Jesus Christ” after they had already been saved and received holy spirit into manifestation (Acts 10:44-48). Similarly, Paul recounted that it was after he believed that he was water baptized (Acts 22:16).

Something that needs to be cleared up is the apparent contradiction between the record in Acts 19:5 and 1 Corinthians 1:14-16. The record in 1 Corinthians seems to say that Paul only baptized Crispus, Gaius, and the household of Stephanas, and perhaps a few others he forgot. Yet he baptized, or oversaw the baptism of, the men in Acts 19, and it seems he would have remembered that.

The key to understanding the apparent contradiction is that Paul wrote to the Corinthians that he baptized none “of you,” that is, of the Corinthians themselves. The problem in Corinth was there was division among the people and different factions were forming, and people naturally tended to follow the leader who baptized them. So Paul was writing specifically to the Corinthian believers to break that kind of thinking, and said that he thanked God that he did not baptize a lot of people there “so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name.” The people he did mention in 1 Corinthians 1:14-16 were all from Corinth. Crispus was the synagogue leader who got saved, so we can see why Paul would have personally baptized him (Acts 18:8). Gaius is almost certainly the man in Corinth who was wealthy enough to be Paul’s host, and indeed, was also able to host the whole congregation at Corinth (cf. Rom. 16:23, which was written from Corinth). We know nothing of the household of Stephanus, but given the wording of 1 Corinthians 1:14-16, he would have been in Corinth too.

Thus, the record in 1 Corinthians 1:14-16 is not saying that Paul did not baptize anyone except a few people, it is saying that those few were all the ones he baptized in Corinth. As we can see from Acts 19:5, Paul did baptize, or oversee the baptism of, other people. That is not to say, however, that during his two years of ministry at Ephesus Paul could have become much clearer about water baptism, for when he wrote 1 Corinthians toward the end of his stay in Ephesus (c. AD 55), he said Jesus did not send him to baptize (1 Cor. 1:17). In addition, by the time he wrote Ephesians, likely in AD 62, he wrote that there was “one baptism” for the Church, and that was the baptism in holy spirit. But even after writing Ephesians, it is quite possible that Paul continued to occasionally water baptize as part of people’s public commitment to Christ.

[For more on Christian baptism, see John W. Schoenheit, *Baptism: The History and Doctrine of Christian Baptism*, published by Spirit & Truth.]

Act 19:6

**“the holy spirit came on them.”** The “holy spirit” in this context is the gift of God’s nature that God puts by New Birth into people who take Christ as Lord (Rom. 10:9).

[For more information on the “holy spirit” being the gift of God, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” Also see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

In this context, “came on them” does not mean that these disciples did not already have the gift of holy spirit. The fact that they were “disciples” means that they had already believed and thus were born again and had the gift of holy spirit born inside them. When the text says that the holy spirit “came on them,” it means came on them into outward manifestation, which is why Acts 19:6 says that “they spoke in tongues and prophesied.” The wording “came on them” is based upon wording already established in the Old Testament.

When God would put His gift of holy spirit upon people in the Old Testament, what happened between the person and the spirit is described in different ways. One of those ways was that the holy spirit “rushed” upon the person, and there are a number of verses in the Old Testament that show the sudden influence of holy spirit by using the phrase “rushed upon” (cf. ESV translation: Judg. 14:6, 19; 15:14; 1 Sam. 10:6, 10; 11:6; 16:13). For example, when the spirit “rushed upon” Samson, that fact was immediately outwardly made known because Samson was supernaturally empowered and he tore a lion apart with his bare hands (Judg. 14:6).

Another way the spirit is described in the Old Testament as coming into manifestation in a person’s life is that the spirit “clothed” the person (cf. ESV translation: Judg. 6:34; 1 Chron. 12:18; 2 Chron. 24:20). When the spirit came suddenly on someone and clothed them, that fact showed outwardly in the action of the person. Thus, Gideon blew his shofar and organized his army, while Amasai and Zechariah both prophesied immediately after being clothed with the spirit.

Here in Acts, we are informed that the men Paul was addressing were born again because the Bible says they were disciples. But these men had not experienced the outward working of the gift of holy spirit that was born inside them; in fact, they had never been instructed about it. But when Paul taught them and laid his hands on them, then the holy spirit “came on them,” using a somewhat similar wording to the “rushed upon” in the Old Testament and Acts 8:16, and they immediately manifested it outwardly by speaking in tongues and prophesying. The record in Acts 8:16 is quite similar to this record in Acts 19. Disciples were born again but had not manifested the spirit until they suddenly manifested it outwardly into the world (see commentary on Acts 8:16).

**“spoke in tongues.”** For more on speaking in tongues, see commentaries on 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 14:5.

Act 19:7

**“12 men.”** There is no reason not to think that this number is literal. Some commentators have tried to tie “12” into the twelve apostles, or the twelve tribes of Israel, but there is no connection. If there were 12 men, then there were 12 men, and the Bible accurately reflects that fact. The reason the Bible says “about 12” seems to be that sometimes not all of them would be with the group for any number of reasons, or perhaps occasionally someone else visited that early group, which grew in size pretty quickly. We would not normally see “about 12,” because the number would be “about 10” or “almost 15,” or something such as that. Thus we can assume that the original number was actually 12, but sometimes someone was not present or someone else joined in.

Act 19:8

**“reasoning and persuading *them* about the Kingdom of God.”** The Jews would have had to change their beliefs quite dramatically to believe what Paul was teaching. Not just that Jesus was Lord, although that would have been a huge leap for them, but also concerning the Kingdom of God. The Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection (Matt. 22:23; Acts 23:8), so they did not believe in an afterlife at all. In contrast, the Pharisees believed, like the Greeks, that after a person died, the soul continued to live on in an incorporeal state and was either in a good place (“Abraham’s bosom”) or a bad place (Hades; Gehenna), which is why Jesus worded the parable of the rich man and Lazarus the way he did (Luke 16:19-31). So Paul would have to convince both the Sadducees and the Pharisees that a person died and was dead, then was raised up on the Day of Judgment, then the saved people went into the Kingdom on earth while the unsaved people were destroyed in Gehenna. This was too much for many of the Jews, who were hardened to Paul’s message after a few months.

[For more on the dead being dead and the soul not living on after a person died, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead,” also see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’” For more on people being annihilated in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.” For more on the coming Kingdom of Christ on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Act 19:9

**“the Way.”** This was one of the earliest, if not the earliest, formal designations of the Christian Faith, and it is used in Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22.

[For more information, see commentary on Acts 9:2.]

**“Tyrannus.”** The Greek means “tyrant,” and *Turannos* (also sometimes spelled *Turannios*) was a common masculine name, although some scholars have mused that it may have been a designation given to him by the way he taught in his school. Roman schools usually used harsh corporal punishment and some schoolmasters were harsher than others. However, it may have also become the name of the school and not the personal name of the man who ran it at that time.

Act 19:11

**“extraordinary miracles.”** The Greek text is more literally, “not common,” miracles. The miracles Paul was doing were uncommon and due to God’s special blessing on Paul and the people at that time to spread the Good News and solidify Paul’s teaching ministry so he could do the Lord’s work. Sickness is such a scourge that godly people throughout the centuries have continued to search diligently for a way to tap into the power of God so people can be healed and delivered. If we learn anything from reading the Four Gospels and seeing Jesus Christ in action, it is that there is no “formula” for healing; it is a matter of walking by the spirit of God and getting revelation about what to do, and if there is no revelation, then almost always there is no miracle of healing.

Since there were many sick people in the Greco-Roman world (the average lifespan was early 30s for women; late 30s for men), we should ask what it was about Ephesus that God empowered “extraordinary miracles” there. The answer almost certainly has to do with the people’s deep involvement with magic. We know that from the fact that even just among the converts to Christianity, which was only a very small percentage of the population, the value of the magic scrolls that were burned was around 50,000 pieces of silver (3 million dollars). The Devil had apparently really shown his hand in Ephesus, and reliance on magic was everywhere, so God needed a powerful demonstration of His power to turn people from darkness to light, and get them to stop using demonic power.

We do see times in the Scripture when a physical object was used in conjunction with a healing or delivering people from demons. Jesus put mud in the eye of the blind man (John 9:6); Peter’s shadow healed people (Acts 5:15); and handkerchiefs and aprons Paul sent healed people and delivered people from demons (Acts 19:11-12). Also, occasionally someone in the Bible was healed when oil was poured on them (Mark 6:13). These unusual occurrences teach us that we cannot “put God in a box” and tell Him what He can and cannot do. On the other hand, anyone who has tried repeating these acts knows that they were what Acts 19:11 calls them: “special miracles.”

When someone is sick, the first thing to do is to pray fervently for them and seek God’s guidance to see if there is anything more that can be done. God is a merciful and loving God, and we must trust in Him.

[For more on healing, see commentary on 1 Pet. 2:24.]

Act 19:12

**“handkerchiefs or aprons.”** There is no intrinsic healing power in things such as this, but periodically, for His own purposes, God empowers healing through things such as these. For example, the people who got healed by touching Jesus’ garment (Mark 5:27-34; 6:56) or Peter’s shadow (Acts 5:15), or were healed by way of some other physical thing (cf. 2 Kings 5:10-14; John 9:1-7). Since we never know when the Lord will empower a miracle by things such as these, the people of God have to be ever alert to them and be prepared to take advantage of them when they occur by being confident of the power one has as a Christian.

**“that had touched his skin were carried away.”** This is more literally, “to be taken away from his skin.” In other words, the cloths were taken away from Paul’s skin to the sick. Most versions do like the REV and smooth out the Greek for ease of reading.

Act 19:13

**“attempted to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had the evil spirits​”** This shows that Paul had been very effective at casting out demons by the name of Jesus Christ. These exorcists would not have tried to use the name of Jesus if it had only been used a few times or if it had only been minimally effective and only worked some of the time. The phrase “invoke the name” is literally in the Greek, “name the name,” but that idiom is strange to modern ears.

But the name of Jesus Christ does not produce “automatic deliverance,” such that it can be used without first receiving revelation to use it. No one, not even Jesus himself or the apostles, cured everyone. When Jesus went to the Pool of Bethesda there was a multitude of sick people but Jesus only healed one person (John 5:1-8). So again, the fact that so many people in Ephesus were cured of sickness and demons by Paul shows that God Himself was moving powerfully in that city and empowering outreach to all Asia.

Act 19:16

**“leaped on them, and overpowered all of them.”** It is common practice in the magical arts to use names and objects to try to control demons, or to think you can be protected from them by saying spells or performing the rituals “in just the right way.” Often the demons pretend to be controlled that way and so deceive those arrogant enough to think that humans can control fallen angels. However, there are times when the demons do great harm, leaving the conjurers wondering what went wrong.

The same can be said for Christians who try to use objects like crosses, Bibles, holy water, garlic, and even the name of Jesus Christ to control demons. It is the name of Jesus Christ spoken by revelation that brings the power of God to bear. In fact, if you are speaking by revelation from God or the Lord, you may not even have to say, “In the name of Jesus Christ.” Paul did not in Acts 13:10-11. Demons are powerful and dangerous, as we see here in Acts 19 and in many places in Scripture. For example, the demons in the man in the tombs gave him the supernatural strength needed to break the chains that people used to try to restrain him (Mark 5:4; Luke 8:29).

This record in Acts 19 reminds us that if we are going to be successful and safe in dealing with demons, we have to walk by revelation, and not assume that because we are Christian or know the name of Jesus Christ that we will be protected from harm or will be able to deliver a demonized person.

Act 19:18

**“Many also of those who had believed.”** The verb tenses in the Greek text make it clear that the people had believed in the past, so they were already Christians. This event occurred during Paul’s third missionary journey, which started in Acts 18:23. However, he had been to Ephesus before, on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:19), and also Apollos had been teaching there, as well as Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:24-26). Thus it is no surprise that when Paul came to Ephesus on his third missionary journey, there were already disciples there (Acts 19:1). However, Ephesus was a center of the practice of magic. The statue of the goddess Artemis, in the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus, which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, had magical inscriptions on it that were reported to be very powerful.[[130]](#footnote-23276) Just from the culture around them, these disciples had been steeped in magic and apparently did not give it up when they got born again. This is similar to Christians who get saved but continue to consult their horoscope, use “charms” to supposedly ward off evil, or dabble with séances, palm readers, or psychics. A person can be saved and still participate in evil. Under the teaching ministry of Paul, these Christians in Ephesus finally came forward and confessed their practices, and renounced them. The fact that this is recorded in Acts is clearly more than just a historical notation. It is an example to follow. Christians everywhere should renounce astrology, witchcraft of all types, “psychic” involvement, charms, and other “protective” superstitions and practices that supposedly bring “good luck,” and any other practice that relies on things other than God for help, information, blessings, and protection.

**“were coming.”** The Greek verb is in the imperfect tense, so “kept coming” (as the NASB) is better than just “came,” particularly in this context. Those who had believed kept coming forward, little by little, confessing their deeds. Some had the courage to come forth immediately, others did as they saw other believers go before them. This is the value of public confession and repentance: there are some who draw their courage to go forward from seeing others go forward first.

**“divulging their practices.”** The Greek word for “practices” is *praxis* (#4234 πρᾶξις). It is difficult to translate in this context because it has both a general definition and a technical definition, and both likely apply here. The general definition is an action or deed, which in this context would be an evil deed, and some versions, such as the NIV84 and CJB, even say “evil deeds.” However, ancient Greek sources reveal that *praxis* was also used in a technical sense for the practices of magic, including spells. Thus, F. F. Bruce translates the verse, “Many of those who believed also came and made confession, divulging their spells.”[[131]](#footnote-30491) Also, the New Jerusalem Bible has: “Some believers, too, came forward to admit in detail how they had used spells.” No doubt both the general and technical definitions apply. Some of the believers in Ephesus simply came forward and described the evil they had been involved with, while others came forward and specifically described the magic and witchcraft they had been involved with, including the casting of spells. We decided that, because the general definition of “evil deeds” included the specific definition of involvement with magic and witchcraft, it would be best to put the general definition in the REV and let the reader learn about the more specific meaning from the commentary.

Act 19:19

**“practiced the magic arts.”** Ephesus was a huge port city on the Mediterranean Sea with a population in Paul’s time that is estimated at about 250,000 people. There were many different religions there, and besides that, Ephesus had a reputation in the Roman world for magic and the occult. Given that, it is no wonder so many of Paul’s converts had been involved in the practice of magic.

We can understand why magic had such an attraction in the ancient world. Magic involved the harnessing and control of spiritual forces to accomplish what the practitioner wanted. Thus, magic could be involved in almost every aspect of a person’s life: financial success, good crops, love, winning at gambling, the death of an enemy, etc. All of these could supposedly be achieved with the help of magic. While technically, certain forms of “black magic” were forbidden by Roman law, in most cases that did not carry much weight because the worship of different gods could involve some very unusual practices and the boundary between what was and what was not actually our equivalent of “black magic” was mostly subjective. (Also, see commentary on Acts 19:18, “practices”).

**“brought their scrolls together.”** We learn a lot about the culture of a city or region by the common sayings that develop in the area. For example, we know that Corinth was known for its many and varied sexual practices because a common Greek term for a prostitute was a “Corinthian girl.” Similarly, we know that Ephesus was known for magic arts because a common name for a magical scroll was an “Ephesian letter.”[[132]](#footnote-21097)

**“burned them.”** There is a powerful spiritual lesson in the fact that the magic scrolls were burned (and there almost certainly would have been other articles used in the practice of magic in addition to scrolls). Some might make the argument that the scrolls should have been sold, not burned, and the money used to help spread the Gospel. But that belief fails to recognize the spiritual priorities in life, in this case, that there are things that are inherently evil, and “belong” to the Devil and his demons, and can cause harm if not destroyed.

Demons are attracted to things that are inherently evil and have access to them whenever they want (which is why Christians should never have things that are inherently evil in their house). Furthermore, if something is inherently evil, it cannot be cleansed by prayer or casting demons away from it. If the magic scrolls were not destroyed, the evil would simply be moved from one place to another. Evil things must be destroyed, which is why in the Old Testament God commanded certain things be destroyed (Exod. 34:13; Deut. 7:5; 12:3).

It is not generally difficult to identify things that are inherently evil, and not everything evil or hurtful is “inherently evil.” Inherently evil things include things such as idols that are made to be worshiped instead of God. So are books and scrolls of spells, incantations, and instructions on how to practice “dark arts” such as necromancy, divination, witchcraft, etc., and the implements that are specifically designed to be used in the practice of the dark arts. So is pornography—it has no godly purpose or design and is inherently ungodly.

Sadly, most Christians are ignorant or indifferent about the spiritual battle that rages around them and the part that they play in it. Thus, many Christians practice a kind of syncretism (the blending of different religions) without even knowing it. For example, some Christians have “lucky” things that supposedly give them invisible help; others pray to dead people (mostly called “saints”) to help them. God specifically says He will not share His glory with other “gods,” whatever their form (Isa. 42:8; 48:11).

The world wants Christians to practice “religious toleration,” and that makes perfect sense given the Devil’s agenda to take glory from God. But the doctrine of religious toleration denies the reality of the spiritual battle raging around us and the fact that people are either for God or against Him, there is no middle ground (Mat. 12:30; Luke 11:23). Wisdom dictates that Christians learn how not to be offensive to people with other beliefs, but that is very different than giving approval to ungodliness.

**“50,000 pieces of silver**.**”** The piece of silver was the silver *argurion* (#694 ἀργύριον), which in Ephesus at that time was almost certainly the coin known as the Attic silver drachma (“Attic” referred to the fact that it came from southern Greece, most principally, Athens). The silver drachma could buy one sheep at that time, so we could value the scrolls as 50,000 sheep, but sheep are more expensive today than they were then, so that valuation would give an inaccurate rendering. A more accurate way to value the coin was by realizing that it was a day’s wage for a laborer (or back then, a soldier). So, in 2024, if a laborer makes $15 per hour, or $120 in a workday, then $120 times 50,000 is six million dollars. This shows the growth of the Christian population in the area at the time. Of course, the six million dollar current value would change if the common labor wage differed from $15 per hour.

The Christians of this community were willing to give up very costly “scrolls” (i.e., books) on the magic arts because they were repenting from their idolatry and evil practices. This serves as a great model for us today. How much are we willing to give up for the sake of Christ?

Act 19:21

**“resolved in the spirit.”** This is one of the times when “spirit” (*pneuma*) refers to a person’s attitudes, thoughts, and desires. The phrase is equivalent to “resolved in himself.” The NAB translates the phrase, “made up his mind” and the NIV translates the whole phrase simply by the word “decided.” Other verses that use “spirit” as a product of the mind include: “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (Matt. 5:3); “The spirit is willing, but the body is weak” (Matt. 26:41 NIV); and, “…how happy Titus was, because his spirit has been refreshed by all of you” (2 Cor. 7:13 NIV). This cannot be the instrumental use of the Greek word “in” (*en*), making the phrase read, “resolved by the spirit” as if Paul was being guided by the Lord via the gift of holy spirit. The reason it cannot be that this verse is referring to Paul’s being guided by the Lord is that it says Paul resolved to go to Jerusalem. Yet it is clear from the scope of Scripture that the Lord did not want Paul to go to Jerusalem (Acts 20:22; 21:4, 10-12). The Lord cannot direct Paul to go to Jerusalem and also tell him not to go. It was Paul’s decision to go to Jerusalem, and the Lord tried very hard to dissuade him, but was not successful. Paul went, and spent the next several years of his life in jail because of it, first in Caesarea, then in Rome.

Act 19:23

**“the Way.”** This was one of the earliest, if not the earliest, formal designations of the Christian Faith.

[For more information, see commentary on Acts 9:2.]

Act 19:24

**“Demetrius.”** He would have been a prominent member of the guild of silversmiths in order to call all the craftsmen together.

**“shrines.”** See commentary on Acts 17:24.

**“brought no little business to the craftsmen.”** The Greek word translated “business” is *ergasia* (#2039 ἐργασία), and it can refer to the business or trade itself, or the profit and income that is made from the trade. Here it no doubt implies both, and the verse and context show that Demetrius was a good organizer and leader. He would have owned his own business and also perhaps was even the head of a local guild of workmen. His organization and working skill brought in business and income for the craftsmen in the area. Some may have worked for him, and some may have profited by taking on some of his extra work or working in concert with him in ways that profited them both. The way he was able to gather the craftsmen and publicly make his case against Paul shows his talents as a leader and organizer.

Act 19:28

**“Artemis of the Ephesians.”** Located in Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world: the Temple of Artemis (Latin: Diana), who was often depicted as a many-breasted goddess. Although called “Diana” in the KJV, the NT Greek text has “Artemis,” and almost all modern English Bibles read “Artemis.” Although called Artemis, the Artemis of Ephesus was not the same as the Artemis in Greece and Rome proper. The goddess “Artemis of the Ephesians” had been distinctively syncretized with the great Anatolian mother goddess Cybele, who herself had been influenced by earlier mother goddesses going back at least as far as the Hittites. The temple worship of Artemis-Ephesus consisted of sacrifices and ritual prostitution, a practice that was common to many of the religions of the ancient world. She was also associated with magic, but exactly why is not clear; perhaps it was due to her control over nature. She was a powerful goddess, and not known for her kindness to mankind, although she supported women in childbirth and was prayed to for healing. According to myth, the hunter Actaeon was in the woods hunting when he accidentally came upon a pool with Artemis bathing. She turned him into a stag and he was torn apart by his own hounds.

Alexander the Great took control of Ephesus in 334 BC and contributed a large sum of money toward the building of a new and more elaborate temple to Artemis, which was four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens. It was made of fine marble and was 425 feet long, 220 feet wide, and had 127 columns that were 60 feet high, and it was adorned with works of art. It contained an image of Artemis which, by legend, had fallen from Jupiter in heaven (Acts 19:35). Artemis of Ephesus was not only worshiped in Ephesus, but shrines for her were made and sent all over the world, encouraging her worship all around the Roman world, something that Demetrius the silversmith pointed out (Acts 19:27). Evidence from ancient coins show the goddess of the Ephesians was in fact revered throughout the ancient Roman world.

In spite of the fact that the temple of Artemis was one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world and four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens, it was lost in history until archaeologists rediscovered it in 1869.

Act 19:29

**“the theater.”** The great theater in Ephesus, still easily seen, could seat close to 25,000 people and would have been the natural place for the angry mob to go to.

Act 19:31

**“Asiarchs.”** The title “Asiarch” was the designation given to a man from the wealthy class who was a delegate from a city of Asia to a council of men that helped defray the cost of public games and events, and to regulate the worship of Rome and the emperor in the province. The evidence is that there were ten Asiarchs each year.[[133]](#footnote-20810) Some of them may have been priests of various religions. Ordinarily, they would not have been together in Ephesus, so it is likely that some game or festival was happening in Ephesus at the time. We have no information about how Paul became friends with some of these powerful men. We can see that, like true leaders, they acted quickly and decisively when it seemed as though Paul was going to go into the theater, and they sent to warn him not to.

Act 19:33

**“Alexander.”** Alexander was apparently a prominent Jew. But why would the Jews be so anxious to have one of their people address the crowd? Like the Christians, the Jews did not worship Artemis, and they did not want to see the peace they enjoyed with the Gentiles to be destroyed by Paul’s aggressive evangelism. Apparently, Alexander was going to explain to the crowd that Paul and his companions were Christians and not like the traditional Jews in Ephesus. It was not until later in the first century that it became clear to most Romans (but not all), that Christianity was a new religion and not just a branch of Judaism. For many years after Christ, most Gentiles saw Christianity as just one more sect among the Jews, like the Pharisees and Sadducees were. But the Gentiles in Ephesus worshiped Artemis and were in no mood to listen to anyone who did not, and they shouted Alexander down.

Act 19:35

**“town clerk.”** Ephesus was allowed to be governed by its own civic council, and the town clerk was the executive officer of that council. He had many important responsibilities, such as drafting the decrees that went before the council and, very importantly, acting as the liaison between the civil government of Ephesus and the Roman provincial government, which had its headquarters in Ephesus and oversaw the administration of the entire Roman province of Asia.

Rome entrusted civil governments such as existed in Ephesus with keeping the peace and maintaining business and commerce so that Rome was secure and taxes were paid. A riot such as the one that happened in Ephesus was unacceptable to the Emperor and the Roman Senate, who could impose penalties on the city and even possibly hold the town clerk personally responsible. So the town clerk was highly motivated to calm the crowd and dismiss them.

Act 19:37

**“blasphemers.”** The Greek verb *blasphēmeō* (#987 βλασφημέω) is transliterated (not translated) from the Greek into English as “blasphemy.” However, “blasphemy” in English has a different meaning than *blasphēmeō* does in Greek. In English, “blasphemy” is only used in reference to God. It is insulting God or a god, insulting something considered sacred (like defacing a cross or statue of Jesus), or claiming to be God or a god in some way. However, in Greek, *blasphēmeō* and *blasphēmia* (the noun) did not have to refer to God or a god, although they could, but were common words that were used of someone speaking against another. The primary meanings were showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation.

[For more on *blasphēmeō*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3.]

In this situation, Demetrius the silversmith, who feared for his livelihood, and the town clerk, who no doubt feared the wrath of Rome if there were a riot, had different agendas. Demetrius was correct that even though Paul may not have been in the Temple of Artemis speaking directly against her, he was saying that man-made images were not gods, and in that sense, he was indeed blaspheming, or hurting the reputation of Artemis and every other Roman “god.” Demetrius, who correctly was concerned about his income, saw clearly that if what Paul was preaching was accepted by the people, their livelihood would be in jeopardy. The town clerk, on the other hand, correctly assessed that there was a right way to get things done, and a riot would not go well with Rome.

Act 19:40

**“in danger of being charged with rioting.”** The Roman emperor and senate highly valued peaceful conditions and rewarded them. In this case, Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia (now western Turkey) and had given it quite a few privileges. Now, because of this riot, those privileges were in jeopardy, including its degree of self-government (there is no record of a Senatorial governor being present there). This case involving Demetrius the silversmith is a mini-vignette of how demons and demonized people promise one thing but actually deliver another. The whole episode started with Demetrius saying how the tradesmen were “in danger” of losing their wealth, and thus started the riot that ostensibly would have somehow maintained the greatness of Artemis and the city of Ephesus. In fact, however, the riot put Ephesus “in danger” of losing its privileges.

Act 19:41

**“he dismissed the assembly.”** The people, knowing that what the town clerk had said about being charged with rioting by the Romans was true, quietly went back to home and business. We might ask why this record about Demetrius and the riot was written in Acts. Surely there are many reasons for it and lessons we can learn from it. For example, the Devil is the god of this age, and he works against any effort to evangelize people and turn them from darkness to light, and he works through his people who are committed to his ungodly causes such as Demetrius and the other idol makers. No wonder Scripture tells us that everyone who lives a godly life will suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12).

Another reason for including the record in Acts seems to be to defend Christians and show that they are not the problem; people who do not like what Christians do are the problem. This theme comes up several times in Acts. For example, it was the Jews who brought Paul before Gallio, but Gallio would not try the case (Acts 18:12-17). Then, here in Ephesus, the idol-makers cause trouble for Paul and the Christians, but the town clerk says what the Christians were doing was not prima facie wrong. Later on, King Agrippa concluded that Paul was innocent of the charges made against him (Acts 26:32). There is no situation in Acts when the Christians were convicted of any actual crime by a Roman authority. This would have made an impact on any Roman reading about the start of the Christian Church in the few centuries after Christ. In fact, as Acts records, it was always Jews or pagans who caused trouble for the Christians because they were envious and/or threatened by what the Christians were very lawfully doing.

**Acts Chapter 20**

Act 20:1

**“into Macedonia.”** This verse reflects a change in Paul’s plans. According to 1 Corinthians 16:8, Paul had planned to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, but likely because of the riot and further trouble in Asia he left Ephesus earlier than he had planned.

Paul must have spent a considerable amount of time in Macedonia, as this must have been the time that Paul visited Illyricum on the west coast of Macedonia (Rom. 15:19), since he did not go to that part of Macedonia on his second missionary journey.

Act 20:2

**“Greece.”** Particularly Corinth. Paul had founded the Church at Corinth (Acts 18), and it was from there (or, less likely, from Cenchreae), on this trip, that he penned the Epistle to the Romans. He was going to sail from Corinth to Syria (likely Antioch, his home base and where he had started his third missionary journey; Acts 18:23), but decided to take the land route through Macedonia, then across the Aegean Sea, briefly stopping at a few cities, and eventually sailing to Caesarea, the port of Jerusalem (Acts 21:8).

Act 20:4

**“Berea.”** An old Macedonian city on the Astraeus River, about 45 miles (75 km) from Thessalonica. So Paul was accompanied on this trip by three people from Macedonia, two from the Roman province of Asia, and two from Galatia (Timothy and Gaius).

Act 20:5

**“us.”** This verse starts the second “we” section of Acts, when Luke joins Paul on his travels. The three “we” sections are: Acts 16:10-17; Acts 20:5-21:18; and Acts 27:1-28:16. See commentary on Acts 16:10.

Act 20:10

**“life.”** See commentary on Acts 15:26, “lives.”

Act 20:12

**“not a little comforted.”** This is the figure of speech tapeinosis, or demeaning. It is the deliberate demeaning, or lessening of something in order to elevate or increase it. It often comes in the form of an understatement. We are aware that sometimes the most powerful way to emphasize something is to understate it. “Not a little comforted?!” The believers probably threw quite a party. The understatement in the text causes the reader to add emphasis that is greater than a plain statement of fact could provide. Thus versions such as the NIV and NASB, which just say, “were greatly comforted,” not only eliminate the beautiful figure tapeinosis, but also strip away the emotion that the reader would otherwise bring to the biblical text.

[See figure of speech “tapeinosis.”]

Act 20:22

**“look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Act 20:23

**“the Holy Spirit.”** “The Holy Spirit” is the name for God that emphasizes His power in operation. God is called “the Holy Spirit” in a number of verses in the NT, including Matthew 1:20; 12:32; and Hebrews 9:8.

[For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit,” see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” Also see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

**“warns.”** The Greek is *diamarturomai* (#1263 διαμαρτύρομαι) and means to solemnly testify or earnestly charge, and can mean “warn” as it does here and in Luke 16:28. This is the first time the book of Acts tells us that Paul was being directed not to go to Jerusalem. He should have let others carry the financial gift that had been collected for the believers there. Although this is the first mention that Paul was not to go that is written in Acts, the verse does tell us he had been warned “in every city.” Paul had left Achaia (Corinth) with money for the poor believers in Jerusalem and traveled by land north back through Macedonia (he had come to Corinth by way of Macedonia), then sailed east toward Caesarea, the port city of Jerusalem. Thus he had passed through many cities before reaching where he was, Miletus, a port city of Ephesus (Acts 20:17).

[For more on Paul’s travel to Jerusalem and its consequences, see commentary on Acts 21:12, 14.]

Act 20:24

**“life.”** The Greek word is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), often translated “soul.” The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here *psuchē* refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. This is one of the many verses that show that *psuchē*, soul, is not immortal and is not the reason people can live forever. Paul would never say that he did not count his everlasting life valuable, but he would say he did not count his earthly life valuable, because he knew he would be raised from the dead.

[For a more complete explanation of *psuchē*, “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Act 20:25

**“listen.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20. In this context, “listen” seemed more polite than “look.”

Act 20:28

**“the Holy Spirit.”** “The Holy Spirit” is the name for God that emphasizes His power in operation. God is called “the Holy Spirit” in a number of verses in the NT, including Matthew 1:20; 12:32; and Hebrews 9:8.

[For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

**“church of God.”** Trinitarians use this phrase along with what follows, “blood of his own,” to establish that the verse is referring to God’s own blood, and since this verse is referring to the sacrifice of Jesus, Jesus must be God. There are quite a few problems with that. First, this phrase “church of God” has some significant textual variants; there are some major manuscripts which read, “church of the Lord” (P74, A, C\*, D, E). If the text was originally “church of the Lord” then the entire Trinitarian argument would fall apart, because the verse would not be saying that God has blood. Thus, the Trinitarian argument already is on shaky grounds. In the next section, more problems with the Trinitarian argument based on Acts 20:28 will be discussed.

**“the blood of his own *Son*.”** This refers to the blood of his own Son, Jesus.[[134]](#footnote-20731) This is a phrase used in conjunction with “church of God” to support Trinitarianism, by interpreting it to mean that God is the subject and he purchased the church with “his own blood.”

The Greek text could be literally translated, “blood of one’s own (son),” (Possessive genitive) or “one’s own blood” (Genitive of Apposition). Either one is a valid translation. Yet, the Trinitarian must translate it, “one’s own blood” or “his own blood,” in order for this verse to support Trinitarianism.

In order to arrive at a proper translation, we must look at how the scriptures define God, and this could help us understand what was likely meant. Do the scriptures define God as having a body and having blood? No, they define God as being invisible and incorruptible (Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17), yet, Jesus clearly has a body, and Jesus clearly shed his blood (Heb. 13:12; Col. 1:20). Thus, it certainly makes more sense to understand this phrase as, “blood of one’s own *Son*.” The word “Son” is properly supplied when asking the question: who is God’s own who shed his blood to purchase the Church? Clearly the answer is Jesus throughout the entirety of the New Testament.

So, in order for this verse to teach that Jesus is God, the Trinitarian needs to use one specific manuscript reading for “Church of God,” and one specific translation of “his own blood,” and hold to a completely unique understanding that God has blood, which contradicts the rest of Scripture in which God is incorruptible (1 Tim. 1:17) and is invisible (Col. 1:15). One can see the great weakness in using a verse like this to support the Trinity; it simply has too many translation and manuscript issues to be a reliable verse to build a doctrine upon. Thus, it makes much more sense to simply translate the verse, “blood of his own *Son*” referring to Jesus’ blood, who we know had a real flesh and blood body (Col. 1:20), unlike God.

Act 20:32

**“have been made holy.”** The Greek is *hagiazō* (#37 ἁγιάζω), “to be sanctified,” but it is a perfect tense participle in the passive voice. The Christian is sanctified the moment he becomes born again, by the presence of the holy spirit. Most commentators do not understand it, and have “are” sanctified, but this verse refers to the one-time event in the life of the believer when he or she gets saved. Interestingly, Lenski realizes this is referring to a one-time event in the past, so he has it refer to the dead Christian being in heaven.[[135]](#footnote-26686)

Act 20:35

**“the words of the Lord Jesus.”** This quotation, “it is more blessed to give than to receive,” is not recorded in the Gospels. It is what is known as an *agrapha* (*a*—not, *graphe*—writing). It is clear that the Lord spoke much more than what is recorded in the Gospels, for the totality of Jesus’ speech can be read aloud in just several hours. John was clear that not everything about Jesus’ life is recorded in scripture (John 21:25). People would have remembered other things that he taught and preserved them as well.

The actual quotation itself is the figure of speech chreia, a quotation that gives the author’s name.[[136]](#footnote-20403)

**Acts Chapter 21**

Act 21:4

**“not set foot in Jerusalem.”** This is the second time the Word of God reveals that Paul was not to go to Jerusalem, and this is the clearest warning because the disciples in Tyre told Paul “through the spirit” not to go to Jerusalem. This clearly reveals the will of God. These disciples were not speaking from emotion, they were speaking by revelation. Paul had made up his mind to take the financial offering of the Gentiles on to Jerusalem and was so set in his mind about it that he did not listen to the voice of God concerning the situation. (See commentary on Acts 21:12, 14).

Act 21:11

**“the Holy Spirit says.”** “The Holy Spirit” is the name for God that emphasizes His power in operation. God is called “the Holy Spirit” in a number of verses in the NT, including Matthew 1:20; 12:32; and Hebrews 9:8.

[For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Act 21:12

**“not to go up to Jerusalem.”** During Paul’s third missionary journey, Paul gathered an offering from the Gentiles to take to Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26; cf. 2 Cor. 8-9). When he was still in Ephesus and wrote 1 Corinthians, he wrote to the Church at Corinth to start taking collections of money that could then be taken as a gift to Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-3). At that time he was unclear about whether he would take the money to Jerusalem himself or if someone else would take the money and bring along personal letters from him (1 Cor. 16:3-4). By the time Paul traveled westward across the Aegean Sea and wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia (it is possible he wrote from either Philippi or Thessalonica, both towns with established churches) he had made up his mind to travel with the financial gift himself (2 Cor. 8:19). He confirmed this shortly thereafter in the Epistle to the Romans, which he wrote when he reached Corinth (Rom. 15:28; cf. 2 Cor. 8:20). At first he was going to sail from Corinth to Syria (Acts 20:3), but he decided to take the land route back to Macedonia, and then he sailed from there for Syria and Jerusalem, but he made a number of stops along the way. Although he touched land in Syria, he never returned to Antioch, his home base and the city from which he had started his missionary journey.

At some point on that journey from Corinth to Jerusalem with the money that had been collected for the believers at Jerusalem, God started telling Paul not to go to Jerusalem. The first account of this is Acts 20:23 when Paul was in Miletus, the port of Ephesus, speaking to the elders from the Church at Ephesus. By that time he reported that God warned him “in every city” about going to Jerusalem. Thus, it is possible that as early as when he left Corinth with the money, he was already getting revelation not to go to Jerusalem himself, but to let others take the gift. When Paul landed at Tyre, the disciples there told Paul “through the spirit” that he was “not to set foot in Jerusalem” (Acts 21:4). This makes the will of God crystal clear, because the believers at Tyre did not speak on their own initiative, or from their emotion or love for Paul, but “through the spirit.” Then, in Caesarea, the daughters of Philip the Evangelist prophesied to Paul, and the context is that he should not go to Jerusalem (Acts 21:9). Then, Agabus, a recognized prophet in the Church, spoke to Paul about the consequences of going to Jerusalem, and all the disciples begged him not to go (Acts 21:10-12). Paul ignored the warnings from God, went to Jerusalem, and spent more than four years as a prisoner as a result. More than two years in Caesarea (Acts 24:27), months traveling to Rome (Acts 27:9; 28:11), and at least two years under arrest in Rome (Acts 28:30). Paul disobeyed the will of God and went to Jerusalem, and his ministry was severely curtailed as a result.

The Day of Pentecost was the summer of AD 28. When Paul left Corinth and went through Macedonia, it was approximately the Feast of Passover in AD 57 (cf. Acts 20:6). He wanted to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost in June (Acts 20:16). If he was in Jerusalem in June of 57, and arrested shortly after, he spent more than two years in jail in Caesarea (Acts 24:27). Then he traveled by boat to Rome, leaving in the late summer of AD 59. This trip took at least four months, and perhaps six. He sailed late in the year, and after “much time had been lost” (Acts 27:9), came to port on the island of Crete. The ship sailed from Crete after the Day of Atonement (Acts 27:9; late September to early October). After the shipwreck and wintering on the island of Malta, Paul sailed for Rome. It would now be late winter or early spring of AD 60. When Paul got to Rome, he was “two whole years” under house arrest (Acts 28:30). This would have been from the spring of 60 to the spring/summer of 62. These dates are generally agreed upon by scholars, although sometimes they differ by a year or so earlier or later.

Understanding the chronology helps us put the magnitude of Paul’s imprisonment in perspective. Although he had met the Lord and become a believer years earlier, he did not start his powerful public ministry until he was called to Antioch, likely AD 45 (cf. Acts 11:26). If Paul was arrested in 57, he had only spent 12 or 13 years in public ministry, which also involved three missionary journeys. Then he was under arrest for almost five years. If his ministry had come under attack while he was free and working hard to teach and preach, and out among the people doing healings and miracles (cf. 1 Cor. 2:3-5), it was much more seriously attacked during the time he spent as a prisoner, from which it never really recovered. By the time he wrote 2 Timothy, he said, “all who are in Asia turned away from me” (2 Tim. 1:15). That is amazing, because the Roman province of Asia, which we today know as western Turkey, was where Paul spent more than two years (Acts 19:8-10) teaching the Word of God. If Paul got out of jail in Rome in 62, he was likely martyred by 66 or 67, a mere four or five years later, not enough time to rebuild the foundation of his church. This is especially true since the great fire of Rome was in June of AD 64, and after that, Emperor Nero engineered a much more severe persecution against Christianity than had existed before, and the free movement of the Word was more difficult.

Most Bible preachers take the one phrase, “The will of the Lord be done” (Acts 21:14), and say that Paul’s going to Jerusalem was the will of God. However, that idea is incorrect for many reasons. First and foremost, there is no verse anywhere that says Paul was going to Jerusalem by revelation or according to the will of God. While he was in Ephesus he was not even sure he would go (1 Cor. 16:3-4). So at some point he decided to go, but there is no verse that says that decision of his was the will of God. Second, God does not contradict Himself. If the revelation from God in Acts 21:4 was not to go, and that flow continued uninterrupted from then to Acts 21:14, why would anyone decide the will of God was for him to go? On what basis? Thirdly, although sometimes people doing God’s will suffer hardship, often it is a consequence of disobedience. In this case, had Paul heeded God’s warning, he could have sent other people to Jerusalem with the money, and he himself left for Rome on his way to Spain, just as he had a longing to do (Rom. 15:22-24).

Act 21:13

**“For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem.”** Men and women of God often feel their calling so strongly that they make misjudgments about what God wants them to do, and this was the case with Paul. Genuine men and women of God have very deep feelings for the people, even though the people are ungodly and defy God (cf. Jer. 9:1; 13:17).

Act 21:14

**“The will of the Lord be done.”** This verse does not mean that it was the will of God for Paul to go to Jerusalem, even though that is what almost every Bible teacher says it means. In this context, it was a phrase used in surrender to the free will of man, and the disciples used it, indicating their hope that perhaps God might be able to redeem a bad situation—in this case, Paul’s unwise decision to go to Jerusalem. Why would anyone think that these disciples in Caesarea thought that Paul’s going to Jerusalem was the will of God? They were doing their absolute best to talk Paul out of going. They “pleaded” with him not to go (Acts 21:12). Would they have really done that if they thought it was the will of God for him to go? Were these disciples so immature that they knew it was God’s will for Paul to go to Jerusalem, but let their emotions rule their actions until Paul stood firm and rebuked them saying “What are you doing, crying and breaking my heart” (Acts 21:13), at which point each of them sheepishly admitted that going to Jerusalem was the will of God after all? Certainly not. These were well-established believers. Philip the Evangelist, in whose house they were staying (Acts 21:8), had been one of the original seven men chosen to work with the Church in Jerusalem under the direction of Peter, James, John, and the other apostles (Acts 6:5). These were not new converts, or neophytes who let their emotions rule. God had told Paul in city after city not to go to Jerusalem. However, Paul was so emotionally attached to the Jews, and so convinced that he could win them to Christ and also help strengthen relations between the Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians, that he was not hearing the voice of God. For more details on Paul disobeying God and going to Jerusalem see commentary on Acts 21:12.

There are some Bible teachers who know that it was God’s will not to go to Jerusalem, and using the KJV, get around the “problem” of this verse by changing the punctuation. The KJV reads: “And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, ‘The will of the Lord be done.’” Changing the commas makes it read, “And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased saying ‘The will of the Lord be done.’” This punctuation makes the verse say that the disciples stopped saying to Paul, “The will of the Lord be done,” but the Greek text does not allow the phrases and punctuation to be changed that way. When Paul would not listen to the revelation from God, the disciples, in giving up trying to persuade him, said, “The will of the Lord be done,” i.e., God, somehow work your will in this. God gave mankind freedom of will, and when someone does not do the will of God, the rest of us can only pray that somehow or other God can get His will done in the situation.

Act 21:17

**“had come to Jerusalem.”** This was Paul’s fifth and last trip to Jerusalem after his conversion; we do not know of any later trip after his release from prison in Rome. Paul made five trips to Jerusalem after he got born again. First trip: three years after his conversion: Acts 9:26-30; Gal. 1:18-20. Second trip: 14 years after his conversion for a famine relief visit: Acts 11:28-30; Gal. 2:1-10. Third trip: in AD 49, for the Jerusalem council: Acts 15. Fourth trip: between his second and third missionary journeys: Acts 18:22. Fifth trip: after his third missionary journey when Paul was arrested and sent to Rome (Acts 21:17).

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek word for “brothers” often includes men and women, and it does so here.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

Act 21:19

**“related.”** See commentary on Luke 24:35, “related.”

Act 21:28

**“Place.”** The word “place” was a designation of the Temple. See commentary on Matthew 24:15, “*topos.*”

Act 21:39

**“no insignificant city.”** Paul could have said that Tarsus was a “great” city, or an “important” city, but perhaps the Roman officer would have argued with him (national prejudices can run deep). This is the figure of speech, tapeinosis, or demeaning. It is the deliberate demeaning, or lessening of something in order to elevate or increase it. It often comes in the form of an understatement. We are aware that sometimes the most powerful way to emphasize something is to understate it. By understating the fact, and saying that Tarsus was “no insignificant city,” the Roman could hardly argue the point, and still got the message that Paul was therefore well-traveled and educated.

[See figure of speech “tapeinosis.”]

Act 21:40

**“in the Hebrew language.”** There is a debate among scholars as to whether the language Paul spoke was Hebrew or Aramaic. The Greek text says “Hebrew,” and there was a Greek word for Aramaic that is not used here, but it seems that some other places in the New Testament that say “Hebrew” actually refer to Aramaic. Although the majority of scholars think that Paul spoke Aramaic, not Hebrew, here in Acts 21:40, Paul was in the Temple, the heart of the Hebrew-speaking world. Also, there are more and more archaeological artifacts that have Hebrew, not Aramaic written on them, which is partially why some scholars think that Hebrew was spoken much more widely than was believed in the twentieth century. As it stands now, there is not enough evidence to come to a definite conclusion. However, given the fact that the text reads “Hebrew” and there was a Greek word for Aramaic, it seems best to have the English translation read “Hebrew” because that is certainly possible. Nevertheless, many English versions of the Bible read “Aramaic” in Acts 21:40 because the translators feel strongly that Paul spoke in Aramaic.

**Acts Chapter 22**

Act 22:4

**“the Way.”** This was one of the earliest, if not the earliest, formal designations of the Christian Faith, and it is used in Acts 9:2, 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22.

[For more information, see commentary on Acts 9:2.]

Act 22:9

**“understand.”** This is one of the meanings of the Greek word, which is *akouō* (#191 ἀκούω). By comparing Acts 9:7 and 22:9, we learn that the men with Paul heard the sound of Jesus’ voice, but did not understand what he said. See commentary on Acts 9:7.

Act 22:12

**“*deeply* religious.”** The Greek is *eulabēs* (#2126 εὐλαβής); see commentary on Acts 10:2, “godly man.”

Act 22:16

**“be baptized, and wash away your sins.”** There are some who teach that this verse is saying that a person needs to be water baptized to be saved, but that is not what the verse is saying. Water does not wash away sins, it is a symbol that represents the cleansing from sin that God does when a Christian gets saved. A. T. Robertson writes:

“It is possible, as in [Acts] 2:38, to take these words as teaching baptismal remission or salvation by means of baptism, but to do so is in my opinion a complete subversion of Paul’s vivid and picturesque language. As in Rom. 6:4-6 where baptism is the picture of death, burial, and resurrection, so here baptism pictures the change that had already taken place when Paul surrendered to Jesus on the way (verse 10). Baptism here pictures the washing away of the sins by the blood of Christ.”[[137]](#footnote-26413)

The baptism ceremony was the time when the person being baptized made a public confession of Christ and called upon the name of the Lord, which is what saved the person (cf. Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:13), and thus baptism was sometimes associated with salvation. That a person’s confession of Christ was not to be a personal thing that was done in private, but was intended to be a public and open confession, explains why Romans 10:9 says “confess with your mouth,” and Romans 10:9 never mentions baptism, only confession and believing.

By the time Paul spoke the words recorded in Acts 22:16, it had been almost 30 years since Jesus had been crucified, and in that time enough of the New Testament had been written that it was clear a person did not receive salvation via water baptism. For example, some years before this event in Jerusalem, Paul wrote to the church at Corinth and said, “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to proclaim the good news” (1 Cor. 1:17). But that verse makes no sense if water baptism was necessary for salvation, because Christ certainly sent Paul to get people saved. Also, later, Paul wrote that the Church had “one baptism” (Eph. 4:5), and given the baptisms of water and holy spirit, the holy spirit baptism given by Jesus was greater than John’s water baptism, as John himself also said (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 11:16).

Beyond the cultural context and scope of Scripture, Acts 22:16 never actually says that baptism cleanses from sin. It says calling on the name of Jesus does. The Holman Christian Standard Bible is one of the versions that represents that quite clearly: “Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins by calling on His name.” In the Greek text, the word “calling” is a participle, which can have a causal force, thus the translation, “by calling.” It is not water baptism but confession and belief in Christ, represented by “calling on the name of the Lord,” that saves a person (cf. CEB, CJB, Geneva Bible, NEB, NLT, Phillips, Tyndale NT).

Act 22:17

**“state of suspended consciousness.”** See commentary on Acts 10:10.

Act 22:22

**“for he should not have even been allowed to live this long.”** A Greek idiom for an obligation that has existed from the past and is still unfulfilled at the present.[[138]](#footnote-15647) The Jews are so offended that they are saying that he should have already been executed for his beliefs and actions.

**Acts Chapter 23**

Act 23:2

**“the high priest Ananias.”** The High Priest Ananias was the son of Nedebaeus, and was the High Priest from AD 47-59. This is not the High Priest Annas, who was High Priest at the time of Christ’s ministry and advocated for him to be crucified.

Act 23:8

The Sadducees maintained that the human soul was not immortal, but disappeared upon the death of the person, and they used that belief to support (wrongly support!) their doctrine that there was no resurrection. Although it is true that the human soul is not immortal, that does not keep God from resurrecting people, who are empowered with a different spirit when they are resurrected (cf. Ezek. 37:12-14, esp. v. 14).

Some scholars say that the Sadducees also did not generally believe there was any spirit except God, but other scholars maintain that what the Sadducees rejected was not the existence of spirits, but the existence of a spirit world that had a hierarchy of good and bad spirits that were opposed to each other. The fact that Jesus mentioned “angels” to the Sadducees in the context of the resurrection (Matt. 22:30) supports the fact that the Sadducees did generally believe in a spirit world.

Act 23:9

**“We find no evil in this man. And if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him….”** The Pharisees do not finish their thought, but let it drop. This is the figure of speech aposiopesis, “sudden silence,” when a speaker breaks off in mid-sentence. We would have expected the full thought to be something like, “We find no evil in this man. And if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, then he is innocent!” But, for unstated reasons, the sentence was never completed. It is possible that the roar of the crowd shut down the people speaking.

[For more on aposiopesis, see commentary on Luke 19:42.]

Act 23:12

**“bound themselves under a curse.”** The curse was that they would not eat or drink until they killed Paul. They had an out, of course. The Rabbis could dissolve the curse, and we can be sure that none of these men starved to death.

Act 23:23

**“third hour of the night.”** This is about our 9 p.m. Ordinarily the night was broken into watches, but sometimes a more accurate measurement was needed.

[For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48.]

Act 23:24

**“to Felix the governor.”** This is the first mention of Felix, the Roman governor of the Roman province of Judea.

“Felix,” more properly Antonius Felix, was the fourth Roman procurator of Judea, and he served from AD 52-60. Felix was a Greek and was born a slave, but was given his freedom. His older brother, also a freedman, was Marcus Pallas, who became the secretary of the treasury when Claudius was the emperor of Rome. Because of his powerful position, Pallas was able to petition the Romans and have his brother appointed as procurator of Judea. According to Wikipedia, “Felix’s cruelty, coupled with his accessibility to bribes (see Book of Acts 24:26), led to a great increase of crime in Judaea. The period of his rule was marked by internal feuds and disturbances, which he put down with severity.”[[139]](#footnote-11767)

Act 23:27

**“having learned that he was a Roman.”** Claudius Lysias was a professional soldier, but his high rank caused him to be part politician, and not above covering the truth and recounting events in a way that cast him in a favorable light. He reported to Governor Felix that when he learned that the man whom the Jews were trying to kill was a Roman citizen, he swooped down from the heights of the Antonia Fortress and rescued him, and then he said he later took Paul to the Sanhedrin to ascertain the reason they would have tried to kill Paul. The truth is told in the narrative of Acts 21:30ff.

The Jews were trying to kill Paul, but the reason the Romans got involved was due to the uproar in the city. The soldiers were charged with keeping the peace, so they ran down into the Temple and took Paul from the crowd to quiet the riot that was starting. It was only when Paul was illegally about to be examined by scourging (Acts 22:25), that Claudius Lysias found out he was a Roman citizen and released Paul. Obviously, it would not have looked good on Claudius’ record to chain a Roman citizen, so he carefully omitted that fact when he wrote to Governor Felix. The entire episode about Paul is full of political maneuvering, lies, cover-ups, prevarications, and distortions. Claudius Lysias is joined by Tertullus, the Jews (see commentary on Acts 24:6), Felix (see commentary on Acts 23:24 and 24:26), and Festus (Acts 25:9, 20), in distorting the truth to further their political careers. The massive lies and cover-ups we see in the case of Paul no doubt happened in many other cases as well, and show the weakness of a system that does not have effective checks and balances in government, or harsh penalties for leaders who are willing to sacrifice innocent people to further their own causes. Sadly, human nature has not changed, and modern governments are full of the same kinds of lies and maneuvering that we see occurring in Acts some 2,000 years ago.

Act 23:31

**“Antipatris.”** A city about 40 miles (64 km) northwest of Jerusalem, and about 25 miles (40 km) from Caesarea. This is the only place this city is mentioned in the New Testament. It was built, or built up, by Herod the Great in 9 BC, and named after his father, Antipater. It had been the Old Testament site of Aphek (Josh. 12:18; 1 Sam. 4:1; 29:1; 1 Kings 20:26ff; 2 Kings 13:17; etc.).

Act 23:35

**“Herod’s praetorium.”** Herod’s Praetorium was in Caesarea on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. The word “Praetorium” originally referred to the tent of the commanding officer in a Roman field camp. Then it came to refer to the official residence of the commander, which thus included the residence of a provincial governor, such as Pilate, Felix, or Festus. Because many of the governor’s palaces were in dangerous territory, the palace compound included an army barracks, so it was natural that in those cases “praetorium” was extended to include the governor’s palace, buildings in the palace complex, and the army barracks that was often in the compound, and that is the way “Praetorium” is used in Acts. In the Prison Epistles, when Paul is in Rome, the Praetorium specifically referred to the quarters of the Emperor’s personal army, the Praetorian Guard (Phil. 1:13).

By calling the palace complex, “Herod’s Praetorium,” we can see that the presence of Herod the Great was still being felt more than 50 years after he died. The harbor complex at Caesarea on the Mediterranean Sea was the most extensive of Herod’s many building projects. He took a small port and, between 22 and 10 BC, turned it into an impressive city and the largest port on the Mediterranean. He had a palace built for himself by the sea, and that is where Felix kept Paul under guard. On the basis of Paul’s Roman citizenship, and the fact that there was no real evidence against him, Felix should have set Paul free, as Claudius Lysias had already ascertained (Acts 23:29). However, Felix was less interested in justice than he was in either getting bribe money (Acts 24:26) or doing the Jews a favor (Acts 24:27). Nevertheless, he did not put Paul in chains in prison, but remanded him to the palace complex. Felix’s lack of desire for truth and justice in Paul’s case extended to the rest of his life, and his governorship ended with his being recalled to Rome for improprieties.

**Acts Chapter 24**

Act 24:1

**“And after five days.”** The religious leaders were anxious to get rid of Paul, so they moved quickly. The description “after five days” refers to five days after Paul himself arrived in Caesarea, so Ananias and his elders moved quickly. It was likely the day after Paul was transferred that Ananias and the others learned of Paul’s transfer, and their own trip to Caesarea would have taken two days, so it likely took them two days to plan the trip and their absence in Jerusalem and to choose an appropriate orator to speak for them. As the High Priest, Ananias had many dealings with the Romans both directly and indirectly, so technically he would not have needed Tertullus, however, Tertullus (judging from the name) was likely a Roman and was thus likely brought along to add some influence.

**“they brought charges to the governor.”** The governor at this time was Felix. He had been governor for many years (Acts 24:10).

Act 24:4

**“*customary* graciousness.”** The Greek word translated as “*customary* graciousness” is *epieikeia*, (#1932 ἐπιείκεια), “consideration springing from a recognition of the danger that ever lurks upon the assertion of legal rights lest they be pushed to immoral limits. The virtue that rectifies and redresses the severity of a sentence.”[[140]](#footnote-24357) See commentary on 1 Timothy 3:3, “reasonable.” *Epieikeia* refers to a disposition to be merciful, and especially to moderate the harshness of judgment. In this context, Tertullus was trying to win the favor of the Roman governor Felix so it is within the scope and semantic range of *epieikeia* to have the translation “*customary* graciousness.”

Act 24:6

**“he tried to profane the Temple.”** Paul did not try to profane the Temple. Tertullus and the Jews with him were not interested in truth and justice, and told this lie about Paul to accomplish their goal, which was to have Paul killed. Tertullus knew that the sanctity of the Temple did not mean anything to the Roman governor Felix, who as a Roman was a polytheist. However, the Jews knew that Rome judged the provincial governors in part by their ability to keep the native populations at peace. Riots and uprisings were dangerous and expensive, and could cost a governor his political career. If Paul was trying to profane the Temple in Jerusalem, that could be very troublesome, leading to riots that would get the unfavorable attention of Rome. So Tertullus said what he did in case some facts could be overlooked and his case be considered proven, or in case the Jews could obscure the facts to the point that Felix would kill Paul as a favor—a favor they would pay back by looking more favorably upon Felix’s rule and some of the more oppressive policies of Rome. If Felix’s court was ruling according to the Law of Moses, Tertullus should legally have been executed as a false witness. Under the Mosaic Law, false witnesses got the penalty they were trying to impose on the defendant (Deut. 19:16-19). For more on the injustice in Paul’s case see commentary on Acts 23:27.

**24:6b-8a**. Most modern versions leave this out, recognizing from the textual evidence that it is almost certainly a later addition.[[141]](#footnote-20775) If left in, this addition changes “from whom” Felix would learn; it makes Felix learn about Paul by examining the Jews who accused him.

Act 24:7

**24:6b-8a**. Most modern versions leave this out, recognizing from the textual evidence that it is almost certainly a later addition.[[142]](#footnote-10437) If left in, this addition changes “from whom” Felix would learn; it makes Felix learn about Paul by examining the Jews who accused him.

Act 24:8

**24:6b-8a**. Most modern versions leave this out, recognizing from the textual evidence that it is almost certainly a later addition.[[143]](#footnote-30982) If left in, this addition changes “from whom” Felix would learn; it makes Felix learn about Paul by examining the Jews who accused him.

Act 24:14

**“as a follower of.”** The Greek used the preposition, *kata* (#2596 κατά), which is often translated “according to,” or “in accord with,” but has many meanings.[[144]](#footnote-27944) A very clear rendering of the Greek *kata* in this context, while not being strictly literal, is “as a follower of” (cf. NIV84; NLT; New English Bible; The Source NT).

**“the Way.”** This was one of the earliest, if not the earliest, formal designations of the Christian Faith, and it is used in Acts 9:2, 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22.

[For more information, see commentary on Acts 9:2.]

Act 24:15

**“a resurrection of both the righteous and unrighteous.”** That God is going to raise people from the dead is clearly set forth in a number of verses in the Old Testament and Gospels (cf. Job 19:25-27; Ps. 49:15; 71:20; Isa. 26:19; 66:14; Ezek. 37:12-14; Dan. 12:2, 13; Hos. 13:14; Matt. 12:42; Luke 11:31; 14:14; John 5:28-29). Then, after the day of Pentecost, it is set forth again in Acts, the Epistles and the book of Revelation (Acts 24:15; 1 Cor. 15:20-22, 42-49, 52; 1 Thess. 4:16-17; Rev. 20:4-15).

In the future, both the righteous people (usually referred to as being “saved”) and unrighteous people (usually referred to as “the unsaved”) will get up from the dead and be judged, but at different times. Although the Resurrection of the Righteous and the Resurrection of the Unrighteous are separated by 1,000 years (cf. Rev. 20:4-13), here in Acts 24:15, Paul mentions them both without paying attention to the time separation. Also, Paul did not mention the Rapture of the Church here in Acts 24:15 when he was talking to Felix, the Roman governor of Judea, because he was not trying to give an exact description of future events but was simply noting that both righteous and unrighteous people will be raised from the dead and judged. Until the Church Epistles stated that the Christian Church would be taken up to heaven from the earth in an event theologians refer to as “the Rapture” (1 Thess. 4:16-18), the Bible had only revealed that there would be two resurrections. In this abbreviated context, Paul includes the Rapture in the resurrection of righteous people because that is exactly what happens in the Rapture: righteous people (Christians) are raised from the dead. The point Paul was making was that both good and bad people will get up and be judged, which could have been quite unsettling to his powerful and often cruel audience, and Paul did not want that point to get mired down in details.

It is important to note that Paul said that there would be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous. Scripture says that will be in two separate resurrections, but it is also important to see that the unrighteous people will get up. Some unrighteous people comfort themselves by thinking that when they die they are just dead and no judgment or punishment will follow, but that is not the case. God holds every person accountable for the life he gave them, and he will judge every person for how they lived. Unrighteous people will be resurrected, judged, and thrown into the Lake of Fire where they will eventually perish (Rev. 20:11-15).

The first resurrection is called, “The first resurrection” (Rev. 20:5-6); “the resurrection of life” (John 5:29); and “the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:14; Acts 24:15). The first resurrection will occur after Armageddon and at the beginning of the 1,000-year Millennial Kingdom of the Messiah, which is Christ’s future 1,000-year kingdom on earth. The Millennial Kingdom will start very soon after Armageddon. The first resurrection will include all the righteous people from Genesis through the Battle of Armageddon, with the exception of the Christian Church, because Christians will have been Raptured into heaven before the Tribulation started (see commentary on 1 Thess. 4:17).

The second resurrection is called “the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:29 ESV), and “the resurrection of the unrighteous” (Acts 24:15), because most of the people who are raised at that time will be judged to be unjust. This second resurrection will occur after the 1,000-year Millennial Kingdom comes to an end (Rev. 20:4-13). Since all the righteous people who ever lived before the Millennial Kingdom had already been raised from the dead, it is a fair question to ask, “Who in the ‘resurrection of the unrighteous’ will be left to be declared righteous and granted everlasting life?” To answer that question we must remember that the Millennial Kingdom will last 1,000 years and there will be “natural people” who were allowed into it at the Sheep and Goat Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46). Those natural humans will have children, and thus the number of natural people—who are born, age, and die—will continue to multiply, and those people will live and die during that 1,000 years. Those who lived righteous lives will be raised at the resurrection of the unrighteous because it is the only resurrection left for them, and they will be granted everlasting life on Judgment Day (Rev. 20:11-15).

The only two resurrections mentioned in the Old Testament and Gospels are the Resurrection of the Righteous and the Resurrection of the Unrighteous. There are some verses in the Bible that refer to both of these resurrections in the same verse or context, and these include: Daniel 12:2; John 5:29; Acts 24:15; and Revelation 20:4-13. Also, sometimes one of the resurrections is mentioned in the Bible without it being named as one of the resurrections. For example, Ezekiel 37:12-14 is about the first resurrection, but it is not specifically called a resurrection.

That there would be a resurrection from the dead should have been well-known from the Old Testament. Job is likely the oldest book in the Bible, and Job said that even though his flesh was destroyed in the grave, in his flesh he would see God (Job 19:25-27). Isaiah 26:19 says the earth will give birth to the dead. Ezekiel 37:12-14 is very clear about the resurrection. Daniel 12:2 and 12:13 both speak of the resurrection, as does Hosea 13:14 (cf. also Deut. 32:39; Ps. 71:20; Isa. 66:14).

The End Times events will occur in the following order: The Christian Church will be Raptured into heaven and there will be seven years of Tribulation on earth. The Tribulation will end when Christ comes down from heaven and fights the Battle of Armageddon and conquers the earth (Rev. 19:11ff). Then the Devil and his demons will be imprisoned (Rev. 20:1-3). Then, close together, Christ will judge those people on earth who survived the Tribulation and Armageddon at the Sheep and Goat Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46), and also the first resurrection will occur (Rev. 20:4-6). Then there will be the 1,000-year Millennial Kingdom of Christ. Then the Devil and his demons will be loosed and there will be another war (Rev. 20:7-10). Then there will be the second resurrection called the Resurrection of the Unrighteous because the majority of the people will be unrighteous (Rev. 20:11-15). Then God will establish a new heaven and earth (Rev. 21-22).

The common Christian teaching that when people die they go immediately to heaven or “hell” has blurred and basically nullified the biblical teaching of the resurrections and a future Judgment Day. Why would there be a resurrection and judgment if everyone is either in heaven or hell and everyone has already been judged? Theologians answer that question by saying that people are reunited with their bodies at that time, but the Bible never says that. Furthermore, there are serious problems with that answer. One problem is why would a person who has existed in an incorporeal form for hundreds or even thousands of years now need a body? Furthermore, the Bible never speaks of people who have died as being some kind of ghost until the resurrection occurs in the future.

Another problem is that the Bible never speaks of people being reunited with their bodies; that is a made-up answer without biblical support. Another problem is that the Bible never speaks of only “bodies” being raised from the dead; it always speaks of “people” being raised (cf. Job. 19:25-27; Ps. 71:20; Isa. 26:19; 66:14; Ezek. 37:12-14; Dan. 12:2; Hos. 13:14; Matt. 12:42; Luke 11:31; 14:14; John 5:28-29; 1 Cor. 15:20-22, 42-49, 52; 1 Thess. 4:17; Rev. 20:4-15). A “person” is a living body, not just dead flesh.

Another problem is that the Bible never says that people are judged when they die. It always speaks of a future day of judgment. For example, the Queen of Sheba (referred to as the “Queen of the South”) had been dead for nearly 1,000 years when Jesus lived, but he spoke of her as getting up from the dead and being judged in the future, not as a past event (Matt. 12:42; Luke 11:31). But the Bible never says that people are judged when they die, and furthermore, never says that people who have died are in their incorporeal form but somehow still waiting for their judgment. The correct biblical teaching is that when people die they are dead and awaiting being raised from the dead, at which time they will be judged.

[For more information on dead people being dead until the resurrection, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more information on the Sheep and Goat Judgment and the order of end-times events, see commentary on Matt. 25:32. For more on natural people being in the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Matt. 25:34. For more information on Christ’s future Millennial Kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on unsaved people being annihilated in the Lake of Fire and not being in torment forever, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.” For more about Gehenna, see commentary on Matt. 5:22. For information on the punishment of the wicked being in proportion to the wrong they have done, see commentary on Rom. 2:5. For information on how to be saved and live forever instead of dying unsaved and being annihilated, see Rom. 10:8-10 and see commentary on Rom. 10:9.]

Act 24:16

**“conscience without offense.”** That is, a conscience that has no offenses that Paul has committed against God or people.

**“man.”** The word is plural in Greek and refers to all humankind, both men and women (cf. Luke 2:52).

Act 24:18

**“nor with an uproar.”** Paul is the only one who recounts the events accurately and tells the truth about the circumstances surrounding his arrest. Christians should be keenly aware of the fact that God sees and knows everything, and a lie that would never be discovered by man will be disclosed openly at the Judgment (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10; Luke 8:17). Others who spoke of the circumstances distorted the facts for their own gain (see commentary on Acts 23:27).

Act 24:22

**“the Way.”** This was one of the earliest, if not the earliest, formal designations of the Christian Faith, and it is used in Acts 9:2, 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22.

[For more information, see commentary on Acts 9:2.]

Act 24:24

**“But after some days, Felix came with Drusilla, his wife, who was a Jewess.”** “Felix,” more properly Antonius Felix, was the fourth Roman procurator of Judea, and he served from AD 52-60 (see the REV commentary on Acts 23:24).

At this point in Acts, Felix must have been absent from Caesarea for a while, and now he returns with his wife Drusilla. The Roman historian Suetonius wrote that Felix had three wives in succession. The first two were both named Drusilla and this is the second Drusilla, who was the daughter of Herod Agrippa I (the Herod who executed the Apostle James; Acts 12:1-2), and the sister of Herod Agrippa II (the Herod Agrippa in Acts 25:13-26:32). Felix and Drusilla had a son, Marcus Antonius Agrippa, but he was killed when Mount Vesuvius erupted on August 24, 79 A. D., which killed the people in Pompeii, Herculaneum, and the surrounding area.[[145]](#footnote-30706)

Act 24:25

**“Felix became frightened.”** It makes perfect sense that Felix became frightened when Paul spoke of the Day of Judgment. Felix was cruel and undisciplined (see commentary on Acts 24:24.”

Act 24:26

**“money would be given to him by Paul.”** Felix wanted a bribe to let Paul go, and he kept Paul in jail to gain the favor of the Jews (Acts 24:27). This reveals the true character of Felix. Felix was well-known in Roman history for wanting bribes (see the REV commentary on Acts 23:24). He was a dishonest man who will pay for his evil deeds on the Day of Judgment. It is sad, but perhaps not astounding, that over the millennia the Adversary has been able to maneuver so many evil men and women into positions of authority. Felix was recalled to Rome, but the tyrannical and evil people continued in positions of leadership in Israel. It is the population who is being led that is responsible for doing the best it can to assure that rules are in place, and enforced, to keep ungodly people from exercising authority in positions of government.

[For more on the injustice in Paul’s case see commentary on Acts 23:27.]

**Acts Chapter 25**

Act 25:1

**“Festus.”** His more complete name is Porcius Festus, and he was the governor (procurator) of Judea, but the dates are not exactly known—it was likely about AD 59-62. He became governor after Antonius Felix. Roman records of him exist and he even minted a coin in Judea, the Roman bronze prutah. A prutah is not mentioned in the Bible, but it was a bronze coin worth two lepta (a “lepton” was the “widow’s mite” Mark 12:42).

**“province.”** The Roman province of Judea. Lenski correctly writes: “Judea was not strictly a province (eparcheia), but a department of the province of Syria which was under a *proprietor* (*legatus Caesaris*). Judea had a procurator (*epitropos*) who, however, was also called *eparchos*, which shows that Luke’s language is correct.”[[146]](#footnote-16915)

Act 25:3

**“Paul.”** The Greek text reads “him,” but here “Paul” is substituted for clarity.

Act 25:6

**“judgment seat.”** The Greek word is *bēma* (#968 βῆμα, pronounced 'bay-ma), and it was a term that originally meant the space which a foot covers (a foot-length) or a place for the foot. Then it came to mean a raised place mounted by steps, and thus often a platform or the official seat of a judge or ruler, and thus, the place from which awards and rewards were given and punishment meted out.

Act 25:9

**“desiring to gain favor with the Jews.”** Festus, like Felix before him (cf. commentary on Acts 24:26), was more interested in gaining the favor of the Jews than getting justice for Paul. Thus, like so many politicians, he does what is expedient for his career rather than what is just and right. This is a temptation that everyone in power faces, and why we must have a clear concept of the Day of Judgment and the rewards that are available to those who discipline their lives and live in a godly manner. It is also why we, as a society, must have severe punishments for those men and women who do not fear God and use their power unjustly. People who do not fear God’s future Judgment often fear getting punished here and now for their sins, and so avoid improprieties.

[For more on the injustice in Paul’s case see commentary on Acts 23:27.]

Act 25:10

**“I am standing before Caesar’s judgment seat.”** A Roman citizen could appeal to Caesar in Rome if he felt he was not getting a fair trial in his local area. Paul’s trial in Caesarea in Israel had come to the point that this was the only option available to Paul to save his life. He had pleaded his case without success even though his accusers could not prove their case against him (Acts 25:7-8), so what would be different at Jerusalem? He suspected or knew that Festus only wanted to take him to Jerusalem to gain greater favor with the Jews, which would mean further imprisonment or even his death, so he appealed to Caesar.

[For more on the injustice in Paul’s case see commentary on Acts 23:27.]

Act 25:13

**“*Herod* Agrippa the king.”** This is Herod Agrippa II. He was the great-grandson of Herod the Great by his favorite wife, Miriamne. He was living in an incestuous relationship with his sister, Bernice. The territory ruled by Agrippa II was quite large. Claudius gave him even more, then Nero expanded the territory over which he ruled.

Act 25:20

**“being perplexed how to inquire concerning these things.”** This was a lie. Festus knew Paul was innocent (Acts 25:10), but wanted to do the Jews a favor by imprisoning or executing Paul (Acts 25:9), and thus further his career. But of course, he could not say that to King Agrippa, so he makes it seem like he just cannot fully grasp the case and needs help.

[For more on the injustice in Paul’s case see commentary on Acts 23:27.]

Act 25:25

**“But I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death.”** Festus says this now, in front of King Agrippa, because he knows it is true and Paul is about to make his case, which will clearly show it. Festus was a crafty politician, and he knew that Paul might tell Agrippa that he had already made his case to Festus without result, which would place Festus in a bad light. Paul was, after all, a Roman citizen, and as both Claudius Lysias had observed two years earlier (Acts 23:29) and as Agrippa was about to declare (Acts 26:31-32), Paul should have been set free. He was only imprisoned to further the political careers of the governors (see commentaries on Acts 23:27 and 25:9). It was politically expedient for Festus to now admit that Paul had done nothing worthy of death, so if it comes up that Festus should have let Paul go, he can say he was leaning in that direction, but still wanted a little more detail about the case, which he could get more easily in Jerusalem. It would have been a lie, but it would have kept him out of trouble with Rome.

**Acts Chapter 26**

Act 26:11

**“I tried to force them.”** The Greek word is *anagkazō* (#315 ἀναγκάζω), to force or compel, and in this verse, it is a conative imperfect active,[[147]](#footnote-10215) expressing what Paul tried to get the Christians to do. Sometimes he would have been successful, sometimes not.

**“blaspheme.”** The Greek verb *blasphēmeō* (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation.

[For more on *blasphēmeō*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3.]

Act 26:12

**“On one such occasion.”** The Greek is difficult to bring into English clearly without nuancing the text, as evidenced by the wide variety of English translations. The REV (cf. CJB, NAB) picks up the sense well. The literal is simply, “in which,” and refers to Acts 26:11, which speaks of Paul’s persecution of the Church. Then Acts 26:12 speaks of one of his journeys to persecute the Church.

Act 26:14

**“It is hard.”** Paul’s testimony about what Jesus said to him as it is recorded here in Acts 26:14 is more complete than it is in the record of Paul’s conversion in Acts 9:4. Acts 9:4 leaves out the part about Jesus saying to Paul that it was hard on Paul to be kicking against the goads. Nevertheless, some scribes copying the text of Acts harmonized the text and added the phrase about kicking the pricks to the record in Acts 9, and from those Greek manuscripts, it came to be part of the King James Version. It was common to harmonize accounts of the same record so that they read the same way.

[For more on harmonization of the biblical text, see commentary on Luke 11:2, “Father.”]

**“goads.”** The use of a goad was a biblical custom primarily used in plowing a field. The man plowing the field carried a goad that he used to control the ox, cow, or donkey that was doing the plowing (the donkey was not the preferred plow animal, but occasionally it was all the farmer had). The goad was a long stick, preferably at least eight feet long, with a point at one end that the farmer would use to poke the animal if it started to wander. Young or untrained animals that had not plowed much before were especially prone to wander from the straight path and so they had to be steered in the right direction, as well as encouraged to go forward and not stop.

Occasionally the animal would get annoyed at the farmer and would kick back at him, at which point the farmer would simply hold the goad behind the animal and let it kick the pointed stick, a painful act that trained it not to kick. That was what Jesus was referring to when he said, “It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” The words of the wise are compared to goads in Ecclesiastes because they steer us in the right direction and keep us moving.

The plows in biblical times were mostly light scratch plows and could be held with one hand, which allowed the goad to be carried in the other hand. A more well-to-do farmer might have a metal point on the end of his goad to keep it from splitting or wearing away, and it was also common to carve the back end of the goad into a flat blade, or have a flat metal blade attached that could be used to clean the plow blade and break up clods of dirt. A goad could be an effective weapon in the hands of a capable person, and Shamgar killed 600 Philistines with an ox goad (Judg. 3:31).

Act 26:18

**“the Adversary.”** The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated as “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost.

[For more information, see commentary on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

Act 26:23

**“first.”** There is some controversy as to whether the word “first” goes with rising from the dead (REV, ESV, NIV, etc.) or proclaiming the light (NASB1995). The natural word order in the Greek tends to make “first” go with resurrection from the dead, which is certainly the case: Jesus was the first person and only person who was raised from the dead and never died again. The verse becomes somewhat more ambiguous if “first” goes with “proclaim.” Being raised is not a prerequisite for proclaiming truth, and there were others before him who proclaimed truth.

**“the People.”** A term the Jews used of themselves. In the Jewish mindset, there were “the people” (the Jews) and everyone else, “the Gentiles.”

**“and to the Gentiles.”** The salvation and everlasting life given by the Messiah was not just for the Jews, even though many of them thought that it was. The first prophecy of the Messiah is the one God made to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3:15, and that was thousands of years before the Jews existed. About 2,000 years after that first prophecy of the Messiah, God promised Abraham that all the people of earth, not just the Jews, would be blessed through him (Gen. 12:3). Then God repeated that promise to Isaac (Gen. 26:4); and to Jacob (Gen. 28:14). Besides those promises, the Old Testament had a number of verses that spoke of Gentiles being included in the Messianic Kingdom, which meant they were granted everlasting life (Ps. 102:15; Isa. 2:2-4; 19:23-25; 42:6; 49:6; 51:4-5; 56:3-7; 60:3; 66:18-21; Ezek. 39:21, 27; Mic. 4:2; Hag. 2:7; Zech. 8:22).

Act 26:28

**“Christian.”** For information on the use of “Christian” in the New Testament, see commentary on Acts 11:26.

Act 26:29

**“in a short or long *time*.”** The Greek is literally, “in little or in much” [the Greek word *kai* is usually “and” but here better “or”]. The context is time, so most scholars agree that Paul is saying he prays that Agrippa would become a Christian no matter if it takes a little or a long time, and most English versions follow that kind of reasoning. In contrast, the HCSB says, “whether easily or with difficulty.” Although the Greek can be translated that way, it does not seem to fit the context nearly as well, which is about time, not how easy or hard the decision will be for Agrippa. Lenski translates it, “in short order and in great measure,”[[148]](#footnote-10423) but that, too, does not seem to fit the context well. King Agrippa is resisting the Gospel message—perhaps in part because it would cost him dearly in the eyes of Rome—so it does not seem that Paul would be pressing in even harder and saying he wished Agrippa would become, not just a Christian, but a committed one, a Christian “in great measure.” The scriptural and social context fits best with “in a short or long time.” Similar translations include: “Whether in a short or long time” (NASB, NET; cf. ESV, NIV, RSV, AMP, Moffatt); “sooner or later” (NABRE); “Whether quickly or not” (NLT, NRSV; cf. N. T. Wright); “In a hurry or not” (Goodspeed).

**Acts Chapter 27**

Act 27:1

**“we.”** This verse starts the third and last “we” section of Acts, when Luke joins Paul on his travels. The three “we” sections are: Acts 16:10-17; Acts 20:5-21:18; and Acts 27:1-28:16.

[For more information, see commentary on Acts 16:10.]

Act 27:2

**“a ship of Adramyttium.”** Adramyttium (a-druh-'mit-ee-uhm) was a port on the east side of the Aegean Sea in what is today Turkey. It was at the head of the bay in Mysia, in the northern part of the Roman province of Asia, and was across from the island of Lesbos. This ship was one of the freighters that sailed the coastal waters and traveled from port to port, which is why the verse says it was about to “sail to the places on the coast of *the Roman province of* Asia.” Many of the ancient ships were not well prepared for deep water sailing out of the sight of land, and so made it a practice to keep the shore in sight most of the time.

Many things about traveling by ship were challenging. First, there were no passenger ships until modern times. With the exception of ships that specifically carried imperial persons, every ship was a working vessel or a military ship. Anyone wanting to travel by ship had to first find a ship going in the direction they wanted, then haggle for lodging space, which was most often just a small place on the deck.

There were no food or provisions for passengers; any passenger had to bring his own food and wine, though some ships provided water. Especially the larger ships had the equivalent of a galley where meals could be cooked, and although the crew would always have first dibs, passengers would be allowed to cook meals during off times. Travelers also had to bring anything comfortable they wanted to sleep on, and their own covering for warmth and in case of rain. They were usually allowed to pitch a little tent-like covering at night and take it down during the day. Traveling with companions was almost a necessity. They helped each other carry enough material and food for an extended voyage, stood up for each other during the almost inevitable turf wars that would arise over the best places to camp on the deck, and watched each other’s things if someone needed a walk around the deck or was sick.

Also, ships had no set sailing schedule. They had to wait for the right tide, the right wind, and for the omens to be right as well. A bad omen would cancel sailing. Furthermore, some days were considered bad to start a trip (like our Friday the thirteenth). No skipper would leave port on days such as August 24, October 5, November 8, etc.).

Almost always the ships would travel in sight of land. Instruments like the sextant had not been invented, and it was easy to get way off course in the open ocean, so skirting the land was usually the best course of action for ships. The exception was usually some of the large grain ships that plied the ocean and ran, for example, the trip from Alexandria Egypt to Rome.

Act 27:6

**“found a ship.”** For travel by ship, see commentary on Acts 27:2.

Act 27:7

**“the wind was not allowing us *to go* further.”** Boats in Paul’s day were not able to travel close to the direction of the wind like modern sailing vessels can. For one thing, their keels were not deep, so if they pressed hard into the wind, the keel would not bite deeply into the water and the ship would slip sideways to the wind as well as move forward. Thus it often occurred that a vessel sailing against the wind just could not go certain places.

Act 27:8

**“sailing along the coast.”** The Greek word is *paralegomai* (#3881 παραλέγομαι). It is “(a technical, nautical term) to sail along beside some object—‘to sail along the coast, to sail along the shore.’”[[149]](#footnote-14004) It is also a maritime technical term for “sailed along” or “sailed beside,”[[150]](#footnote-20917) and the coast is implied from the context. It can also mean “coast [glide] along.”

Act 27:9

**“the voyage was now dangerous.”** Winter storms on the Mediterranean Sea are well documented and were very dangerous. Ancient writings and the remains of many shipwrecks attest to this. Sailing the Mediterranean was considered risky from March to May, and again in September and October. However, from November to February sea travel was considered not just risky, but dangerous. Here in Acts 27:9, “the Fast,” the Day of Atonement, which generally fell in late September or early October, was past, so travel was becoming dangerous (the Day of Atonement was a day of fasting, so it became known as “the Fast,” cf. Lev. 16:29). Even if there was no storm on the sea, winter travel was dangerous because the sky would become overcast, often for days, and sometimes for weeks (the storm Paul got caught in lasted more than two weeks. Acts 27:27). This meant that there was no way to navigate by the sun, moon, or stars, which greatly increased the possibility of getting off course and having a shipwreck.

**“the Fast was already over.”** “The Fast” was a common name for the Day of Atonement, which was Tishri 10, a date that usually fell in our September. The Mediterranean Sea became very dangerous for sailing vessels in the fall and winter of the year. Paul warned the Romans about that, but they were overconfident and decided to sail anyway, but the trip was a disaster.

[For more on the Feasts of Israel, see commentary on Lev. 23:2.]

Act 27:10

**“lives.”** The Greek word is *psuchē*, often translated “soul.” Paul was in no way saying that people’s everlasting souls were in danger from the storm. He was using “soul” for the natural life of the body. See commentary on Acts 20:24.

Act 27:14

**“northeaster.”** The Greek is *eurakulon* (Eὐρακύλων), which is a hybrid sailor’s word from the Greek *euros*, east wind, and the Latin *aquilo*, north wind. Gales from the NE are not uncommon in the Mediterranean.

Act 27:17

On the North African coast were two gulfs referred to as the Syrtis. The Greater Syrtis, off Lybia, was the easternmost, and further west was the Lesser Syrtis. Sailors were afraid of these areas because they had sandbars that shifted greatly and dangerous shallows. The Syrtis here in Acts 27:17 is the Greater Syrtis. The sailors did not know exactly where they were, and were afraid that they may have been blown, or would be blown, farther toward the coast of Africa than they intended to sail and thus be blown into the Syrtis, where they would almost certainly be blown aground and perish.

The Syrtis “had a horrible reputation as a sailors’ graveyard (Pliny, *Natural History* 5.26). Josephus (*J. W.* 2.16.4 [2:381]) says the name alone struck terror in those who heard it. It was near the famous Scylla and Charybdis mentioned in Homer’s *Odyssey*” (text note, NET First Edition).

Act 27:22

**“life.”** See commentary on Acts 27:10.

Act 27:24

**“look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Act 27:27

**“drifting across.”** The Greek, *diapherō* (#1308 διαφέρω) in this case refers to drifting across, although we know from the record in Acts that the wind was actually blowing them steadily. There is no reason to translate the text as “to and fro,” “up and down,” etc. The wind was in a steady direction. They were being blown across, (or “through,”[[151]](#footnote-29512)) the sea.[[152]](#footnote-31964)

**“Adriatic.”** This could well be confusing to the modern reader. In Roman times the Adriatic Sea extended to the middle of what we know as the Mediterranean Sea, but today geographers limit it to the sea between Italy and Greece. The ship Paul was on was in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, between Crete and Malta. It was not in the modern Adriatic Sea.

Act 27:37

**“souls.”** Here, “souls” means people. See commentary on Acts 2:41.

Act 27:38

**“grain.”** The Greek word is *sitos* (#4621 σῖτος), which means “wheat,” or “grain” in general. Here it most likely means grain in general. It is not likely that the only grain on board was wheat, even though wheat was the most desirable grain. At that time of year, all of the grain harvests were over.

**Acts Chapter 28**

Act 28:4

**“Justice *herself*.”** Cf. NET translation, “Justice herself has not allowed him to live!” Justice comes from the Greek *dikē* (#1349 δίκη, pronounced dee-'kay), which BDAG defines in this verse as “*Justice* personified as a deity.” The pagans conceived of Justice as a female deity who ensured that proper punishment was given to criminals: “A goddess who personifies justice in seeking out and punishing the guilty–‘the goddess Justice.’ … Although a number of modern English translations have rendered *dikē* (δίκη) “justice,” preferring to use an abstraction, in the original setting it is almost certainly a reference to a pagan deity” (NET Translation Note, Acts 28:4). Kistemaker writes: “The natives conclude that their goddess Justice is meting out divine punishment on an evildoer.”[[153]](#footnote-12761) Thus we have added “herself” in italics to make clear that a personified deity was intended.

Act 28:11

**“set sail in a ship.”** For more on travel by ship, see commentary on Acts 27:2.

Act 28:15

**“The Market of Appius.”** More properly, this is the “Forum of Appius.” The Forum of Appius was a town on the Appian Way (the Appian Road), which was one of the earliest and one of the most strategically important of all the Roman roads. It ran for some 350 miles (563 km) from Rome to Brindisi in southeast Italy (on the heel of the boot of Italy), and allowed the Roman Army to control southern Italy. It was so important that Horace referred to it as the Queen of the long roads. On his journey to Rome, Paul landed at Puteoli (Acts 28:13), and from there he was taken on land to Rome, a distance of about 150 miles (240 km). Walking inland from Puteoli, Paul and the soldiers would have soon come to the Appian Way, which made the travel north to Rome much easier.

The Forum of Appius was about 40 miles (64 km) southeast of Rome. It was a rough town, not known for law and order, but due to its distance from Rome and being on the Appian Way, it got lots of traffic. The Roman poet Horace described it as a town full of boatmen and cheating innkeepers (*Satires*; 1. 5. 4. (LCL)). Although the 40-mile trip from Rome to the Forum of Appius could be made in one day, it was often made in two, which speaks of the love the believers had for Paul in that they were willing to make that trip to meet him and escort him back to Rome.

**“the Three Taverns.”** The Three Taverns was a stopping place on the Appian Way about 33 miles (53 km) southeast of Rome. It originated as a staging place for official Roman traffic, but soon became widely used by all travelers. The term “taverns” can be misleading today because at the time a “tavern” was more of a shop and not just a place to get drinks. The three “taverns” (or “shops”) would most naturally be the blacksmith’s shop, the general store, and the inn or place of refreshments. Those three places would have been prominent enough that the stopping place gained the name, the “Three Shops.” The Three Taverns would have been very busy because it was a natural stopping place on the road south from Rome. The journey of 33 miles was a long but very makeable day’s journey from Rome.

Act 28:16

**“we.”** See commentary on Acts 16:10.

Act 28:17

**“brothers.”** Here “brothers” means “fellow Jews.”

**“fathers.”** Here “fathers” has the common meaning of ancestors.

Act 28:25

**“the Holy Spirit rightly spoke.”** “The Holy Spirit” is the name for God that emphasizes His power in operation. Here it refers to a prophetic word inferred to Isaiah in roughly 700 BC. God is called “the Holy Spirit” in a number of verses in the NT, including Matthew 1:20; 12:32; and Hebrews 9:8.

[For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

Act 28:26

**“Go to this people and say, ‘By hearing you will hear, yet absolutely not understand.”** Paul quoted Isaiah because what was happening in Isaiah’s time was happening in Paul’s time: the Word of God was available but arrogant people hardened their hearts against it, so they heard but did not understand and they saw but did not perceive.

[For more on the idiom of permission, see the commentary on Rom. 9:18. For a good example of the idiom of permission see the commentary on Exod. 4:21. For more on why Christ taught in parables, see commentary on Matt. 13:13.]

Act 28:27

**“grown dull.”** The Greek is *pachunō* (#3975 παχύνω), and means “to make thick, to make fat, to fatten,” and it is used metaphorically for making someone stupid or dull.

Act 28:28

**“this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles.”** The theology known as “ultradispensationalism” starts a new administration with this verse. E. W. Bullinger tries to explain why. The essence of Bullinger’s argument is that up until this point the *parousia*, the personal coming of Christ, was presented to Israel if they would repent, but after this, the *parousia* is not mentioned again. Thus it is at this point a new administration starts which is primarily to the Gentiles and is set forth in the later Epistles such as Ephesians, Colossians, and Philippians.[[154]](#footnote-30213)

We do not agree that a new administration should start with this verse. For one thing, there is no genuinely clear evidence for the change of dispensation in Acts 28. There is nothing like the expulsion from Eden, the giving of the Law, or the pouring out of the gift of holy spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Furthermore, there are not major doctrinal changes, which are always a huge part of any change in administration (a point we will expand upon shortly). Furthermore, the fact that Paul said that the Gospel would be sent to the Gentiles was not new. In fact, carefully reading Acts 28:28 shows it does not ever say that it was new, just that the Good News would go to Gentiles who would listen rather than Jews who would not. This qualifies as a genuine prophecy, but not the start of a new administration.

If the inclusion of the Gentiles were going to start a new administration, then it seems that Acts 10, where the Gentiles were clearly included in the Church, would qualify better than Acts 28. The Acts 10 record would then have been further confirmed by Acts 11:26, when many Gentiles were added to the Church and believers were first called “Christians,” a term including both Jews and Gentiles. The inclusion of the Gentiles would have been even further confirmed by the Jerusalem council in Acts 15 (likely AD 49). Then, highlighting that the Gentiles were now the major converts to the Church would have been Romans 11:28, written less than a decade after the Jerusalem council (likely AD 57) which says that the Jews were enemies of the Gospel. Although Paul was still actively trying to win Jews through his three itinerary journeys, it is clear that his greatest successes were among the Gentiles, something that can be easily seen by reading Acts.

As to the ultradispensational position that the offer of the *parousia* has somehow been withdrawn because the Jews rejected Jesus, we find it untenable.[[155]](#footnote-32552) Although the word “*parousia*” is not used in the later Epistles, Ephesians-Colossians, the concept of the *parousia* certainly is. Furthermore, it is in 1 John 2:28, which we would argue is later than Acts 28. The *parousia* relates to the coming and presence of Christ, which is in all the Epistles, and is the heart of the book of Revelation. The *parousia* was not withdrawn simply because the Jews rejected it. They just will not get to enjoy Christ’s return.

A primary motivation that ultra-dispensationalists have for making a new administration starting in Acts 28 is that it gets rid of the manifestations of holy spirit such as speaking in tongues, prophecy, and healing. Most ultradispensationalists do agree that God still heals, but not as a manifestation of holy spirit like Peter, Paul, and others operated, but rather just as something that God occasionally does by fiat for His own glory. But the manifestations of holy spirit cannot be done away with without getting rid of holy spirit. By definition, if you have holy spirit, you have manifestations. That lesson goes back to Numbers 11 when the 70 who got the spirit immediately began the manifestation of prophecy. But Ephesians and the later Epistles clearly mention the holy spirit. Ephesians explains the whole process of receiving holy spirit: we hear, then we believe, then we are sealed with holy spirit (Eph. 1:13, 14). But for ultradispensationalism to work, Christians must have the gift of holy spirit but not have the manifestations of holy spirit. That is not possible. The manifestations are inherent with the gift of holy spirit. Ephesians, for example, mentions prophets in the Church, but prophecies are a manifestation of the gift of holy spirit. Also, the manifestations of the spirit are clearly in the book of Revelation, because prophecy is mentioned a few different times. It makes no sense that the manifestations of holy spirit would be given to the early church and to the people in the book of Revelation, but not given to the Church today.

Considering the evidence, there is just no valid reason for starting a new administration in Acts 28.

[For information on the Administration of Grace, see commentary on Eph. 3:2.]

Act 28:29

This verse is omitted in the REV. The textual evidence shows that this verse is a late addition to the Western text, and from there, it was copied into some Byzantine texts (from which it came into the KJV). The addition was possibly made because of the abrupt transition in the language from what is now verse 28 to verse 30. Other versions omit this verse, including the NIV, ESV, and RSV.

1. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-22294)
2. Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 790-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-28687)
3. See Graeser, Lynn, and Schoenheit, *The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to be Like Christ*. [↑](#footnote-ref-28661)
4. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-18939)
5. Cf. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary of the Greek New Testament*, 278-79. [↑](#footnote-ref-10971)
6. Cf. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, 538, “metonymy.” [↑](#footnote-ref-20241)
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8. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 3:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-26441)
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10. G. Aldrete, *Daily Life in the Roman City*, 97-98. [↑](#footnote-ref-16155)
11. Cf. Friberg, Louw and Nida, and BDAG, s.v. “πρηνής.” [↑](#footnote-ref-17467)
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21. Thayer, s.v. “μεγαλεῖος.” [↑](#footnote-ref-23159)
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37. Cf. Wuest, *New Testament*, “from among the dead,” 279. [↑](#footnote-ref-22658)
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