

# The Acts of the Apostles

Adult Bible Study

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## I. Preliminary considerations

- A. Significance - The primary importance of the Acts of the Apostles lies in Historical information it gives us of the early Church. Without Acts we would have no historical information about the earliest days of the Church at all. True enough we could glean from Paul's letters some historical data but it would be very implicit and ambiguous. Acts therefore, provides us with our sole biblical source (from the standpoint of History) for the life of the Church in the Apostolic age.
- B. Style - the Acts of the Apostles is historical but there are different ways of writing history
  1. There is the manner that attempts to trace the progress of events from day to day, week to week, year to year and so forth. This method is favored by the modern mind. Nevertheless it is not the form of history we experience here. The book makes no claim to give an exhaustive, blow by blow account of the history of the early Church or of each of the Apostles. Apart from Paul, only three Apostles are mentioned: Peter, James and John. Peter is really only one of the three who is thoroughly treated. Once the focus shifts to the Gentile mission we also see how the focus necessarily changes to Paul who is an Apostle, but not one of the Twelve.
  2. There is the manner that opens up a series of windows and allows us to glimpse the great themes, events and personalities. This is the form we find in Acts. The events chosen are the highlights and they are also representative of what was going on generally. Out of the many possible events he could have chosen, Luke picked out those that were most important or most able to exemplify Christian living. Hence we can describe the events of Acts as windows into the History of the Early Church rather than a complete listing of events and people. Luke writes as a pastoral leader rather than a pure historian in the modern sense.
  3. The essential perspective of Acts is that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Church grew and matured. Of particular glory is the Gentile mission. There is particular emphasis therefore on the gradual but certain realization by the Church of her catholicity (i.e. universality) and the certainty of the Lord's command to go unto all the nations.
  4. Finally let this caution be advanced: Acts does not just concern the past. It is God's inspired word to us and therefore presents us with models of how God deals with us and how he expects us to act.
- C. Style (cont.) - There are certain stylistic devices Used by Luke that are worth mentioning here
  1. Speeches - The speeches of Peter, Paul and others do not merely record something said. Rather, most speeches explain some event and provide the

- reader with the real meaning of the event. Other speeches, esp. Paul's after his arrest, answer objections to the Christian faith.
2. Repetitions in the story - Some story are repeated several times (eg. The conversion of Saul, the conversion of Cornelius). This is to underscore their importance. For example, Cornelius was the first Gentile convert. This is obviously an important milestone for the early Church and showed how the Church now encompassed more than just the Jewish People. Likewise, the repetition shows how it was Peter, not Paul, who first endorsed the principle of the mission to the Gentiles. This is because the whole event took place before Paul's arrival on the scene.
- D. The Author - Luke, the same author of the third Gospel, is the author of this work. We know really very little about him. Apart from Acts he is mentioned only three times (Col. 4:14; Phil 24; 2 Tim 4:11). These reference allow us to say certain things about Luke:
1. He was a physician. This is already strongly evident in Luke's Gospel where he often defaults to medical terminology.
  2. He was one of Paul's most valued helpers and loyal friends
  3. He accompanied Paul to Rome in his last imprisonment.
  4. He was a Gentile<sup>1</sup>
- E. The recipient of the Work is a certain Theophilus. Both the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles are addressed to this individual. We can only guess who he was. There are several theories
1. He was not a real person at all. Rather, he was an imaginary recipient who represented all recipients. This theory lays strong emphasis on his name which means "To Love God" (Theos=God; Philein=to love). This makes the opening address a generic "Dear Lover of God."
  2. An alternate form of this theory is that Luke did write to an individual but his real name was not Theophilus. Rather this name was used since it was dangerous to a Christian at those times.
  3. Theophilus was a real person and most probably a high government official. Luke addresses him as "most excellent: but the phrase means the same things as "Your Excellency." This theory would hold that Luke wrote to him as a Govt official with the intention of describing Christianity as a normal and in fact a wonderful way of life so that persecutions by Govt officials would be discouraged.
- F. The date of the Letter was likely in 80's AD.
- G. Purpose of the Letter - There are several possible and likely reasons for the composition of Acts
1. Taking the third "Theophilus theory" for our starting point, one likely purpose was to show forth the life of Christians in a way that would commend it to the Roman Government. Luke seems to wish to show that the general approach of the Roman officials has been one of tolerance and he hopes that this will continue since it is a wise policy. This theory flows from several indications
    - a. Roman officials are always depicted as fair and courteous (cf

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<sup>1</sup>This means that he is the only Gentile Author of a New Testament Book.

- 18:12; 19:31). They do merely presume evil accusations but investigate them. Further, they stay out of theological debates between Christians & Jews.
- b. Sergius Paulus, the governor of Cyprus becomes a Christian (13:12).
  - c. Christians are depicted as good & loyal citizens. (18:14; 19:37; 23:29)
2. Another aim was to show that Christianity was for people of every nation. Philip preaches to the Samaritans, He teaches and baptizes the Ethiopian Eunuch, Peter accepts Cornelius into the faith, Christians preach to the pagans at Antioch, Paul travels far and wide among the Gentiles, the Council of Jerusalem and its results, etc.
  3. The chief reason seems to be the story and fulfillment of the words of Christ in 1:8 *You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*. Luke shows how this command and promise is obeyed and fulfilled. The little band of followers from Palestine, a remote region, had expanded and in less than 30 years all the way to Rome. This point helps answer the question as to why Acts so abruptly with Paul's imprisonment and his arrival in Rome. What ever happened to him? Why does Luke not tell us? Because he had accomplished his purpose in writing: He had shown how Christianity began in Jerusalem and swept across the world until it reached Rome. From Rome it would spread to the whole Empire and the known world. A possible subtitle of the Acts of the Apostles might be: "How the Gospel was brought from Jerusalem to Rome.
- H. As said in number 3 just above, the primary purpose of Acts is to show the spread of the Gospel. This becomes evident when we look at how Luke ends each major section of his work. Broadly speaking, Luke divides the work into five sections each closing with a one summary of praise about the spread of the Gospel.<sup>2</sup> The five sections are:
1. Jerusalem and the preaching of Peter which finishes with the summary "The word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem; and a great many of the priest were obedient to the faith." (1:1-6:7)
  2. The spread of Christianity through Palestine and into Samaria. It ends with the Summary "So the Church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, had peace and was built up; and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it was multiplied." (6:8-9:31)
  3. The conversion of Saul and the spread of the Church to Antioch and the reception of Cornelius, a Gentile, into the Church. It ends with the summary, "The word of God grew and multiplied." (9:32-12:24)
  4. The extension of the Church throughout Asia Minor and the preaching tour of Galatia. It ends with the summary "So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily." (12:25-16:5)

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<sup>2</sup>For a more detailed outline of the letter see appendix 1.

5. The extension of the Church into Europe. It ends with the summary "So the word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily." (16:6-19:20) Acts ends with the arrival of Paul in Rome and his "preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered." (19:21-28:31)
- I. Jerusalem and Rome. Some scholars have held that Luke is especially concerned to stress Jerusalem as the mother church, the seat of the Twelve and the doctrinal focal point of Christian missionary activity. This is all true, however it must not be overlooked how important Rome is to him as well. In a sense, Paul's arrival there is the culmination of the whole story. Why?
    1. First, because Rome was the capitol of the Pagan Gentile world. Symbolically it represented all the Gentiles. The Gentile mission is obviously very precious to Luke. Thus Paul's arrival and preaching of the Gospel there is the dramatic climax of the story of the early Church.
    2. Second, Rome was the nerve center of the ancient world. To and from Rome came thousands. The road network of the Roman Empire was impressive even by modern standards. All roads led to Rome and from there. Certainly to have the Gospel message alive and well in Rome was to ensure its spread to remoter regions.
    3. This explains not only Luke's climatic presentation of the Paul's Roman arrival but also Paul's stated desire to visit Rome and his thoughtful and brilliant Letter to the Romans. Further, it gives the context for Peter's relocation from Antioch to Rome according to tradition.
    4. Hence, while it is clear that Jerusalem is the Mother Church and the location of doctrinal authority (cf esp. Chapter 15), in another important sense, Rome is the target church. This is important for later developments in the Church and helps to explain the shift of the locus of authority from Jerusalem to Rome. What is only present here in seminal form, would later bear fruit.
    5. Finally it must be noted that Jerusalem the mother church was completely destroyed in 70 AD. This helps explain the transfer of the seat of Apostolic Authority to Rome. Peter, the chief apostle moved first to Ephesus and eventually to Rome probably well before 70 AD probably due to many factors including the vigorous growth of the Church among the Gentiles. Thus Jerusalem began to be eclipsed even before it's destruction, yet it's destruction in 70 surely was a major blow to it's influence in those early years.
  - J. Israel and the nations. Although Luke spends considerable time in showing forth the Gentile mission, he does not neglect the Jewish Christians. The First chapters of Acts are devoted to them and it must not be forgotten that many did in fact accept Christ. The Gentile mission is not the rejection of Israel but the legitimate continuation of it.
  - K. Luke and Paul. - Some scholars especially Protestant scholars of the past have put Luke and Paul at odds in terms of their basic theology. Essentially Luke shows a more fully developed Church than does Paul. Since Protestantism tended to make Paul the standard of genuine Christianity, any divergence between the vision of

Luke and that of Paul meant that Luke had to cede to Paul. But this is wrong for several reasons.

1. It is wrong to pit one book of the Bible against others. The Holy Spirit is the true author of all scripture. Hence, where seemingly different visions are seen we need to enter and appreciate the diverse perspective rather than choose sides. There are no sides; there is only one Author.
2. Paul's purpose in his letters is to address specific pastoral and theological issues, not to necessarily present a portrait of the major events of the early Church. That is Luke's purpose. Hence it is wrong to judge either of them by the other's writing since the purpose is different. If we seek a glimpse of the life of the early Church (albeit, incomplete) we are best to look to Acts. If we seek a thorough development of certain theological and pastoral concerns then Paul is our best bet. Nevertheless, this is not a hard and fast rule. Both Paul and Luke contribute to and compliment each other's work.
3. Interestingly enough, when some Protestant scholars of the past were reminded of the rather advanced Church structure presumed in Paul's letters to Titus and Timothy, many responded by rejecting the Pauline authorship of those letters. In those letters, there is a very definite authority structure with the Church. The office of bishop is very highly developed as well as other very "Catholic" structures.
4. Many of these debates between Catholic and Protestant scholars have subsided in recent years. Nevertheless they the issues are still an important undercurrent of which we should be aware.

L. Other religious themes:

1. The Holy Spirit - Acts could be called the Book of the Holy Spirit. The books is replete with descriptions and recognitions of the work of the Holy Spirit.
  - a. There are five separate accounts of the Spirit's dramatic outpouring upon believers: 2:1-4; 4:28-31; 8:15-17; 10:44; 19:6
  - b. Luke also shows how the Holy Spirit actively intervenes in the Church's story, impelling and guiding it. (eg. 8:29, 39; 10:19; 11:15; 13:2; 15:28; 16:6; 20:22; 21:4,11).
  - c. In these ways Luke advance the theological understanding of the Holy Spirit as a person of the Trinity.
2. The Life of the Church - Luke is a witness to the way God is forming for himself a people for His name and he seeks to communicate this work as he sees it unfold. His descriptions are somewhat idealistic (being of one mind and heart, sharing all possessions etc.) But he does not entirely overlook the less than full realization of these ideals. Luke describes
  - a. Community prayer (1:24; 4:24-30; 6:4; 12:5, 12; 13:2; 13:2; 16:25; 20:36; 21:5,14)
  - b. and worship, including the Eucharist (20:7)
  - c. the sharing of possessions (6:1-7; 11:27-30)
  - d. listening to the teaching of the Apostles (6:1-7; 11:1-18; 15:30-35; 20:7-12; 20:17-35)

- e. the leadership of the Apostles & the establishment of local leaders (6:1-7; 8:14-24; 11:22-26; 14:21-23; 15:22-27; 15:31-32; 19:21-23...)
- 3. The discernment of God's will - Luke shows with detail how the early Church discerned God's will through several important examples
  - a. the election of Matthias (1:15-26)
  - b. the decision to keep preaching despite persecution (4:23-31)
  - c. the choosing of the seven deacons (6:1-6)
  - d. The acceptance of Paul as a preacher and apostle (9:26-30)
  - e. The question of Gentile converts (10-15)
- 4. Universality (Catholicity) - the mission to the Gentiles, as we have seen in other contexts is of great importance. Let it simply be mentioned here in passing.
- M. Other themes of Acts mentioned here only in passing.
  - 1. The Church as the fulfillment of Christ's saving Plan
  - 2. The risen Lord Jesus acts through his Spirit-filled Apostles
  - 3. Continuity - the inclusion of the Gentiles is the fulfillment of God's chosen people, not the end of them.
  - 4. The triumph of Christianity despite all obstacles.
  - 5. God's guidance of the early Church
- N. Ecclesiology - Ecclesiology is a fancy term for "the study of the nature of the Church." It will be of interest for us to see how our Catholic understanding of the nature of the Church and the structure of it is already seen in acts. This will be so in several ways The authority structure of the Church is already evident in seminal<sup>3</sup> form in Acts.
  - 1. the office of the Papacy is based on the ministry of Peter. In Acts we see

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<sup>3</sup>Seminal - namely the seed for what would later be more fully developed is already sown here. This is an important concept. There are many qualities of the Church, and teachings of the Church that are not entirely spelled out in Scripture but these ARE there in seed form. For example, not every implication of the teaching on the Trinity is present explicitly in sacred scripture, (In fact, the word "Trinity" is nowhere found in Sacred Writ). Yet the teaching is clearly there in Scripture and will be more fully developed later (eg. that the Holy Spirit is a Person etc. ) This should not dismay us. If I were to plant a seed for an oak tree and come back in 20 years I would not expect to find only a seed still lying there. I would be very disappointed if that was all I found. Rather, I would expect to find a 50 foot Oak. I would not even be able to see the seed anymore. Nevertheless, all that the tree had become was contained, though obscurely, in that seed and flowed from it. So it is with the Church. The Lord sowed a seed he expected to grow. To focus only on the very earliest days of the Church, say the first 20 years, would be to neglect the growth that necessarily must happen and that the Lord intends. In terms of evaluating any vision of the Church, or any doctrinal teaching we need not always find it explicitly in scripture but it needs to be there at least seminally. That is, the teachings of the Church may never directly contradict scripture and ought to flow properly from the truths contained in scripture. This understanding is important as a manner of answering critics of certain Church teachings. They say "It's not in the Bible" by which they mean exactly spelled out or specifically mentioned. Our response must be to show at least that the seed of that later growth and insight can be found in the Bible.

the authority of Peter clearly set forth. This is especially so in Acts 15 when the Gentile question is resolved by the Apostles with Peter presiding and rendering the final judgement. It is also seen by his leadership just after the Pentecost event, and by the special guidance he received from the Holy Spirit preparing him for the acceptance of Cornelius and the other Gentiles as well as for the proper interpretation of dietary laws.

2. The office of Bishop is based on the ministry of the Apostles as well as the men they appointed to lead local communities by the laying on of hands. Form the authority of the Apostles also derives the authority of Bishops in the Catholic understanding and we shall see how this is also rooted in Acts and other N.T. books.
3. The diaconate is also seen to be instituted in Acts, by the Apostles.
4. The distinction between the local Church and the Universal Church will also be seen here. Local Churches had established leaders but there was also a central authority vested in the Apostles and their appointed representatives that had to be respected.
5. There are other Catholic insights that we will discuss later.

II. The Translation will be the Revised Standard version for two reasons

- A. The availability of it to me on a computer Bible
- B. It is a scholarly, accurate and readable and avoids certain pitfalls of other modern and approved translations
  1. the Revised New American Bible is basically good but has certain annoying traits. Chief among these and perhaps most startling is the refusal to capitalize the word holy in Holy Spirit. The NAB renders it holy Spirit (!).
  2. Inclusive language is not used. Some might prefer that it be used but it can lead to confusion in some of the scriptural allusions especially the psalms. The Inclusive language question has become so contentious that it has led some modern translators to use ideology rather than good scholarship when translating. To avoid all this we use the RSV which was written before all the modern warfare and confusion.

## The Acts of the Apostles Textual Commentary

- I. The Mission in Palestine (Acts I:1-9:43)
- A. Foundations of the missionary era
1. Preface- *In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, {2} until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. {3} To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God. {4} And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me, {5} for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit." {6} So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" {7} He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. {8} But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."*
  - a. An Outline of the Preface:
    - (1) Review for the Reader - vv. 1-2
    - (2) Recapitulation of the Resurrection - v. 3
    - (3) Requirement of reception - vv. 4-8
  - b. in the first book - Acts is the second "book" written by Luke. The first book was the Gospel of Luke which told the story of the life of Jesus upon earth: *all that Jesus began to do and teach, {2} until the day when he was taken up*. The second volume is Acts which tells the story of the Christian Church which exists in fulfillment of Jesus work and by his command of grace: "Go unto all the nations..." For these eight verses Luke simply recalls, in a very cursory way what happened during those forty days between the resurrection and the ascension.
  - c. *to do and teach* - these words very concisely sum up Jesus' life which was not one of words only but of deeds. So it must be with the life of faith. Vatican II teaches, *The economy of revelation is realized by deeds and words, which are intrinsically bound up with one another. As a result, the works performed by God in the history of salvation show forth and bear out the doctrine and realities signified by the words; the words, for their part proclaim the works and bring to light the mystery they contain.*<sup>4</sup>
  - d. *Forty days* - forty is a very important number in the Bible. Forty years in the desert, forty days for Moses on Mt. Sinai, forty days of fasting and prayer for Jesus in the Desert, and now forty days of

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<sup>4</sup>Dei Verbum, 2.



final instruction for the apostles before ascending. Forty days or forty years, in the biblical perspective are periods of time during which God prepares or effects important stages in his plans. The forty days also helps lend authority to the Apostles teaching. This is based on a rabbinic tradition whereby their students learned a certain part of the teaching for forty days and were then called to repeat it in an authentic and accurate manner (a kind of a mid term test). Hence forty days was a normative period of instruction after which the apostles were qualified to repeat it authoritatively.

- e. ***staying with them*** - the Greek word, *synalizomenos* is a peculiar word for meeting. More literally it means "salt was being shared with (among) them" (*syn*=with (*h*)*alizo*=to salt) Since it is odd and rare it is translated in different ways: coming together, eating together, staying with them etc. This leaves us with a lot of questions. Was Jesus consistently with them or did he come and go. The construction of the Greek word is a present passive participle which therefore suggests an on-going action: "he continued meeting with them." The Gospels however seem to suggest more of a coming and going. Nevertheless, the accounts really are not at odds since the Gospels stress the first resurrection appearances while Luke refers to the overall period before the Ascension in a much more general way. Still, we ask, what was it like? Was there daily instruction? How thorough was it? We do know that not everything was conveyed. Rather, the Holy Spirit would convey the rest later on.
- f. ***he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem*** - We discussed above the importance of Jerusalem as the mother church and the seat of doctrinal authority in the early Church. Rome is the target church of the Gospel going forth to the ends of the earth. (cf I. letter I on page 4 above). Jerusalem is the mother Church and is for Luke an important link between the era of Israel and that of the Church. The holy city is the geographic center of all sacred history. The going forth of instruction from Jerusalem unto the ends of the earth was prophesied by Isaiah, *For out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.*<sup>5</sup> Even today, this is still true and, according to the Book of Revelation it will figure prominently in the end times as well. Particularly in this first section<sup>6</sup>, the mission in Palestine, Jerusalem figures prominently .
- g. ***the promise of the Father*** - a euphemism for the Holy Spirit. It was used in the early Church. For example see Paul's use of the term in Gal. 3:14 and Eph 1:13.
- h. Verses 6- 8 strike the keynote of the whole book of Acts: the apostles, empowered by the Holy Spirit shall witness to the Lord to the ends of the earth.
- i. ***they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"*** - one way to interpret the apostles question is to see it as a mistaken nationalism as we can see all through the Gospels. Another way to interpret it is to understand it as referring to

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<sup>5</sup>Is. 2:3.

<sup>6</sup>Remember, broadly speaking Acts is divided in two sections: The mission in Palestine and the Mission to the end of the earth.

Christ's coming again in glory. They seem to ask, will this manifestation of your glory occur soon? Either way, Jesus cautions them in the next phrase and indicates that it is not for them to have a global vision of history.

- j. ***It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority.*** Jesus' response is nuanced and therefore not fully satisfying. He deflects speculation about times and seasons without denying that God has such dispositions within His authority. Jesus shifts the focus from knowledge to mission. Essentially the Lord responds by saying what Paul would later say, "we walk by faith and not by sight..." This whole dialogue recalls Mark 13:32ff and is good advice for us to recall and consider: *But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Watch therefore -- for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning -- lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Watch.*
- k. ***But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses...to the end of the earth.*** Here is the initial pouring forth of the Glory of the Lord and the Glory of Israel. The kingdom of Israel will be restored by the going forth of the Gospel of salvation to the ends of the earth. The inclusion of the Gentiles means that many souls will be grafted on to Israel. (Cf Rom 11:17ff). The glory of the Church is the glory of Israel. Likewise, at the descent of the Holy Spirit the Apostles will experience the power of the Lord. They will not just have an experience, they will receive power from on high. When we get to this event in Chapter 2 we shall discuss the sacrament of Confirmation.
  - (1) the Greek word for power used here is *dynamis* from which we get the words dynamo, dynamic and dynamite. Thus the power that comes upon the Christian after Baptism in the Holy Spirit is a dynamic power. Do most Christians experience this dynamism? If not, why?
- l. ***Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth*** Luke will follow this basic travel-log in the Chapters ahead. (cf Outline, appendix 1) In this sense, we have here a table of contents for Acts.
- m. ***you shall be my witnesses...to the end of the earth*** - again this is the keynote of the whole book. Acts shows how this declaration of the Lord is fulfilled by the power of the Lord and the work of the Holy Spirit. The Church is the fulfillment of this and called to

continue this mission. The Lord does not just speak to the 12 here, he speaks to us and to every member of the Church. The Church is his witness to the ends of the earth.

- (1) witnesses - witnesses speak what they know is true, not what they think or wish is true. Witnesses speak to what they have seen. The Church knows and has seen the risen Lord. Note too that the Greek word here is *martyres* from which we get martyr. Hence, every Christian *Martus* must be willing to be a martyr. We must ask, am I a witness? Do I know what I say is true. Have I seen, do I experience in my life the actual power of the risen Lord? Am I willing to accept martyrdom, literal, or the more common, daily martyrdom of witness?
- (2) end - the Greek word here is *eschaton* - which means the limits of the earth not only in a spatial sense but also temporally. Thus the *Eschaton* in Greek is also the Last Day, the end time. So, *eschaton* implies not just the ends of the earth but also the end of time.

2. The Ascension - {9} *And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. {10} And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, {11} and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." {12} Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away;*
- a. Outline:
    - (1) Ascension - v. 9
    - (2) Astonishment - vv. 10-11
    - (3) Attentiveness - v. 12
  - b. There is a great deal of attention to the fact that Luke seems to have a different account of the ascension here than he does in his Gospel. In the Gospel, (24:50) Luke seems to have Jesus ascend on the same day as the resurrection. Here, it is forty days later that he ascends. Many scholars say that this indicates that Luke was not particularly concerned with exact dates for the ascension. Perhaps this is a valid approach but it doesn't seem the best solution since Luke indicates to Theophilus the care he took in ascertaining all the facts. A better solution, it seems, is to admit in Luke 24:50 it is not at all certain that Luke is placing the resurrection and ascension on the same day. The wording is not that specific and it is clear that in Luke 24, a lot of events are being recited in a rather quick overview. Thus, we can favor the Acts 1 account which gives a greater specificity to the event. It is only Luke in Acts who gives us a definite sense of the time period involved between the resurrection and ascension. Each of the Gospel accounts speak only in a very general sense of the timing of these events. Acts therefore is the sole biblical source for our tradition of the 40 days of Eastertide.
  - c. *He was lifted up* - here is Jesus' lifting up, his enthronement and Messiah and Lord.
  - d. *a cloud took him* - more literally the Greek verb says that a cloud took under him - so he was on the cloud as he moved higher into heaven. Thus, the scene harkens back to the walking on the water. There is also a clear statement of Christ's divinity here since a cloud figures prominently in Theophanies in both the Old and the New Testaments (eg. Ex 13:22 & Luke 9:34ff)
  - e. *they were gazing into heaven as he went* - the Greek verb, *atenizontes* is a periphrastic imperfect which indicates that there was some time that passed as the disciples looked at his departing form. This time element helps explain the angel's remark to follow.
  - f. *two men stood by them in white robes* - One interesting theory about these men is that they are Moses and Elijah. This harkens back to the Transfiguration. However, the tradition has been to

regard the two individuals as angels. Although the Greek wording here does not call these men angels, traditionally they have been regarded as such for two reasons

- (1) they supply information needed for the disciples needed to decode the whole situation.
  - (2) the word referring to their white robes (*leukais*) is the same word used to describe the clothing of the angels at the resurrection (Matt 28:3 Mk 16:5, John 20:12)
- g. ***Men of Galilee*** - The Galilean origin of the first disciples is repeatedly stressed by Luke in his Gospel (Lk 22:59; 23:5; 23:49; 23:55)
- h. ***why do you stand looking into heaven?*** - The Greek structure of the phrase used by Luke seems to imply that there was a loathing of the Apostles to take their eyes away from the miraculous event which they were beholding. Some have speculated that Luke relates this story and this particular phrase because it was a problematic matter of the time. Some were so expectant of an immediate return of Jesus from heaven that they were not working or assisting the spread of the kingdom. Paul seems to have dealt with a similar problem particularly in his Letter to the Colossians.
- i. ***will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven*** - These words do not proclaim that the second coming of our Lord is imminent but they do proclaim that he will return again, This is a certainty of faith: He will come amid the clouds accompanied by his angels (cf eg. Matt 25:32ff)
- j. ***a sabbath day's journey*** - Exodus 16:29 warns that no one is to leave his place (neighborhood) on the Sabbath Day. Thus, this is Luke's way of showing how close Mt. Olivet is to Jerusalem.
- k. Christ's ascension into heaven is not simply an event which stirs and inspires us. It is something that saves us. It is part of the saving mysteries of our salvation and their completion. In the ascension, man returns to God. The gates of heaven open and Christ, who is true God and true man enters. *Today...we have ascended with Christ mystically but really into the highest heaven.*<sup>7</sup> In Christ, we are already seated at the right hand of the Father.

3. *The filling of the college of the Twelve - {13} and when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. {14} All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.{15} In those days Peter stood up among the brethren (the company of persons was in all about a hundred and twenty), and said, {16} "Brethren, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David, concerning Judas who was guide to those who arrested Jesus. {17} For he was numbered among us, and was allotted his share in this ministry. {18} (Now this man bought a field with the reward of his wickedness; and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. {19} And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) {20} For it is written in the book of Psalms, 'Let his habitation become desolate, and let there be no one to live in it'; and 'His office let another take.' {21} So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, {22} beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us -- one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection." {23} And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. {24} And they prayed and said, "Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two thou hast chosen {25} to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside, to go to his own place." {26} And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was enrolled with the eleven apostles.*

a. Outline:

- (1) Convocation - vv. 13-14
- (2) Concern - vv. 15-20
- (3) Charge - vv. 21-22
- (4) Calling - vv. 23-25
  - (a) the individuals - v. 23
  - (b) upon God - vv. 24-25
- (5) Conclusion - v. 26.

b. It is significant that as the curtain rises on this opening scene of the book of Acts, we see the Church gathered. At what are the attributes of this Church, this gathering of the faithful? We see the faithful gathered with their leaders the Apostles and under the leadership of Peter, the chief of the apostles. Peter is already fulfilling his mission to strengthen the brethren. There is structure and authority in this gathering, this vision of the Church.

- c. ***In those days Peter stood up among the brethren*** Peter it will be seen takes the leadership in this opening scene of the early Church. It is he who notes the need to fill the office left vacant by Judas. Peter sees the fulfillment of scripture and thus applies the word of God by quoting two psalms: 69:26 & 109:8. Not only does Peter state the problem and interpret it by the scriptures, but he also directs what is to be done: The man chosen must have accompanied the Apostles during the public ministry of Jesus, and by implication he must have been a witness to the resurrection. This opening scene of the leadership of Peter is important. It shows forth the role Peter who was the rock upon which the Lord would build his Church and he was the one who the Lord directed to strengthen his brethren. Thus we see this mission being fulfilled already in this opening scene. We will be seeing it again. All of this is important because it is upon Peter's role that the Church's office of the Papacy is based and draws its origin. The Popes are the successors to Peter. So it is that here we seen the office of the papacy in its seminal form.
- d. ***concerning Judas*** Judas, though he was destined to betray Jesus was nevertheless a free agent and thus responsible for his act. God did not force him to betray the Lord. The horror of his death underscores the seriousness of his betrayal.
- e. ***His office let another take*** The fact that the apostles number had been reduced by one might seem insignificant. But to them it was not. They saw a need to fill the chair left vacant by Judas. Thus, they did not perceive their office merely as a one time appointment of the Lord. Rather their's was an office that needed to be filled upon vacancy. They held authority in the early Church and new that this office of authority needed to be carried out whenever a vacancy arose. All of this is important because it is on the office of the apostles that the office of Bishop draws its origin and model in the Catholic Church. The bishops are successors to the apostles and receive their office in an unbroken line by the laying on of hands. We shall see later on in Acts, that as the apostles went forth in spreading the Gospel from community to community they would appoint certain men to oversee the local church in their name. These men received the office of oversight by the laying on of hands and shared in the authority of the apostles by that very fact. The Greek word for overseer is *episcopus* from which we get the word Episcopal which means, "of or referring to the office of bishop." We shall see this sharing in the office of the apostles unfold in Acts but here again we see the seminal form by virtue of the fact that the apostles see fit to continue their office even after the death of one of the original 12. Thus it is to be an on-going ministry in the Church transcending the individual who occupies the office.

4. The Pentecost Event (2:1-13) {1} *When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. {2} And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. {3} And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. {4} And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. {5} Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. {6} And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. {7} And they were amazed and wondered, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? {8} And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? {9} Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, {10} Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, {11} Cretans and Arabians, we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." {12} And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" {13} But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."*

- a. Here is an outline of the event:
- (1) The Place of Pentecost - v. 1
  - (2) The Portrait of the Person<sup>8</sup> - vv. 2-3
    - (a) Rushing Wind - v. 2
    - (b) Tongues of Fire - v. 3
  - (3) The Prophetic<sup>9</sup> Proclamation - v. 4
  - (4) The Persuasive<sup>10</sup> Power - vv 5-13

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8i.e. The Third person of the blessed Trinity: the Holy Spirit

<sup>9</sup>The word prophesy here is used to distinguish this gift of tongues from the ecstatic gift of the Spirit wherein one speaks in an unintelligible tongue. These tongues are intelligible and meant to edify, upbuild and instruct others as St. Paul instructs in 1 Cor 14:1 - *Make love your aim, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. 2 For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. 3 On the other hand, he who prophesies speaks to men for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. 4 He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. 5 Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy.*

<sup>10</sup>The ability to persuade is the ability to overcome the limitations of language, culture, and personal dispositions and to convincingly communicate the Gospel message in an effective



- (a) Assembly - v. 5-6
- (b) Amazement - vv. 7-11a
- (c) Announcement - v. 11b

- b. The Church is the Body of Christ. But every body needs a spirit to animate it. A body without a spirit is a corpse. Thus Christ, though he had a mission for the Church, commanded that they wait in Jerusalem until they received power from on high, (Luke 24:49) A body with a spirit is animated and able. Thus the Church, the Body of Christ needs the Spirit of God to equip, enable, and empower it for the work ahead. We are about to witness the animation of the Church.
- c. Given how important this feast is to the Church the account of the descent of the Holy Spirit is very slim indeed: only four verses. Luke has skillfully prepared us for the event with a certain flair for the dramatic. The Apostles are told to wait in Jerusalem for an uncertain time until they are clothed with power from on high. Yet, when the dramatic moment comes it is compactly described. Alas, for us modern history buffs who wish far more detail. However, remember that Luke's purpose is not to give a fully detailed historical account. Rather, it is to set forth the historical framework for theological reflection and understanding of the action of God which always has a hidden quality. In other words, Luke is less concerned about the pyrotechnics of the theophany and more with the transformation of the Apostles which is really THE dramatic event, as we shall see.
- d. ***Pentecost*** - the word Pentecost is Greek and means 50th day. The feast was originally an Old Testament feast. It is first mentioned in Exodus 34:22 and there it is called the feast of weeks. It was a harvest festival celebrating the first fruits of the grain harvest. It was one of the three major festivals of the year. The date was not fixed in the earliest days since the grain harvest was not the same every year. Later however, the feast was set at a fixed date of 50 days after Pentecost. At this point the festival received a different framework. It became the anniversary of the giving of the Law to Moses. As this new framework of the feast was emerging a rabbinic interpretation of Exodus 20:18 was also emergent that held that when the law was given on Sinai all seventy nations on earth at that time heard the Law of God proclaimed in their own tongue. This background helps give a context for the plan of God to reveal his new Covenant in the way that is to unfold in the verses to come. Just as the giving of the Law to Moses was a definitive point in the formation of the Chosen people, so now does

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manner. The persuasion does not happen all at once. Even with the language and cultural barriers overcome, at first there is puzzlement and some ridicule. But by the end of the event there are 3000 new members of the Church.

God also act in a definitive way toward the upbuilding of the people he has already called and chosen, clothing them with power from on high. All nations will be called as well.

- e. ***And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind*** This whole phrase recalls the words of our Lord to Nicodemus: *The wind blows where it wills and you hear the sound of it but you do not know whence it comes or wither it goes; so it is with everyone born of the Spirit.*<sup>11</sup> This passage very much emphasizes the initiative of God. In particular the word "suddenly" is important to this insight. Likewise overpowering quality of the sound (like a tornado) emphasizes an experience that no one could ever forget. Clearly God is acting in a forceful and empowering manner to invigorate the early church. Likewise, wind is a symbol of the divine presence (cf 2 Kings 5:24; Psalm 104:3) The wind also recalls the creative power of God. As God once created the heavens and earth, so now he creates the Church. Now there is the rush of a might wind just as then *The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit*<sup>12</sup> *of God was moving over the face of the waters.* Further, a quote from Psalm 50:3 seems appropriate here: *Our God comes, he does not keep silence, before him is a devouring fire, round about him a mighty tempest.*
- f. ***tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them.*** The use of fire as a representation of God appearing among men was common in Israel: The burning bush (Ex 3:2), The pillar of fire which accompanied them in the desert (Ex 13:21) etc. Likewise, John the Baptist had foretold that Jesus would baptize them with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Lk 3:16,17). The fire takes the form of tongues is significant and deciphered in the next verse. Clearly there is a connection with the tongues of fire and the fact that they speak in tongues and are called to witness to the end of the earth. Hence the task of proclaiming the Gospel to the ends of the earth takes literal shape here. Despite the display of fire it should be noted that the tongues were *as of fire*. Thus Luke does not say that they literally were fire which certainly could have terrified the recipients. By inflaming their hearts with Love, the Holy Spirit removes fear and enables them to proclaim boldly the kingdom of God.
- g. ***began to speak in other tongues*** The nature of this gift of tongues is described in the verses that follow. Essentially, the recipients of the gift of the Holy Spirit were able to communicate in such a way as to allow people of various language groups to hear them simultaneously in their own native tongue. Hence this is not the same gift of tongues that Paul mentions in 1 Cor 14 which allowed

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<sup>11</sup>John 3:8.

<sup>12</sup>In Hebrew the word *Ruah* means spirit, breath, or wind.

them to speak to and praise God in a language that they themselves did not understand and which needed an interpreter (1 Cor. 14:13). Note here too how this is a reversal of the Tower of Babel story (Gen, 11:9). There, due to the pride of people, God dispersed the people into various language groups. Here, due to Grace, God united them all by a common understanding without need for an interpreter. Note however the gift is not accepted by all who chalk the whole incident up to drunkenness! There is a great outpouring of and partaking of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit not wine spirits.

- h. This passage is for us an important source for the Sacrament of Confirmation. What the Catholic Church teaches about the sacrament can be seen in its seminal form in the Acts of the Apostles. Confirmation is the Christian's personal Pentecost. What happened to the disciples in the upper room happens to us in Confirmation. Confirmation is the strengthening and perfecting of the Christian life which was begun in our Baptism. Through the sacrament of Confirmation, those who have been born anew in Baptism receive the inexpressible Gift of the Holy Spirit himself, by which they are endowed with special strength and are sealed with the character of this same sacrament. As we require the grace of Baptism to form the mind unto faith, so it is of the utmost advantage that our souls be strengthened by a different this outpouring of grace so that, just like the disciples of old we too might be strengthened to broadly proclaim the glory of God and the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Confirmation also helps us so that, like these disciples we might be deterred by no danger, or fear of pains, tortures, or death from the confession of the true faith. Since we are reborn as children of God we must confess before all the faith we have received from God, through the Church. Then, bound more intimately to the work of the Lord and the Church by the sacrament of Confirmation, we are endowed by the Holy Spirit with the special strength to do this. Thus, just like the disciples of old, we are more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith both by word and deed as true witnesses of Christ.
- i. Some non-Catholics object to the Church's sacrament of Confirmation. Most of them do not regard Confirmation to be a sacrament. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church holds to the age-old doctrine that it is a sacrament which makes the Pentecost event described in Acts 2 a part of our lives. The teaching of the Church is backed up by the fact that this is not the only place we encounter texts in Acts that confirm the Catholic teaching and practice. Consider the following two passages and see how the Apostles did in fact see it necessary to confer the Holy Spirit upon believers after baptism. They considered the conferring of the Holy Spirit to be part of their office. It will be seen that these two texts show especially the roots of the Catholic practice of conferring and

celebrating the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon each believer.

(1) *Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.*<sup>13</sup>

(2) *While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve of them in all.*<sup>14</sup>

j. Another issue is the different accounts of the bestowal of the Holy Spirit in John and here in Acts. Here is what John's Gospel says: (John 20:19ff) *On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."* How this account be reconciled with Luke's. There are several ways.

(1) It is not true to say that the Apostles were without the Holy Spirit. As Paul says, "No one can call Jesus Lord except by the Holy Spirit." But the Apostles surely called him that before Pentecost. Thus they had the Holy Spirit, at least in some respect. This means that we should not limit the outpouring of the Spirit only to one instance. Thus, Luke describes one bestowal of the Spirit and John another.

(2) This leads to our second point. John describes an outpouring of the Spirit for one purpose (the authority to

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<sup>13</sup>Acts 8:15-19 This quote and the one following help us to understand how Confirmation came was regarded as a sacrament distinct from Baptism.

<sup>14</sup>Acts 19:1-7.

forgive sins) and Luke for another purpose (to proclaim broadly that Jesus is Lord). Note that John's description of the outpouring of the Spirit has only the Apostles present. Luke seems to have other disciples (120 of them) present. Thus, regarding the forgiveness of sins, the Lord gives this power only to the Apostles. Thus the Catholic teaching that the power to bind and loose, to forgive sins, resides only with the priesthood. However, regarding the proclamation that Jesus is Lord and to bear witness to his word, this involves every Christian to some extent. *Now there are varieties of gifts; but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one...All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.*<sup>15</sup> *And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? tongues? Do all interpret?*<sup>16</sup> The Catholic sacramental system therefore celebrates numerous outpourings of the Spirit depending on the gift or ministry being conferred.

- (a) there is the anointing in baptism that celebrates the first gift of the Spirit: Jesus baptizes with water and the Holy Spirit. This especially reflects the life of faith shared by the first disciples before the Pentecost event.
  - (b) there is the anointing and laying on of hands received in confirmation that celebrates and confers the outpouring of the Holy Spirit especially for Mission. This especially reflects the Pentecost event.
  - (c) there is the laying on of hands that confers the special gifts of the Spirit that pertain to the priesthood. This especially reflects the gift of the Spirit given to the Apostles to bind and loose, to forgive sins, etc.
- k. Lastly note that the whole initiative here is God's. The community, rather than taking matters into its own hands, waits quietly in prayer due to the instruction of the Lord. There were no organizational meetings, sub-committees and the like. There was prayer and waiting. *Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.* (Psalm 127:1) Note too how the gift is

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151 Cor 12:4-6,11.

161 Cor. 12:28-29.

bestowed to the whole community. The people were all together and there received the Spirit, not while walking in the woods etc. Communal prayer is important. People who say they don't need to go to a church to pray should take heed.

B. The Mission in Jerusalem (2:14-8:3)

1. The Pentecost discourse (2:14-41) *{14} But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. {15} For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day; {16} but this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: {17} 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; {18} yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. {19} And I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; {20} the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day. {21} And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' {22} "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know -- {23} this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. {24} But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. {25} For David says concerning him, 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; {26} therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will dwell in hope. {27} For thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, nor let thy Holy One see corruption. {28} Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou wilt make me full of gladness with thy presence.' {29} "Brethren, I may say to you confidently of the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. {30} Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, {31} he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. {32} This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. {33} Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear. {34} For David did not ascend into the heavens; but he himself says, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, {35} till I make thy enemies a stool for thy feet.' {36} Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." {37} Now when*

*they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" {38} And Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. {39} For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him." {40} And he testified with many other words and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." {41} So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*

- a. What is the vision of the Church in this chapter? We have already seen the opening vision of the Church in chapter one. This chapter too contains an vision of the Church. The basic components are evident if we outline the whole chapter.
- (1) A Supernatural Power - vv. 1-13<sup>17</sup>
  - (2) A Scriptural Preaching - vv. 14-36
    - (a) The Manner of Jesus' life - v. 22
    - (b) The Meaning of Jesus' death - v. 23
    - (c) The Miracle of Jesus' resurrection - vv. 24-32
    - (d) The Magnificence of Jesus' reign - vv. 33-36.
  - (3) A Saved People - vv. 37-
    - (a) Convicted by the Lord - v. 37
    - (b) Converted unto the Lord - v. 38a
    - (c) Controlled by the Lord - v. 38b
    - (d) Continuing with the Lord - v. 42a
  - (4) A Spiritual Program -
    - (a) Indoctrination - v. 42a
    - (b) Edification (fellowship)- v. 42b, 46-47a
    - (c) Adoration (Eucharistic Worship) - v. 42c
    - (d) Veneration - v. 43
    - (e) Participation (Communal life) - vv. 44-45
    - (f) Propagation - v. 47b
- b. ***But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them*** - Note again how it is Peter who takes the lead. This important to the Catholic teaching about the role of the papacy. It is based on the office and the example of Peter whom the Lord commissioned to strengthen his brethren and who would be the rock upon which the Lord would build his Church.
- c. Many call this the first Christian sermon but, really, it is the second. Peter's speech in 1:14ff has the characteristics of a sermon as well. There Peter interprets the death of Judas in the light of scripture and exhorts his listeners in the light of the situation. This "second" sermon is certainly the first sermon devoted to the mission to the ends of the earth however.

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17As set forth already in these notes - the outpouring of the Holy Spirit

- d. Peter's sermon, can be outlined as follows:
- (1) An introduction announcing his intention to address detractors and explain the events that have just taken place Using scriptural prophecies and seeing these events as their fulfillment (vv. 14-21)
  - (2) A setting forth of the essential facts of Jesus' life (Passion, death, resurrection, ascension) with scriptural demonstrations (vv. 22-36).
  - (3) a call to penance, conversion, and faith in the light of Jesus' life and message. (vv. 38-39)
- e. **David** - the basic argument that Peter advances regarding David flows from the premise that David to be the author of most of the Psalms. Thus, when the psalm says "I" "Me" "My" etc. it refers to David. Thus, in Psalm 16 when the psalm says, *I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; {26} therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will dwell in hope. For thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, nor let thy Holy One see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou wilt make me full of gladness with thy presence.*' it would be taken as referring to David. But says no, it can only refer to Christ who alone can show an empty tomb and a body untouched by decay, and unclaimed by Hades (the place of the dead). David, though great, was dead and buried. His body did see corruption. Thus Christ fulfills the prophecy to David by Nathan that his throne would stand firm forever and that one of his descendants would rule greatly.<sup>18</sup> Christ fulfills this not in the political sense but in terms of the Kingdom of heaven and his exulted Lordship of all creation.
- f. **three thousand** - here is the first fulfillment of the prophecy and command of Christ that the Gospel would go forth to the ends of the earth. It is also important evidence to counter the modern notion that few Jews accepted Christ. Many did accept him: more than just a few.

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182 Sam 7:12-14; Ps 132:11; 89:4.



2. First Major Summary (2:42-47) *{42} And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. {43} And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. {44} And all who believed were together and had all things in common; {45} and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. {46} And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, {47} praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*
- a. Here we do well to repeat the last part of the outline listed above:
  - b. A Spiritual Program -
    - (a) Indoctrination - v. 42a
    - (b) Edification (fellowship)- v. 42b, 46-47a
    - (c) Adoration (Eucharistic Worship) - v. 42c
    - (d) Veneration - v. 43
    - (e) Participation (Communal life) - vv. 44-45
    - (f) Propagation - v. 47b
  - c. here we have a brief and somewhat idyllic portrait of life in the early Church. There was unity and charity, prayer and generosity. Even though it may seem to good to be true we must see this not merely as the way things were for a brief time but as a portrait of how things ought to be. Thus, we ought to try and model our Church communities on the vision presented here. Some of the qualities are
    - (1) Fidelity to the teaching of the Apostles (i.e. the New Testament scriptures).
    - (2) Community life
    - (3) Frequent celebration of the Eucharist (breaking of the bread)
    - (4) Communal prayer
    - (5) Generous sharing among the brethren and strict avoidance of greed or excess.
  - d. *they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching* - note that there was no Bible at this point. The Doctrine of our Lord was communicated to the disciples by the apostles and its authenticity and binding force came not from the fact that it was in a certain book (there was no New Testament at this point!) but rather, that it was proclaimed by the Apostles. This point supports the Catholic teaching on the magisterium which is a living reality not merely a written page. The Bible has authority only because it has been affirmed by the magisterium (teaching authority) of the Church. This authority derives from the authority of the Apostles themselves who were the measure of truth in the early Church. We shall see the authoritative office of Peter and the Apostles unfold with each turn of the page in Acts. The bible is authoritative for us today only because the Apostles themselves were first authoritative and that they vested that authority with successors who could authoritatively and validly rule on matters of faith and morals. (Remember, the Bible as we know it today was not fully compiled until over two centuries after the death of the last Apostle. The Church had to authoritatively determine which books belonged to

the approved list of sacred books and which did not. This decision required authority. We call this teaching authority in the Church the magisterium and we shall see this aspect of the Church operative in seminal form in Acts.

- e. ***had all things in common...sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need.*** - This may or may not be a system that we came to call communism in our age. Luke is not so specific as to exclude other interpretations. The bottom line is that no one was wanting for necessary goods and greed or opulence were not acceptable.

II. This Page is intentionally left blank

III. Chapter three - Peter's Healing miracle and the sermon that followed *Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. {2} And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at that gate of the temple which is called Beautiful to ask alms of those who entered the temple. {3} Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked for alms. {4} And Peter directed his gaze at him, with John, and said, "Look at us." {5} And he fixed his attention upon them, expecting to receive something from them. {6} But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." {7} And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. {8} And leaping up he stood and walked and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. {9} And all the people saw him walking and praising God, {10} and recognized him as the one who sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. {11} While he clung to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's, astounded. {12} And when Peter saw it he addressed the people, "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? {13} The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. {14} But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, {15} and killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. {16} And his name, by faith in his name, has made this man strong whom you see and know; and the faith which is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all. {17} "And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. {18} But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled. {19} Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, {20} and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, {21} whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old. {22} Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet from your brethren as he raised me up. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. {23} And it shall be that every soul that does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.' {24} And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came afterwards, also proclaimed these days. {25} You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God gave to your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your posterity shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' {26} God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you in turning every one of you from your wickedness."*

- A. Here is an outline of the Chapter before us:
1. The Miracle that Confronted them - vv. 1-11
    - a. The Place of the Miracle - vv. 1-2
    - b. The Pretext of the Miracle - vv. 3-5
    - c. The Proclamation of the Miracle - vv. 6-7
    - d. The Praise of the Miracle - v. 8.
    - e. The Pondering of the Miracle - vv. 9-11.
  2. The Murder that Condemned them - vv. 12-14
  3. The Message that Converted them - vv. 15-26
    - a. A Risen Lord - v. 15
    - b. A Residing Lord - v. 16
    - c. A Redeeming Lord - vv. 17-19
    - d. A Returning Lord - vv. 20-21
    - e. A Regal Lord - vv. 22-23
    - f. A Revitalizing Lord - vv. 24-26
- B. The primary significance of this event is in the fact that the Church is called to carry on the work of the Lord. When our Lord walked the earth, one of the primary evidences of his divinity and of the truth he proclaimed was the miracles he wrought. These miracles were worked to help people have faith that He was who he said he was and that his words are true. Christ Jesus founded the Church to continue his saving presence and work in the world. The poor still have the Good News proclaimed to them, the blind still recover their sight, the lame still walk. Although Christ Ascended into heaven he still walks this earth in his mystical body, the Church. Just as Christ proclaimed the Good News of salvation, so does the Church. Just as Christ healed the sick, so does the church (in both the literal and the extended sense of the word). Just as Christ fed the multitudes, so does the Church (esp. in the Eucharist, but also through works of Charity). Just as Christ forgave sinners, so does the Church (through the priests in the sacrament of confession). And so on. In this scene from Acts we see this aspect of the Church brought out. The Church is Christ's saving and healing presence in the world because he mystically dwells in the Church as its head. Christ is the head of the body the church and we are his members. The miracle worked here is primary evidence that the Church is empowered to carry on Jesus' work. It also sets the scene for the speech of Peter to follow.
- C. **Peter and John** - again note the prominence of Peter. Likewise, the pairing of Peter and John has taken place before - eg. at the going out to them empty tomb. This pairing is probably no coincidence. Scholars down through the ages have often seen Peter as representative of the Church active and authoritative. John is representative of the contemplative side of the Church. John's purely passive and quiet role here gives a further boost to this view. When, in John's Gospel they got to the tomb, John deferred to Peter in investigating the tomb, even though he got there faster. Likewise here, there is an implicit deference to Peter, but John is quietly present as the contemplative. Another interpretation of the fact that Luke seems to go out of way to mention John is the old rabbinic tradition that there be two witnesses to events. Yet another interpretation it that Luke mentions John to show the tradition of the Lord that the disciples go out two by two.
- D. **The ninth hour** - this was the hour of the evening sacrifice in the temple (About 3:00 pm). The sacrifice went on until dusk. The earlier one went from dawn until 9:00 am.

- E. ***I give you what I have*** - Peter knew the power he had received from the Lord. He knew he had authority and the power to heal. This is not an arrogant presumption but a saving knowledge that Peter has because the Lord has told him.
- F. ***in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth*** - this phrase makes it clear that this is a work of Jesus through his Church. Peter does not work the miracle for his own glory, rather that Jesus be praised. The power that Peter uses is the power he received from Jesus. In addition, Peter adds to the title the mention of Nazareth. This is because many People of Jesus' day were named "Jesus."
- G. ***walking and leaping and praising God*** - these words really emphasize the healing. Likewise they help us to realize the Fulfillment of the prophesy of Isaiah 35: *Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy...And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*<sup>19</sup>
- H. ***wonder and amazement*** - this is the standard response of on-lookers to miraculous healings in Luke's Gospel (eg Lk 4:36; 5:26; 7:16; 8:37; 8:56; 11:14; 13:17; 18:43).
- I. A basic summary and interpretation of Peter's Message to the on-lookers in verses 12-26 is as follows.
1. The healing that occurred is not the result of the piety or power of Peter or John. Rather it is the power of Jesus Christ, invoked by faith that has raised the lame man to walk.
  2. Peter goes on to say in effect, "Yes, this is the same Jesus put to death by you all." Peter does not develop a full theology of the cross here. He does not develop a notion of substitutional atonement, no notion that Christ had to die to satisfy some divine requirement of justice. No, the explanation for Jesus' death in Acts is simply human perversity. The formula is You killed...God raised from the dead (vv. 14-15). The cross for Peter is a scandalous sign of the rejection of God's anointed one by those he came to save. This despite the fact that the prophets of old foretold his coming (v. 21) as well as by Moses (v. 23).
  3. Peter addresses his brethren assuring them that any actions they may have committed in ignorance can be set straight by accepting the savior whom they rejected. But the penalty for not repenting will be terrible. Those who do not acknowledge the truth the prophets foretold about Jesus shall suffer the terrible fate of being destroyed from the people (v. 23). By failing to acknowledge and accept Jesus as Lord will no longer be a member of God's people. True Israel consists of those who are faithful to the patriarchs and prophets of Israel who pointed to Christ.
  4. It is a severe, harsh argument. It is a stark, either/or argument. It is a life and death argument over who is a true heir to the promises of God.
  5. Peter's argument harkens back to the words of John the baptist early in Luke's Gospel: *Bear fruits that befit repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good*

*fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*"<sup>20</sup>

6. The same caution must hold for us. Do not say, "I belong to the Church, or I answered an altar call, or I made an act of faith." For even now the axe is laid to the root of the tree and every tree that does not bear fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore ask, what is the fruit of my faith? For faith must be a fruit<sup>21</sup> bearing tree or it is useless. Faith without works is no faith at all and will save no one (James 2:14-17). Therefore, repent and earnestly seek to do God's will by His grace.

- J. ***But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you*** in reminding them of their choice of a murderer (Barabbas) instead of the author of life Peter also implies a spiritual equivalent here. Every time we sin (the wages of sin is death) we repeat the choice. The book of Sirach reminds us of the choice that is before us, *It was He who created man in the beginning and He left him in the power of his own inclination. If you will you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice. He has placed before you fire and water: stretch out your hand for whichever you wish. Before a man are life and death, and whichever he chooses will be given him.* (Sirach 15:14-18)
- K. ***I know that you acted in ignorance... Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out.*** The fact that they acted in ignorance harkens back to the judgement of the Lord himself from the cross. Father forgive them, they know not what they do (Lk 23:24). Because of this they are offered a second chance but they are not excused from what they have done. They must repent. Thus too for us who sin. We may sometimes act in ignorance but we are not excused by that. We still must repent. In other words, evil has an objective quality even when it is done from ignorance. Once a person is made aware of what they have done, they must seek forgiveness. If, after coming to understand the wrongness of their act they do not repent, Peter says they will be cut off from the people of God. So it is with each of us today. Repentance involves much more than feeling bad about one's sins. It involves a change of heart and a determination to change direction and, where possible, make amends for past sins. Repent: to turn from sin and dedicate oneself to the amendment of one's life.<sup>22</sup> Hence Peter does not ask the people merely to feel bad about what they have done, he wants, he demands, that they change.

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<sup>20</sup>Luke 3:8-9.

<sup>21</sup>The fruits of justice, mercy and truth.

<sup>22</sup>Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary.

IV. The Apostles before the Sanhedrin Acts 4:1-31 *And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, {2} annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. {3} And they arrested them and put them in custody until the morrow, for it was already evening. {4} But many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to about five thousand. {5} On the morrow their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem, {6} with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. {7} And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" {8} Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, {9} if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a cripple, by what means this man has been healed, {10} be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well. {11} This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, but which has become the head of the corner. {12} And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." {13} Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they wondered; and they recognized that they had been with Jesus. {14} But seeing the man that had been healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. {15} But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred with one another, {16} saying, "What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is manifest to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. {17} But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to any one in this name." {18} So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. {19} But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; {20} for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." {21} And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people; for all men praised God for what had happened. {22} For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old. When they were released they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. {24} And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, {25} who by the mouth of our father David, thy servant, didst say by the Holy Spirit, 'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples imagine vain things? {26} The kings of the earth set themselves in array, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed' -- {27} for truly in this city there were gathered together against thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, {28} to do whatever thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place. {29} And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness, {30} while thou stretchest out thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of thy holy servant Jesus." {31} And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.*

- A. Here is an outline of Chapter 4
1. The Persecution we can expect - vv. 1-8
  2. The Persuasion we can express - vv. 9-12
    - a. Puzzlement of Peter- v. 9
    - b. Power of Jesus - v. 10



- c. Prerogatives of Jesus - vv. 11-12
- 3. The Presence we must exhibit - vv. 13-14
- 4. The Persecution we must expect (II) - vv. 15-18
  - a. The Puzzlement of the Powerful - vv. 15-16
  - b. The Pighheadedness of the powerful - vv. 17-18
- 5. The Person we must exalt - vv. 19-22
  - a. Resolve - v. 19-20
  - b. Reluctant Release - v. 21
  - c. Recapitulation - v. 22a
- 6. The Praise we should express - vv. 22b-31

- B. A basic summary of the passage is this. The Sadducees, annoyed by the activity in the temple precincts, have the Apostles arrested. But because it is late, the two must spend the night in jail. The next day the members of the Sanhedrin ask the question: *"By what power or by what name did you do this?"* Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit answers, *by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth*. He further presents this as evidence of the Resurrection of the Lord since it is by his power that this has been done. Although Christ was rejected by the builders (by the leaders and many of the people) he is in fact the cornerstone. This is evident by the deed done in the power of his name. Further he is the Messiah and no one can be saved except by him. Now these members of the Sanhedrin cannot deny the power of the deed. Further they behold the boldness of Peter (i.e. the power of the Holy Spirit speaking through Peter) and they fear the reaction of the crowds who clearly seem to favor Peter and John. All this reduces them to silence. They have nothing to say. They see all this yet are not moved to faith. Thus, they have eyes but do not see, they have ears but do not hear. They are like Pharaoh before Moses. Pharaoh could not deny the power of the deeds done, but he was obstinate. So too these leaders of the Sanhedrin. Finally, they simply order Peter and John to stop all this talk about Jesus and dismiss them. This is more because they fear the crowds than because of any fairness on their part. Peter and John essentially refuse their order, not out of any lack of respect for lawful authority but because they have command from a higher authority (God) about what they must do.
- C. *And they arrested them* With the arrest begins the tide of opposition that will culminate in the dispersal of the community (8:1) and in the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles
- D. *the Sadducees* - The Sadducees were a group within the Jewish people during the New Testament period.<sup>23</sup> They were an aristocratic group of the priestly class. There was not merely a political distinction here. The Sadducees were distinguished from the Pharisees by their beliefs. The Sadducees denied the existence of angels and the resurrection of the dead. They also denied that there would be a Messiah at least as understood by most other Jews. They also rejected a substantial portion of the Old Testament. In general, they accept only the first five books of the Old Testament. Thus they rejected the writings of the prophets and the traditions of the Jewish elders. All of these things distinguished them from the pharisees. While the Sadducees were not precisely a political group there were political implications especially with regard to their ideas about how to live under Roman rule. Since they were largely composed of merchants and landowners they emphasized stability and therefore encouraged peaceful collaboration with the

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<sup>23</sup>The Sadducees disappear from the Jewish scene with the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. The destruction of the Temple led to the end of the priestly class and, ipso facto, the Sadducees disappeared.

Romans.<sup>24</sup> All of this provides the background to understanding the reaction of the Sadducees to what the Apostles were doing. First, Peter and John were preaching the resurrection of the dead which the Sadducees rejected. They were also engaged in preaching a controversial doctrine: that Jesus was Messiah and Lord. This could lead to social unrest etc. and the cautious Sadducees definitely wanted to avoid anything that might provoke the Romans.

- E. ***Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit*** - Here is another example of the fulfillment of the promise of the Lord: *And when they bring you to trial and deliver you up, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say; but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.*<sup>25</sup> Thus again we see how Acts is not merely describing disjointed happenings but rather it shows forth the fulfillment of things prophesied.
- F. ***we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a cripple*** - Peter states the obvious absurdity of this whole interrogation. To be arrested for miraculously healing a man lame from birth is unthinkable. Yet it shows the obtuse spirit that can arise in man. To be sure, the Sadducees had real concerns from their perspective: the "false" doctrine of resurrection was being effectively preached and, there was the possibility of social unrest caused by the proclamation of the Gospel. Yet these concerns cannot properly serve as the full explanation or rationale for this excessive action of arrest. Verse two describes them as "annoyed" not merely concerned. There are obviously then other things at work here: Jealousy? Fear? Hardness of heart? Compare this excess to the far more measured and reasonable response of Gamaliel in Acts 5:34-39 *But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, held in honor by all the people, stood up and ordered the men to be put outside for a while. And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you do with these men. For before these days Theudas arose, giving himself out to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him; but he was slain and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After him Judas the Galilean arose in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered. So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!"* So Gamaliel shows forth a far more reasonable and goodwill approach. Lastly, We must not fail to examine ourselves in this whole regard. How often have we rejected the truth because of the hardness of our own hearts? Perhaps it was too troubling to our own views or demanded too much of us? Have we ever rejected Gospel truth? Set it aside or ignored it? Pretended it didn't exist etc? Have we ever despised others who have told us the truth about God or ourselves?
- G. ***And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*** This grates on some modern ears since it sounds so exclusive. Nevertheless it is a pillar of the faith. Only in Jesus can anyone find final salvation. If any one is saved, be he Christian, Jewish, Moslem, Buddhist or what ever, it will be by and through Jesus Christ. Hence, non-Christians can be saved but only by Jesus. If they do not have explicit faith in Jesus they can lay hold of this salvation only by implicit faith. That is: they live justly according to the Natural Law and the precepts of their conscience. Such an

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<sup>24</sup>This was the opposite extreme to the Zealot party of the Jewish people who were Nationalist and strove to undermine Roman authority.

<sup>25</sup>Mark 13:11.

implicit faith is only an option when a person is excused from explicit faith through invincible ignorance. We can discuss this more in class.

H. ***But many of those who heard the word believed; the number of the men came to about five thousand.***- The growth of the early Church is phenomenal. By now there are 8000 converts in just a few days time. This help to clarify the misperception common today that the Jews rejected Jesus. Many did accept him as is obvious here. Every believer thus far has been Jewish. Sadly it is true, most of the Jews did not accept Jesus. But this leads us to another important Biblical concept: the remnant. The Bible never suggests that all would be saved and come to faith. It does not even suggest that most would. Rather there is a view of the small remnant who would remain faithful to God's plan. In the exiles experienced by Israel, most never returned. Only a small and faithful remnant returned. This provides the basis for the theology of the remnant. The word remnant means "a small part, member, or trace remaining."<sup>26</sup> With this theological perspective we can see again the fulfillment of prophecy. That not all Jews accepted Christ is sad but it was not unexpected. It is worthwhile to examine some of the biblical prophecies related to the remnant to understand its implications.

1. 2 Kings 19:30-31 *And the surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward; for out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the LORD will do this.*
2. Isaiah 10:22 *For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness.*
3. Isaiah 28:5 *In that day the LORD of hosts will be a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty, to the remnant of his people;*
4. Isaiah 37:31-32 *And the surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward; for out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.*
5. Jeremiah 23:2-3 *Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: "You have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD. Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply.*
6. Jeremiah 31:7-8 *For thus says the LORD: "Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, 'The LORD has saved his people, the remnant of Israel.' Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her who is in travail, together; a great company, they shall return here.*
7. Jeremiah 50:20 (RSV) *In those days and in that time, says the LORD, iniquity shall be sought in Israel, and there shall be none; and sin in Judah, and none shall be found; for I will pardon those whom I leave as a remnant.*
8. Micah 2:12-13 *I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob, I will gather the remnant of Israel; I will set them together like sheep in a fold, like a flock*

*in its pasture, a noisy multitude of men. He who opens the breach will go up before them; they will break through and pass the gate, going out by it. Their king will pass on before them, the LORD at their head.*

9. Micah 4:6 (RSV) *In that day, says the LORD, I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away, and those whom I have afflicted;*
10. Micah 4:7,18-19 *...and the lame I will make the remnant; and those who were cast off, a strong nation; and the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion from this time forth and for evermore. Who is a God like thee, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger for ever because he delights in steadfast love. Who is a God like thee, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger for ever because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion upon us, he will tread our iniquities under foot. Thou wilt cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.*
11. Zechariah 8:11-12 *But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as in the former days, says the LORD of hosts. For there shall be a sowing of peace; the vine shall yield its fruit, and the ground shall give its increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things.*
12. Romans 9:27 *And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved;*
13. Romans 11:2-7 *God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? "Lord, they have killed thy prophets, they have demolished thy altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life." But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace. What then? Israel failed to obtain what it sought. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened,*

- I. The community then celebrates the victory with prayer and praise in verses 22-31 just as Moses and the Israelites celebrated the victory over the Egyptians (Ex 15). God is the acknowledged author of this great victory. Further it is seen as a fulfillment of Psalm 2:1-2 which is quoted in the prayer. The interpretation put on the psalm by the early Christians was that, although the kings and leaders of the nation would rage against the anointed Messiah, they would be powerless before him. So it was that King Herod and the Jewish leaders, the ruler, Pontius Pilate and all his Gentile legions were unable to stop Jesus the Messiah even though they killed him. In fighting the Lord, they fulfilled what the Lord had planned all along. This astonishingly insightful prayer concerning the providence of God concludes with a faith filled request that this providence will continue and a surety that it will. So tremendous is this prayer place in their hearts by the Holy Spirit that the place literally shakes. Note too the recurrence of the word "boldness." There is courage, joy and fortitude in this early Church.
- J. Chapter 4- part two - summary and exposition of life in the early Church - ***Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything***

*in common. {33} And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. {34} There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold {35} and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need.{36} Thus Joseph who was surnamed by the apostles Barnabas (which means, Son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, {37} sold a field which belonged to him, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. .*

1. Again we see another description of the Church and here are the characteristics
  - a. They were of one mind<sup>27</sup> and soul.
  - b. They shared their possessions to such a degree that personal ownership was practically a meaningless concept. There were no poor among them for all had what they needed by sharing.
  - c. The Apostles were the source of the testimony to which all adhered with one mind and soul.
  - d. The central teaching was the resurrection. This was later harkened to by St. Paul who said in 1 Cor-inthians 15:14-17,20 *if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.*
2. We have talked of the aspects structure of the Church in the previous Chapter. Nevertheless it is a good thing for us to reflect on the Church along other lines here. Consider the boldness and courage of these early Christians. Consider also their insight. See how they can apply the 2nd psalm to their situation and have vision by it. They know what God is doing and can articulate his plan because of the vision their faith gives them. The result is courage, trust and boldness. The Greek word is *parresias* (boldness) which also means frankness, outspokenness. St. Paul says of faith in 2 Corinthians 4:13-14: *Since we have the same spirit of faith as he had who wrote, "I believed, and so I spoke," we too believe, and so we speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.* Do we see such faith evident in Christians today? True enough, some do exhibit such boldness but many do not. Corporately the Church has remained prophetic but not all individual Christians have been of one mind and heart with what the Church teaches and proclaims. Likewise, the Church too as a collective body must always examine herself as to the effectiveness of the proclamation of the Good News.<sup>28</sup> The Letters to the Churches in Revelation 2-3 are a helpful schema for the Church to reflect on the why

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<sup>27</sup>The Greek word here is *Kardia* which is translated "heart" However, modern misconception of the heart as a place of emotion only has led many to translate the word as "mind" which is really what the Greek word is getting at.

<sup>28</sup>Recently for example, the Church considered her catechetical effectiveness and found herself wanting. Thus, the New Catechism was published as a response and an incentive to zealous action in the face of religious ignorance and confusion.

we may not experience the loss of the zeal we see here.

- a. a loss of the original zeal of love and a satisfaction with mediocrity and the presence of sin (Ephesus)
- b. The tolerance of idolatry and scandal (Pergamum)
- c. The tolerance of heresy (Thyatira)
- d. Self-righteousness despite the reality of sin (Sardis)
- e. possible despair in the face of persecution (Symrna & Philadelphia)
- f. Lukewarmness (Laodicea)

V. Chapter 5 - (*in three parts*)

A. Here is an outline of the whole of Chapter 5:

1. Warnings - 1-11
  - a. Execution of the sin - 1-2; 7
  - b. Exposure of the sin - 3-4; 9
  - c. Expulsion of the sinners - 5-6; 10
  - d. Experience of the Community - 11
2. Wonders - 12-16
  - a. Courage - 12-13
  - b. Conversion - 14
  - c. Cures - 15-16
3. Withstandings - 17-42
  - a. Reaction of the temple leadership - 17-18
  - b. Rescue of the Apostles - 19
  - c. Re-enlistment of the Apostles - 20-21
  - d. Reflection of the Temple leadership - 22-24
  - e. Rigidity of the Temple Leadership - 25-28
  - f. Response of Peter - 29-32
  - g. Reason of Gamaliel - 33-39
  - h. Reconsideration of the Temple Leadership - 40
  - i. Rejoicing of the Apostles - 41
  - j. Return of the Apostles - 42

- B. Part one - *But a man named Ananias with his wife Sapphira sold a piece of property, {2} and with his wife's knowledge he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles' feet. {3} But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? {4} While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." {5} When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. {6} The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. {7} After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. {8} And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." {9} But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Hark, the feet of those that have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." {10} Immediately she fell down at his feet and died. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. {11} And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard of these things.*

1. Outline:
  - a. Warnings - 1-11
    - (1) Execution of the sin - 1-2; 7
    - (2) Exposure of the sin - 3-4; 9
    - (3) Expulsion of the sinners - 5-6; 10
    - (4) Experience of the Community - 11
2. The story told here is shocking and quite frank. A number of things need to be said about this story.
3. In the first place there is a contrast between what Barnabas did and what Ananias and Sapphira did. This helps explain the drama of the story. Barnabas' fidelity is contrasted strongly with the infidelity of the couple.
4. Secondly, the selling of goods and the pooling of resources was entirely voluntary. There was nothing compulsory about such a bequest (see vs 4). Thus the sin condemned here is not that they didn't hand everything over to the community.
5. What then is the sin condemned here? Specifically it is deceit and by extension, hypocrisy. In effect, what they did was to perform a good deed and allow all to consider it as such. They pretended to be exceedingly generous by selling their land and laying the proceeds of the Land before the Apostles. All certainly applauded their deed. But, in fact, they were not actually that generous, they withheld some of the money although no one knew, and claimed to give it all. Thus they lied. They were also hypocrites. Recall that the Greek word, Hypocritos means "actor." An actor plays a role but is not really the person he portrays. So it is this man and woman were playing a role. They were not really the generous benefactors they presented themselves to be. They played the role, received the applause, but were actors only. Thus they were hypocrites. They disguised their greed as Charity. The whole episode shows how much God detests hypocrisy.
  - a. Peter indicates the seriousness of this sin lies not merely that they lied to the community and to the Apostles but that they lied to God (verse 4).



- b. Another aspect of this passage is the portrait of the profound respect the apostles commanded and the authority which they exercised. This is especially true of Peter.
- c. There is the further insight of the identification of the Holy Spirit with the Apostles. To lie to Peter and the Apostles is to lie to the Holy Spirit. They are Christ's representatives (*He who hears you hears me*<sup>29</sup>). It was also Christ who *breathed on them and said, receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven them. Whose sins you retain, they are retained.*<sup>30</sup> Hence, the power of the Holy Spirit dwells in them because they are Christ's ambassadors and because he bestowed on them a special share of the Holy Spirit by which they were to bind and loose. St. Ephraem says, *God punished Ananias and Sapphira not only because they stole something and concealed it but because but because they did not fear and sought to deceive those in whom dwelt the Holy Spirit who knows everything*<sup>31</sup>
- d. A further effect of their sin is to possibly cause mistrust in the communal life of holiness and purity of the early Church. Every sin has a communitarian dimension because it sets evil loose that can affect all.
- e. This can help explain Peter's severe response and there is no disputing that it was severe. Especially severe is his approach to Sapphira. Imagine, her husband has just died and Peter does not mention it. Rather he traps her by her own testimony, then shocks her with the news of her husband's death, then denounces her and finally predicts her own death! Altogether, not a very pastoral scene! Has Peter forgotten his own weaknesses of the past? A few things can be advanced in this regard.
  - (1) Today the word "Pastoral" has become a bit jaded. It has too often has come to mean "affirming" only. Jesus who is the model for all pastors was frequently severe in his condemnation of sin and in his challenging of sinners. *Woe to you hypocrites!*<sup>32</sup> etc. Repentance pleased the Lord but the condemnation was severe for the unrepentant whose final state was to be with wailing and grinding of teeth in unquenchable fire where the worm dies not.<sup>33</sup>
  - (2) Peter's strong reaction implies that he has the effects on the community in mind. The result of the whole affair is that great fear comes upon all who heard of these events. There is a fear of the effects of sin, and a respect for God and his representatives. St. John Chrysostom says of this scene, *This fault could not have been treated lightly, like a gangrene it had to be cut out before it infected the rest of the body. As it is, both the individual benefits (as he is not left to advance further in wickedness) and the rest of the*

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29Lk 10:16.

30John 20:22-23.

31Armenian Commentary in Acts, ad loc.

32The Lord uses the word "Woe" 27 times in the New Test.

33Mk 9:48 & Matt 3:12.

*disciples (in that they were made more vigilant).*<sup>34</sup> Hence, we should not call Peter unpastoral by limiting the word pastoral only to effects on the individual. We must recall the common good and recall that one of the tasks of a pastor is to weigh the effects of his decision not only with the individual but also with the community.

- (3) As to his own sins of the past, one might expect a more understanding point of view. Nevertheless, no pastor can let knowledge of his own shortcomings hinder his preaching of the full Gospel message of the call to complete holiness. He must strive to live the full message of the Gospel and exhort all to do likewise. If a pastor lets his shortcomings dishearten him, he may commit another sin by failing to preach the very Gospel he has been called to proclaim. *Woe is me if I do not preach the Gospel!*<sup>35</sup> Let every shepherd live what he preaches, but whatever the case, let him not fail to preach the truth. If a man does not live what he preaches he may come under condemnation. But if he fails to preach as well, he comes under a double condemnation.
- (4) In all the questions about the best way to have handled this situation pastorally we must Give Peter the benefit of the doubt. He was on the scene and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Is it possible today that we have too far in the other direction? An excessive or misguided tolerance for wrong-doing under the guise of being "pastoral" or "understanding" can lead to contempt for the highest standards and reduce the understanding of the seriousness of sin. Is this not one of our problems today? We ought to be careful before rendering judgement on Peter's approach.
- (5) It would be wrong to conclude that Peter was somehow the cause of this couple's death. There is not indication that their deaths came about by some prayer or spiritual power of Peter. Rather, we seem to have an illustration here of the scriptural admonition that "the wages of sin is death." What a clinical report on the cause of their death might say is intriguing to ponder: stress? Shock? Fear? Who knows but spiritually speaking God used them as an example for others to behold. We need not conclude that they went to hell. They were judged by God, but perhaps their only punishment was to be physical death, not eternal death.

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34Homily on Acts, 12.  
351 Cor 9:16.

- C. Part two - {11} *And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard of these things.* {12} *Now many signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico.* {13} *None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high honor.* {14} *And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women,* {15} *so that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and pallets, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them.* {16} *The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.*

1. Outline:

- a. Wonders - 12-16
  - (1) Courage - 12-13
  - (2) Conversion - 14
  - (3) Cures - 15-16

2. *that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them* - The scene recalls the woman in the crowd who reached out to touch Jesus cloak thinking that just to touch the hem of his garment would heal her. This phrase should not be interpreted as to mean that Peter had some magical power. He is always clear that the power he has comes from the Lord. Even the miracles worked by the lord were not to be regarded as magical acts. Rather they were meant to evoke faith and were often the result of faith. This shall be discussed further in the next point. Note too how Peter is regarded. It is not too much of a stretch for us to see how the present Pope, John Paul evoke a similar love and attraction. People travel hundreds of miles to see him and hear his message. They gather by the hundreds of thousands when he travels to greet him. Again, this may trouble some who may consider it wrong to honor any man so highly. Remember however, he is honored because he represents Christ. Hence the Pope is always clear to proclaim Christ and His teaching at any public gathering. He is called to bring Christ's healing message to the multitudes even as Peter was of old.
3. Miracles - (*signs and wonders*) In this third summary Luke refers especially to the Apostles' power to work miracles. These miracles confirm the fact that the Kingdom of God has in fact come among them. Grace abounds and shows itself in conversions and physical cures. The signs and wonders worked by the Apostles are not done to amaze people or provoke curiosity but to awaken faith. Miracles are not simply a bending of the laws of nature: they are a kind of advance sign of the glorious transformation which the world will undergo at the end of time. Miracles are a form of accreditation God gives to the Gospel message. They are actions of God in support of the truth of his messengers' preaching. Origin writes, *If they had not worked miracles and wonders Jesus' disciples could not have moved their hearers to give up their traditional religion for new teachings and truths and to embrace, at the risk of their lives, the teachings which were being proclaimed to them.*<sup>36</sup> Through miracles God speaks to the minds and hearts of those who witness them, inviting them to believe but not forcing them. If people have

the right dispositions they will generally have no difficulty in recognizing and accepting miracles. Common sense and religious instinct tell them that miracles are possible because all things are subject to God. However, prejudice and resistance to conversion and its implications can blind a person and make him deny something which is quite obvious to a person of good will. We have seen this in the life of our Lord and already here in Acts wherein the leaders of the temple, instead of coming to faith, resistant the clear message of the miracles.

4. ***And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women*** - see the great description of the growth of the early Church. Note too, these were all Jewish people who came to the Lord. As we discussed in the last chapter, it is frequently a perception that the Jewish people rejected the Messiah. We see here however, that thousands, multitudes, accepted him and came to faith. Thus, even if the majority did not come to faith, many in fact did! We see here, in this chapter how more numbers are added to this faithful remnant. The preaching, the miracles and the Grace of the Holy Spirit are all having their effects.
5. ***bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits*** - the troubles were not only physical from which they were cured but spiritual as well. The ancients frequently attributed physical illness to evil spirits. They were not simpletons as we might be tempted to think. They were more aware of first causes than we are today. They were not unaware of the physical causes of sickness but were keenly aware that the root cause of all suffering and death was sin. It was through Original sin that suffering and death was set loose in the world. Hence the origins of sickness and suffering could be seen in the work of demons as well as merely physical causes. Hence, to deal with sickness required a holistic understanding. Moderns may laugh at them, but we should not disregard their insight. We may have made great insights into curing physical maladies but we have become spiritually impoverished and see countless other social and spiritual disfigurements that result.

D. Part three - The Second Persecution (5:17-42) *But the high priest rose up and all who were with him, that is, the party of the Sadducees, and filled with jealousy {18} they arrested the apostles and put them in the common prison. {19} But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out and said, {20} "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life." {21} And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and taught. Now the high priest came and those who were with him and called together the council and all the senate of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. {22} But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, and they returned and reported, {23} "We found the prison securely locked and the sentries standing at the doors, but when we opened it we found no one inside." {24} Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were much perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. {25} And some one came and told them, "The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people." {26} Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but without violence, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people. {27} And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, {28} saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." {29} But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. {30} The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. {31} God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. {32} And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him." {33} When they heard this they were enraged and wanted to kill them. {34} But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, held in honor by all the people, stood up and ordered the men to be put outside for a while. {35} And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you do with these men. {36} For before these days Theudas arose, giving himself out to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him; but he was slain and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. {37} After him Judas the Galilean arose in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered. {38} So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fail; {39} but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!" {40} So they took his advice, and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. {41} Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. {42} And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.*

1. Outline

a. Withstandings - 17-42

- (1) Reaction of the temple leadership - 17-18
- (2) Rescue of the Apostles - 19
- (3) Re-enlistment of the Apostles - 20-21
- (4) Reflection of the Temple leadership - 22-24
- (5) Rigidity of the Temple Leadership - 25-28
- (6) Response of Peter - 29-32
- (7) Reason of Gamaliel - 33-39
- (8) Reconsideration of the Temple Leadership - 40
- (9) Rejoicing of the Apostles - 41
- (10) Return of the Apostles - 42

VI. Chapter 6 (in two parts)

A. Outline of Chapter 6

1. First Deacons

a. Multiplication - 1a

- b. Murmuring - 1b
- c. Modeling - 2
- d. Ministry - 3-6
- e. More Multiplication - 7
- 2. Furor Displayed - 8-15
  - a. Antagonism - 8-11
  - b. Arrest - 12-15
    - (1) Frenzied Crowd - 12
    - (2) False Charges - 13-15

B. The first deacons and the Greek speaking Jews (6:1-8:1a) *Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. {2} And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. {3} Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. {4} But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." {5} And what they said pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. {6} These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands upon them. 7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.*

1. *the disciples* - From this chapter onwards, Christians are referred to as disciples. This term is no longer applied only to the Apostles and to those followers of Jesus during his life on earth. Now all the baptized are disciples. This makes sense based on what we have said thus far. In the first place, the word disciple comes from the Latin root *discere* meaning "to teach" Hence a disciple is a student of a teacher. In one sense then, only those who actually walked with Jesus and heard him teach could be called disciples. But now that Luke, in various ways, has shown that the Church is the presence of Christ in the world and that He actually, not just symbolically, teaches through the Apostles it can be said that all who adhere to the teaching of the Apostles are disciples of Christ.
2. *the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews* - among the Jewish people there was a division. There were the Palestinian Jews who spoke Aramaic, the descendant of the ancient ancestral language of Hebrew. They prided themselves of no foreign admixture in their lives. The views and customs of the Gentiles had no place in their lives. There were also Jews who lived in foreign lands due to the various exiles of the past. Many had been away from Palestine for generations. They spoke Greek and no longer remembered the Hebrew. Likewise, they had adopted many of the views and customs of the countries in which they lived; in particular, Greek culture. The Hellenists had their own synagogues and used a Greek translation of the scriptures just as the Palestinian Jews had their own synagogues and used the Hebrew Scriptures. The consequence of this historical separation was bigotry. The Palestinian Jews tended to look down on the foreign Jews and had anger for them since they had compromised with Pagan culture, forsaken some of the Jewish customs, and had not returned to Canaan with the exile ended. The Hellenists reacted to all this as might be expected with anger and their own accusations toward

- the Palestinians. These divisions among the Jews did not simply disappear when Jews became Christians and we see the friction alive and well here.
3. ***the daily distribution*** - In the synagogue there was a routine custom. Two collectors went around the market and private houses every Friday morning and made a collection for the needy. Partly in money and partly in goods. Later in the day this was distributed. Those who were temporarily in need received enough to enable them to carry on. Those who were permanently unable to support themselves received enough for fourteen meals (2 meal per day). In addition, a daily collection was sometimes made for those in pressing need. It is clear from this passage that the Christian Church took over this custom.
  4. ***It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables*** - The Apostles do not mean to suggest that the care of the poor is "below" their dignity. Rather, there is a conflict of two important tasks here. The preaching and teaching of the Gospel which is very important and the care of the poor which is also very important. Neither should be neglected for the sake of the other. Thus the Apostles call for help not because the care of the poor is unimportant but because it is important. St. John Chrysostom says, *They speak of it not being right in order to show that the two duties in this case cannot be made compatible.*<sup>37</sup> The main responsibility of pastors of the Church is the preaching of the Word of God, the administration of the sacraments and the government of the people of God. Any other commitments they take on must be compatible with their pastoral work and supportive of it. The governance of temporal matters and leadership in the civic and social order belong to lay persons. Clergy ought to avoid this not only because of their other weighty duties but also because involvement in such affairs can be a source of division within the community. Hence the political, civic and social orders ought to be overseen by laity. The role of the clergy is to form the laity in the values and commandments of the Gospel that they may be rightly equipped to imbue the political, social and civic order with Christian values and truth. The balance between the role of the clergy and that of the laity can be a fruitful discussion for class if there is time.
  5. ***pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty.*** - St. Luke uses the term *diakonia* (duty or service) but he does not call the seven deacons. Hence we cannot say without doubt that these seven are the basis for the diaconate as we currently understand the word. Even ancient writers such as John Chrysostom had doubts that the diaconate derives from this passage. Nevertheless, it is at least possible that the ministry described here played a part in the institution of the diaconate. In the modern sense of the word deacons are ordained by the laying on of hands not unto the priesthood but to the ministry (i.e. unto service). They perform certain duties related to evangelization, catechesis, organization of liturgical ceremonies, Christian initiation of catechumens and neophytes, and Church charitable and social welfare work. The problem with the whole concept of the diaconate in these early scripture passages is the very work *diakonia*. It is simply a very generic word meaning duty or service. Hence, we see that the word is used for a whole variety tasks, much as we use the word "ministry" today. Nevertheless, it seems that we can see the specific

office of the diaconate here for these reasons:

- a. They receive the office by the laying on of hands. This is something more formal than a mere commissioning to service. The laying on of hands implies a conferral of power and something quite special. This is more than a simple blessing.
- b. The role of these deacons seems beyond the mere distribution of relief. We see in the chapters ahead both Stephen and Philip preaching and baptizing. Hence they are involved in some way with the Apostles in the care of souls.

6. ***pick out from among you men... whom we may appoint ...These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands upon them -***

This passage allows us to see the difference between election and appointment to the ordained ministry in the Church. A person can be elected or designated by the faithful; but the power to carry out that ministry is something he must receive through ordination which the Apostles confer. So it is that a man may present himself to the Church for ordination. Nevertheless he must discern and the Church much discern if he is in fact called by God to this ministry. Today this is done through a process of prayer and education lasting five to ten years. Only at the end of that process is the candidate for the office presented to the bishop and ordination conferred through prayer and the laying on of hands. Only a bishop, a successor to the apostles. We see this Catholic structure present in this reading. The community is free to propose the candidates for this office but it is the Apostles (the first bishops) who must confer the ministry through prayer and the laying on of hands. Note too how the apostles set the criteria these men must meet: they must be ***men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom***. Hence the community is not free to pick anyone for this office. They must meet certain standards. So it is with men proposed for Holy Orders today.

7. ***And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.***

- a. Here is another summary by Luke. He seems to imply that the selection of the seven resolved the problem but he does not directly state this fact. At any rate the Church continues to grow and the numbers multiply greatly among the Jews in and around Jerusalem. We are entering into the last phase of the mission in Jerusalem. With the next story about the martyrdom of Stephen we shall see the dispersal of the Church and the expansion of the mission of the Church to the Gentiles into and beyond Palestine.
- b. ***a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith*** - the reference here is probably a reference to the priestly class among the Jews. In other words the descendants of Levi, the Levites. The priestly class in Jerusalem was vast and diverse population. At any given time most were not directly involved in the priestly ministry in the temple. Rather they did this ministry for a time only and then were rotated out and others took their place. Hence it was a temporary service for the most part, not a permanent ministry.



- C. Part two - Furor Displayed - {8} *And Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. {9} Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, arose and disputed with Stephen. {10} But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke. {11} Then they secretly instigated men, who said, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." {12} And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, {13} and set up false witnesses who said, "This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law; {14} for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place, and will change the customs which Moses delivered to us." {15} And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.*

1. Outline

a. Furor Displayed - 8-15

(1) Antagonism - 8-11

(2) Arrest - 12-15

(a) Frenzied Crowd - 12

(b) False Charges - 13-15

2. The stakes are getting higher in Jerusalem. We have seen the persecution increase from warning (4:21) to flogging (5:40) to death (7:58). Moreover, now the crowd begins to turn. Just as with Jesus, they sang Hosanna one day and crucify the next, so now, they have been fascinated and some converted. But now many who were unmoved turns vicious (6:12). Note the sudden change in tone in what we are about to read!
3. The essential summary of the prelude to the speech is this. As Stephen is healing and preaching, working great signs among the people, some Hellenistic Jews turn on him and begin to dispute his words. He overwhelms them however with his wisdom and his possession of the Holy Spirit. Thus then enter into a smear campaign claiming he spoke blasphemous words against God and Moses. They claim, *This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law; {14} for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place, and will change the customs which Moses delivered to us.* Thus the charge is impiety and religious innovation. Stephen in his speech will retort this by showing that he and his fellow Christians are the ones who are faithful to the traditions and the prophecies received.
4. *his face was like the face of an angel* - This is Luke's way of saying that Stephen is filled with the Holy Spirit. It also sets the stage for the importance of the speech to come.

VII. *And the high priest said, "Is this so?" {2} And Stephen said: "Brethren and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, {3} and said to him, 'Depart from your land and from your kindred and go into the land which I will show you.' {4} Then he departed from the land of the Chaldeans, and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living; {5} yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot's length, but promised to give it to him in possession and to his posterity after him, though he had no child. {6} And God spoke to this effect, that his posterity would be aliens in a land belonging to others, who would enslave them and ill-treat them four hundred years. {7} 'But I will judge the nation which they serve,' said God, 'and after that they shall come out and worship me in this place.' {8} And he gave him the covenant of circumcision. And so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs. {9} "And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him, {10} and rescued him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him governor over Egypt and over all his household. {11} Now there came a famine throughout all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction, and our fathers could find no food. {12} But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent forth our fathers the first time. {13} And at the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to Pharaoh. {14} And Joseph sent and called to him Jacob his father and all his kindred, seventy-five souls; {15} and Jacob went down into Egypt. And he died, himself and our fathers, {16} and they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem. {17} "But as the time of the promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt {18} till there arose over Egypt another king who had not known Joseph. {19} He dealt craftily with our race and forced our fathers to expose their infants, that they might not be kept alive. {20} At this time Moses was born, and was beautiful before God. And he was brought up for three months in his father's house; {21} and when he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. {22} And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds. {23} "When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel. {24} And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking the Egyptian. {25} He supposed that his brethren understood that God was giving them deliverance by his hand, but they did not understand. {26} And on the following day he appeared to them as they were quarreling and would have reconciled them, saying, 'Men, you are brethren, why do you wrong each other?' {27} But the man who was wronging his neighbor thrust him aside, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? {28} Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' {29} At this retort Moses fled, and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons. {30} "Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush. {31} When Moses saw it he wondered at the sight; and as he drew near to look, the voice of the Lord came, {32} 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.' And Moses trembled and did not dare to look. {33} And the Lord said to him, 'Take off the shoes from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. {34} I have surely seen the ill-treatment of my people that are in Egypt and heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.' {35} "This Moses whom they refused, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' God sent as both ruler and deliverer by the hand of the angel that appeared to him in the bush. {36} He led them out, having performed wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness for forty years. {37} This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, 'God will raise up for you a prophet from your brethren as he raised me up.' {38} This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living oracles to give to us. {39} Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, {40} saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods to go before us; as for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' {41} And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and rejoiced in the works of their hands. {42} But God*

*turned and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets: 'Did you offer to me slain beasts and sacrifices, forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? {43} And you took up the tent of Moloch, and the star of the god Rephan, the figures which you made to worship; and I will remove you beyond Babylon.' {44} "Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, even as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen. {45} Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations which God thrust out before our fathers. So it was until the days of David, {46} who found favor in the sight of God and asked leave to find a habitation for the God of Jacob. {47} But it was Solomon who built a house for him. {48} Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands; as the prophet says, {49} 'Heaven is my throne, and earth my footstool. What house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? {50} Did not my hand make all these things?' {51} "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. {52} Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, {53} you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it." {54} Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth against him. {55} But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; {56} and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God." {57} But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together upon him. {58} Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him; and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. {59} And as they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." {60} And he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*

- A. Outline of the Chapter (and the speech of Stephen)
1. The Prelude of Abraham 1-8
  2. The Persecution of Joseph 9a
  3. The Predilection of God for Joseph 9b-10
  4. The Power of Joseph 11-17
  5. The Prelude to Part Two 18-19
  6. The Persecution of Moses 20-29
  7. The Predilection of God for Moses 30-33
  8. The Power of Moses 34-38
  9. The Perversity of the People 39-43
  10. The Period of the Temple 44-50
  11. The Prosecution of the People 51-53
  12. The Passion and death of Stephen 54-60
    - a. The Disgust of the people - 54
    - b. The Discernment of Stephen 55-56
    - c. The Death of Stephen 57-60

B. The speech of Stephen and his death

1. This is the longest discourse in Acts. It is rather complex as well. Thus, a summary is in order.
2. **A Basic summary:** Stephen says, in effect, You have your nerve to charge that I have violated Moses and his Law - Look at you! Beginning with Abraham Stephen recounts for his audience the long Journey of faith which began with God's promise of a people and a land. (7:2-7) Joseph is then mentioned. Joseph's very own brothers sold him into slavery! (7:9-16) The efforts of his brothers serve only to further God's plans. Next the story of Moses is recounted. Moses got little affection from his own people who refused to obey him. (7:20ff) Here was their savior and liberator and they failed to recognize him and ask, "Who made you a ruler and judge over us? (7:39) Their disobedience degrades to idolatry (7:35ff). The basic point of recalling all of this is to remind them that a community once rebellious can be so again. Hence they must examine themselves and see how they have persecuted and rejected the prophets so consistently. Hence, with this poor record they ought to hesitate to repeat their mistakes. Yet even in the midst of rebellion and idolatry Stephen admits that there was a "tent of witness" (7:44) i.e. the Ark of the Covenant. Things went well until Solomon undertook to build a temple. In a curious revision, Stephen implies that the whole act of building as an act of Apostasy. Stephen then concludes by a torrent of accusations calling them stiff necked people who murdered God's righteous one. The whole polemical summary of Israel's history centers on the fact that they were lacking in understanding (v. 25), and they always resisted the Holy Spirit (v. 51) of God. This speech has all the intensity of a family feud. It is one Jew locked in a bitter life and death struggle over who is really heir to the family fortune. The polemics are similar to the vigorousness of the abortion issue in this country. The gloves are off and the matter is life and death.
3. **The question and the answer** - they do not exactly match up. Yet this not uncommon. Frequently a hostile questioner will pose a question in an unflattering way. The one making an answer must recast the context and then answer. The charges made against Stephen and the Church are in one sense partially true. There is a reworking (actually a fulfillment) of the Mosaic Law and there was a prophecy (not a threat) that the temple would be destroyed. Thus when the high priest asks, "*Is this so?*" Stephen is not in a position to answer with a simple yes or no. Thus he begins by recasting the context. To provide the proper context he embarks on a review of salvation history to show how the Jews consistently missed the purpose of God's dealings with them because of their hardness of heart.
4. **The Example of Abraham** - When Paul takes up the story of Abraham he is emphasizes Abraham's faith. Stephen's review however emphasizes how God is the main actor. All the main actions are God's; Abraham is acted upon. God appears, speaks, moves, gives and inheritance, promises, judges, gives a covenant. Stephen does not mention Abraham's faith at all. The whole point is that *God* acts. God appears where and when he wishes, directs and moves people and issues promises that are often fulfilled in surprising ways. This last aspect is the key to the Abraham example and is especially taken up in the Joseph example to follow.
5. **The example of Joseph** - Joseph is an example of Jesus. Joseph was rejected by his brethren; so was Jesus. Joseph was sold into slavery as a

way of removing him from the scene as Jesus was killed for the same reason. Nevertheless God was working his purpose out. No matter what curve balls we pitch, God always hits a home run. Thus the very fact that Joseph had been removed from the scene (in effect killed) became the source of life for his brethren when famine hit their homeland. Likewise, due to his success in Egypt, he could even recommend them to Pharaoh. The point is that even despite sin, God is working his purpose out; he is not overcome by human sinfulness and rejection. As with Joseph so with Jesus. Through death and rejection Jesus brought life and reconciliation with the Father. All this hearkens back to the prayer of the Apostles in 4:23ff.

6. **The example of Moses** - Stephen's speech echoes that of Peter back in chapter 3. Both treat Jesus as a Moses figure. (So does Matthew throughout his Gospel). Stephen emphasizes that both grew in wisdom (Acts 2 7:22, Luke 2:52) to become powerful in word and deed (Acts 7:22, Luke 24:19). Both Moses and Jesus were disappointed that their own people did not recognize them as chosen Saviors (Acts 7:25, Luke 13:34-35, 19:41-44). After Moses was rejected and fled Egypt God reconfirmed and sent him back to save them with signs and wonders (Acts 7:27-36). After Jesus rejection and death, he was confirmed as savior by his resurrection. But see too how Stephen has an implicit understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ since the return of Christ after rejection by his own people is done by the Church which preaches and shows forth signs and wonders. The second time Moses returns he works signs in an unmistakable fashion and he led them out. Nevertheless they reject him a second time in the Golden calf incident. So God gives them up to wander in exile until they fully repent. Many of the people are repeating this now according to Stephen. Although Jesus has returned a second time (in the Church) with signs and wonders (through the Apostles) Still, he is rejected a second time. Here Stephen implicitly ties into the prophecy of the destruction of the temple. Thus, implicitly, they were destined to wander in a new exile.
7. The answer to the charges - Now that Stephen has set a context, he is ready to answer the charges. But before we turn to the answers what *is* the context? The context is
  - a. the Lordship of God who is Lord of history. God works out his purposes in often unexpected ways. People of faith see this and respond but those who are hard of heart miss it and react with hostility.
  - b. Israel has not shown itself to be other than hard of heart and stiff-necked. The history as Stephen has reviewed it is a legacy of killing the prophets and rejecting their message. This should lead to humility in the present case. Rather than falling into the trap once again cannot those who hear his words even give a second thought to the possibility that they might be wrong? Did not Gamaliel show at least this much open-mindedness back in Chapter 4?
  - c. Thus the context is caution and openmindedness.
  - d. Now the answer to the charges.
    - (1) ***We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God*** - Stephen has clearly demonstrated his

respect for Moses. He attempts to show that it is those who reject the Messiah who show disrespect to Moses because they repeat the very same sin committed against Moses: they reject God's chosen savior. Moses was poorly treated and rejected by the people. Now Jesus is rejected in the same way. Stephen adds to this the very prophecy of Moses who said *This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, 'God will raise up for you a prophet from your brethren as he raised me up.'*(7:37)<sup>38</sup> Clearly Stephen sees this as a direct prophecy of Jesus. Now, who is dishonoring Moses, the followers of Jesus who accept the prophecy of Moses or the rejectors of Jesus who thereby reject Moses once again by rejecting his prophecy? The question is rhetorical and so Stephen's answer is clear. As regards the blasphemous words against God: it appears that the charge is wound together with the disrespect toward Moses. To blaspheme Moses is to blaspheme God. Stephen thus addresses the speaking against Moses and so addresses the blasphemy against God implicitly.

- (2) ***This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place*** It appears that those bringing the charges against Stephen may also have heard the word of Jesus who said, Destroy this temple and in three days I will rebuild it (he spoke in reference to his body<sup>39</sup> and his prophecy of the destruction of the Temple in Matt 24:1-2. But note that prophecy does not equal threat. Further note how what is happening to Stephen is exactly what happened to Jesus. Jesus had these inaccurate charges leveled against him and now, so does Stephen. We have seen this before in Acts. What happened to Jesus happens to his Mystical Body, the Church. But interestingly enough, Stephen does not directly say, "The charges are inaccurate or out of context." Rather he harkens back to an older tradition regarding the temple. In one sense, it is a shocking argument since the Jewish Temple is likened to a work of Idolatry! Nevertheless, there is a tradition of such criticism in Israel. Like the whole concept of kingship itself, the building of the temple did not meet with universal approval (cf 1 Kings 8:27; 2 Chr 6:8). Even the oracle legitimating its being built (for God first rejected the notion saying no to David but yes to Solomon) was in the form of a conditional clause "if the commandments are kept" (1 Kings 6:11-13). The prophets in general warned against the people relying on ritual rather than obedience and putting false confidence in the presence of God in the Temple as a surety for their survival (cf Jer 7:1-34; Amos 5:25-27; Micah 3:9-12; Is. 1:12-17). It is into this tradition that Stephen taps. Stephen's implicit answer is "The Temple cannot be more important than the obedience of faith...God is larger than the Temple and is not limited to

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<sup>38</sup>Here Stephen quotes Moses' words in Deut. 18:15

<sup>39</sup>John 2:19.

its confines. He can act in his own mysterious and chosen ways."

- (3) ***and [words against] the Law*** The arguments already advanced by Stephen answer this question since, for the purpose here Law and Prophets present a common source pointing to Jesus. Thus Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law. Cf the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5) wherein Jesus declares he did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it.

- C. ***But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together upon him. {58} Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him;*** - The final straw is Stephen's claim to see Christ standing at the right hand of the Father in glory. This hardly veiled claim for the divinity of Christ enrages them and they pick up stones to stone him. This is exactly what happened to Jesus when He declared his divinity: *Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." So they took up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple* (John 8:58-59). Now Stephen who also declares the truth of Christ's divinity also suffers. Jesus hid himself because his hour had not yet come but Stephen's hour has come.
- D. ***"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit...Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*** Here again, see how Stephen looks and sounds just like Jesus. What happened to Jesus (death) happens to Stephen and what Christ did, so does Stephen. Recall Jesus said and did: *And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last* (Luke 23:34,46). Thus, what happened to Jesus happens to Stephen. What Jesus did, so too does Stephen. Yet again, then see how Luke identifies the Church with Christ. What happened to Jesus happens to the Church. In this case the Church is represented by Stephen.
- E. ***they were all scattered throughout the region*** - With this verse we see the close of the mission in Jerusalem. Now the mission will extend into Palestine and eventually to the ends of the earth. Note how this happens. It is the persecution that causes this. There is an ancient saying: The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church. In this context the significance of the verb scattered in this verse is appreciated. The worldly powers think they are rid of the these disciples of Christ. What they do not realize is that, far from destroying the Church, they have in fact been instrumental in casting forth the seed that will bear enormous fruit. See again how God is the Lord of history, not man. This verse also recalls our Lord's teaching: *Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit* (John 12:24). By God's grace the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. Rabbi Gamaliel's comments are also worth recalling here: *For if this plan or undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God you will not be able to overthrow them.* (Acts 5:38-39).

Here ends the mission in Jerusalem.

Now begins the mission in Judea and Samaria.