

# Walking with the Spirit through the Book of Acts

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## Who is the Holy Spirit?

### 1. The Spirit is God

<sup>3</sup> But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back *some* of the proceeds of the land? <sup>4</sup> While it remained *unsold*, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why *is it* that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God.” (Acts 5:3-4; NASB)

<sup>2</sup> While they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set Barnabas and Saul apart for Me for the work to which I have called them.” (Acts 13:2; NASB)

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” (Matt 28:19; NASB)

### 2. The Spirit is advocate

<sup>16</sup> I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, so that He may be with you forever; <sup>17</sup> *the Helper is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know *Him*; *but* you know Him because He remains with you and will be in you. (John 14:16-17; NASB)

<sup>25</sup> “These things I have spoken to you while remaining with you. <sup>26</sup> But the Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and remind you of all that I said to you.” (John 14:25; NASB)

<sup>7</sup> But I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I am leaving; for if I do not leave, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. <sup>8</sup> And He, when He comes, will convict the world regarding sin, and righteousness, and judgment: <sup>9</sup> regarding sin, because they do not believe in Me; <sup>10</sup> and regarding righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you no longer *are going* to see Me; <sup>11</sup> and regarding judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

<sup>12</sup> “I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* at the present time. <sup>13</sup> But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. <sup>14</sup> He will glorify Me, for He will take from Mine and will disclose *it* to you. <sup>15</sup> All things that the Father has are Mine; this is why I said that He takes from Mine and will disclose *it* to you. (John 16:7-15; NASB)

### 3. The Spirit is our guide through the journey of life

<sup>16</sup> But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For the desire of the flesh is against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, in order to keep you from doing whatever you want. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. <sup>19</sup> Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: sexual immorality, impurity, indecent behavior, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, witchcraft, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> Now those who belong to Christ Jesus crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let’s follow the Spirit as well. (Gal 5:16-25; NASB)

But we all, with unveiled faces, looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Cor 3:18; NASB)

They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, after being forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. (Acts 16:6; NASB)

<sup>22</sup> And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, <sup>23</sup> except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that chains and afflictions await me. (Acts 20:22-23; NASB)

After looking up the disciples, we stayed there for seven days; and they kept telling Paul, through the Spirit, not to set foot in Jerusalem. (Acts 21:4; NASB)

#### 4. The Spirit is a source of power for His purposes

So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? (Gal 3:5; NASB)

and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. (1 Cor 2:4; NASB)

<sup>4</sup> Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. <sup>5</sup> And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. <sup>6</sup> There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*. <sup>7</sup> But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. <sup>8</sup> For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; <sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup> and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another *various* kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup> But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. (1 Cor 12:4-11; NASB)

## The Holy Spirit in Today's World

1. Conviction about sin / virtual spaces and flexible morality
2. Focus on the material (bodily comfort) / detachment from the true self (spiritual)
3. Focus on the moment (pleasure) / detachment from judgment (destiny)

## What is the Book of Acts?

### **Acts is part 2 of a two-part history.**

In my former book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. (Acts 1:1-2; NIV)

### **What part does the Holy Spirit play?**

### **Acts presents the account of the first witnesses to the Spirit-empowered life.**

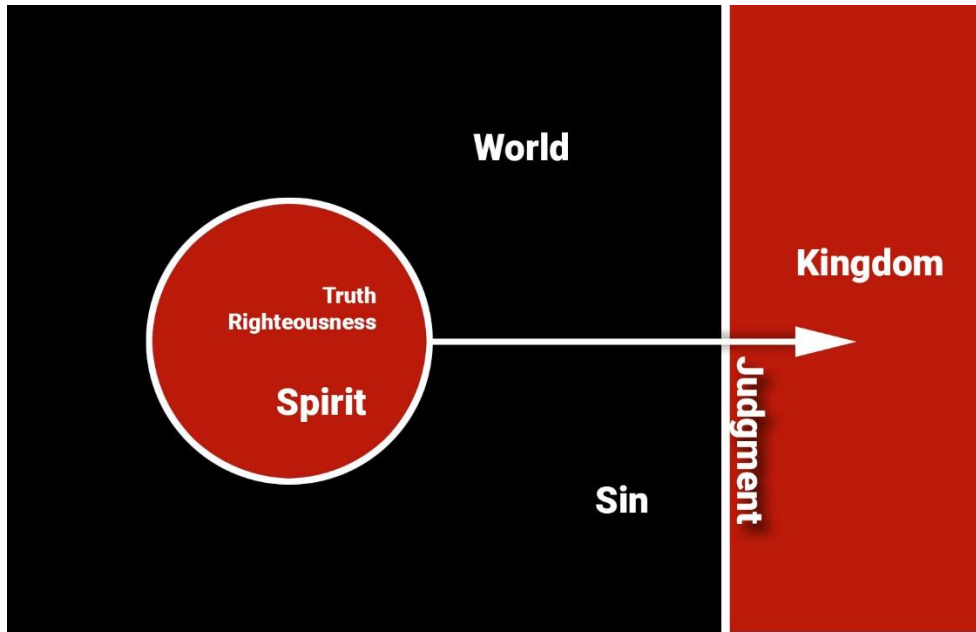
## Acts 1 and the framework for the work of the Spirit

1. Christianity is based in a tangible reality—the proof of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. (Acts 1:3a; NIV)

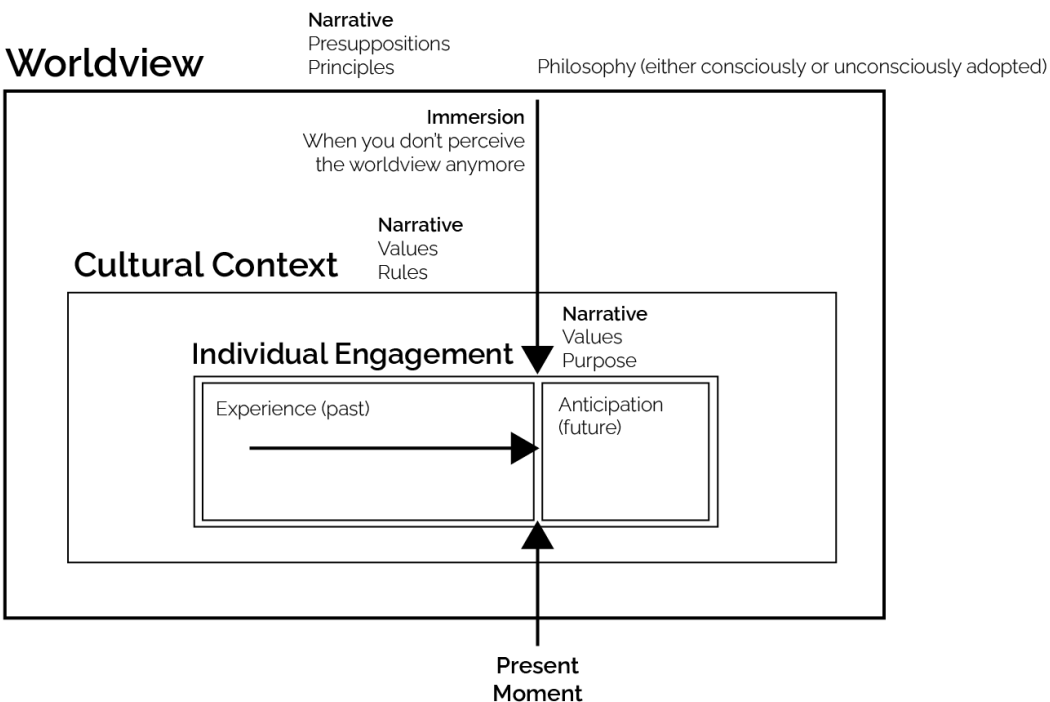
2. The Christian life and mission have a forward view—the Kingdom is the conclusion to the journey that begins in Acts and concludes with this end of this present age. The Kingdom is present and future.

He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:3b)



- Acts reminds us that the gospel is in tension with culture, that we need to be strategic and we need to rely on the Holy Spirit. Jesus predicted we would have trouble in this world (John 16:33)—so the apparent challenges to the gospel in Acts (and in our lives) are expected.

On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.” (Acts 1:4)



4. Acts is based on a radical shift in human existence that comes through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This is metaphorically identified as baptism. Baptism means change, transition, and death as a gateway to new life.

“For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 1:5)

John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” (Luke 3:16)

5. Acts reveals a time frame between the giving of the Spirit and the end of the age (the arrival of the Kingdom), and deliberately avoids any explanation for how long that time will last.

Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.” (Acts 1:6-7)

6. Acts reveals the Holy Spirit as our source of power. This is not power for its own sake, but to fulfill our purpose in this life. Our purpose is nothing other than his purpose.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses ...” (Acts 1:8a)

7. God's purpose is realized throughout the world. The work of the Spirit is not limited by time, space, ethnicity, or any other human characteristic. It is powerful across the centuries. It is the same power today, in this corner of the world, that it was then.

"...in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8b)

8. The beginning of this work is specifically indicated by Jesus visibly transitioning his ministry to the church by leaving the earth in plain sight. This image bring closure and implies that we need to focus our eyes on what lies ahead and do what he says.

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. (Acts 1:9)

As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. (2 Kings 2:11)

## The ascension of Jesus and the start of the church's mission

<sup>9</sup> After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. <sup>10</sup> They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. <sup>11</sup> "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:9-11; NIV)

1. The ascent is a tangible sign and motivation for the church to wait for the Spirit and embrace its mission.
2. The ascent typifies the same vision as Elijah's transition and the start of Elisha's ministry.

<sup>9</sup> When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?"

"Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit," Elisha replied.

<sup>10</sup> "You have asked a difficult thing," Elijah said, "yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise, it will not."

<sup>11</sup> As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. <sup>12</sup> Elisha saw this and cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his garment and tore it in two. (2 Kings 2:9-12)

3. The ascent of Jesus sets up the fulfillment of a key Messianic passage in Ps 110:1.

The LORD says to my lord:

"Sit at my right hand  
until I make your enemies  
a footstool for your feet." (Ps 110:1)

4. The gospels reveal that the ascent was always something anticipated.

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" (John 20:17)



5. The ascent sets us the return of Christ (in similar fashion as his departure), in fulfillment of key end-times prophecies such as Daniel 7 and Luke 21:27.

<sup>13</sup>“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. <sup>14</sup>He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. (Dan 7:13-14)

<sup>27</sup>“At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. <sup>28</sup>When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” (Luke 21:27-28)

6. The angels (Acts 1:10) seem to be the same two who provide insight to the disciples at the empty tomb (Luke 24:1-7). Here they perform the same function: providing an explanation of what happened so that there isn't fear or confusion (Acts 1:11).

While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. (Luke 24:4)

7. The disciples are at the Mount of Olives when this occurs (see Acts 1:12). That Jesus is going to return in the same fashion is a fulfillment of Zech 14:4, a prophecy for the coming of the Lord at the end of the age. He appears as a man at the Mount of Olives.

Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. (Acts 1:12)

<sup>3</sup>Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights on a day of battle. <sup>4</sup>On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. (Zech 14:3-4)

## Choosing a replacement for Judah and the ongoing witness of the resurrection (Acts 1:12-26)

1. The disciples are pictured as faithful Jews who kept the sabbath. (Acts 1:12)
2. The disciples numbered 120 people at this time, and Luke notes that this includes some of the women and the brothers of Jesus (i.e., the children that Mary and Joseph had after Jesus' birth). (Acts 1:13-14)

3. The betrayal of Judah would be seen as a matter of shame and disrepute in ancient culture. Luke makes sure his readers understand that this shame does not reflect on Jesus or the church. (Acts 1:15-20) The resolution is to replace Judah and restore the witness of the twelve disciples.
4. The criteria was to select someone who had been there as part of Jesus' earthly ministry and witnessed his resurrection. Someone in that position would be able to provide an eye-witness testimony of everything that had happened. Paul (for example) would not qualify for this kind of testimony. (Acts 1:21-22)

<sup>21</sup> "Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, <sup>22</sup> beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection." (Acts 1:21-22)

5. The disciples used lots (i.e., flipping a coin) to choose between two equally qualified men, with the hope and expectation God would control the outcome. (Acts 1:23-26)

### Side topic: The use of signs (lots, fleeces, etc.) in decision-making

1. Casting lots is something that happens in ancient culture, the same way we might flip a coin or roll dice to determine a random outcome. But in the case of the Old Testament, it occurs on occasion with the expectation that God will affect the outcome for his purposes. (Joshua, in particular, uses this method on numerous occasions.)

"After you have written descriptions of the seven parts of the land, bring them here to me and I will cast lots for you in the presence of the LORD our God." (Joshua 18:6)

2. Gideon is famous for confirming God's orders by asking God to show a sign through a fleece.

<sup>36</sup> Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised— <sup>37</sup> look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said." <sup>38</sup> And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water.

<sup>39</sup> Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece, but this time make the fleece dry and let the ground be covered with dew." <sup>40</sup> That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew. (Judges 6:36-40)

3. Despite these examples, the primary way God directs us in our decision making is by commanding us to obey his word.

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.” (Matt 7:24)

I hold fast to your statutes, LORD;  
do not let me be put to shame.  
I run in the path of your commands,  
for you have broadened my understanding. (Ps 119:31-32)

4. God also directs us to make decisions in accordance with wisdom. Wisdom is principled and conservative decision-making, striving for outcomes that make sense, preserve life, and honor God. It is contrasted with foolishness, which includes decision-making that leads to destructive and harmful outcomes. Wisdom often comes from loving (parental) instruction and sound advice.

The way of fools seems right to them,  
but the wise listen to advice. (Prov 12:15)

Listen, my son, accept what I say,  
and the years of your life will be many.

<sup>11</sup> I instruct you in the way of wisdom  
and lead you along straight paths.

<sup>12</sup> When you walk, your steps will not be hampered;  
when you run, you will not stumble. (Prov 4:10-12)

5. After the coming of the Spirit in Acts 2, things like lots are not used again in any decision-making. Instead, we see the Holy Spirit as a guide for life, transforming people so that they will make wise and godly decisions. On occasion, when the issue is not holiness or wisdom but rather needing information, the Spirit provides specific instructions or prevents specific actions. This only occurs in the context of ministry, however.

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” (Acts 13:2)

Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. (Acts 16:6)

“I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.” (Acts 20:23)

## Pentecost, speaking in tongues, tongues of fire: The Spirit’s power and baptism

9. What happened at Pentecost was a fulfillment of Jesus’ promise of the coming of the Spirit, after his departure.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup>They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. <sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:1-4; NIV)

10. The unique characteristics of this event suggest this is not the normal experience of people who receive the Holy Spirit. Rather, it seems a deliberate sign to ensure that the start of the church is framed with unmistakable meaning.
  - a) The Spirit is given in a way that is unmistakably supernatural but with a clear manifestation in the physical realm. Whatever it means, possessing the Spirit, it has power and significance in the real (physical) world.
  - b) Having tongues accompany this brings the unmistakable message that the work of the Spirit is intended for the entire world, not just Jews in Palestine.
  - c) The use of tongues typifies the idea that the work of the church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is to spread a message. This is not power for its own sake, but to complete a mission that was started by Jesus. Average, everyday people are now empowered for the same kind of ministry: to deliver the same message of the kingdom.
  - d) The work of the Spirit comes in direct fulfillment of not only Jesus’ promises, but other Old Testament prophecies of the final age leading to the kingdom (see Acts 2:17-21). This event, therefore, connects the past to the present, and the present to the future. The same Spirit who begins this age will end it. The final age (leading to judgment and the kingdom) is upon us.

e) The use of tongues and flames of fire shows that the work is deliberately individualized, though the work itself is for all of us. Each person has the same power but not necessarily the same words.

f) Fire is prophetically associated by John in connection with the kind of baptism that Jesus was bringing (Luke 3:16). The nearest reference that indicates the significance of fire seems to be Jesus' teaching in Luke 12. Fire represents purification and refinement. His people therefore have this as a component in their ministry.

"I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed!"  
(Luke 12:49-50)

g) The scene at Pentecost is radically different than anything seen in the Old Testament and signifies a power never before seen on earth. A full understanding of what it means is not yet evident but becomes increasingly so through the book of Acts.

## Pentecost as Reversal of Babel

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. <sup>2</sup> As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. <sup>3</sup> They said to each other, “Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. <sup>4</sup> Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.” <sup>5</sup> But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. <sup>6</sup> The LORD said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. <sup>7</sup> Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.” <sup>8</sup> So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. <sup>9</sup> That is why it was called Babel—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth. (Gen 11:1-9)

1. The tower of Babel revealed language as the basis for a united resistance to God.
2. The fundamental tension in Babel was the same as in Eden and throughout human history; it is about human ascendancy vs. reliance on God.
3. God impeded their efforts by bringing confusion to their speech, which caused people to move out into the world (i.e., it divided them spatially and ethnically).
4. Human speech continues (through modern media) to be a primary vehicle for resistance to God. The tongue is a restless evil (James 3:8).
5. In the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the motivations underlying humans change, and tongues are used to proclaim the great works of God (Acts 2:11). People are united for the giving of the Spirit and united in their message (Acts 2:1).
6. Those who receive the Spirit are given the ability to ignore language-barriers (which are explained in ethnic terms) and speak a unified message (Acts 2:9-11).
7. The purpose behind all of it is to bring salvation to people who are far off (Acts 2:39). What happens at Pentecost is the announcement and expression of this purpose.

## Tongues in Acts & Paul

Tongues in Acts (Luke)	Tongues in 1 Cor 12-14 (Paul)
Tongues ( <i>glossai</i> ) are languages (2:4).	Tongues ( <i>glossai</i> ) are languages (13:1; 14:10-11).
Tongues are inspired by the Spirit (2:4). They are part of the wonders and signs prophesied by Joel (2:19).	Tongues are a gift of the Spirit (12:7-11)
Tongues are apparently not understood by the speaker (2:4)	Tongues are not understood by the speaker unless the speaker is supernaturally given understanding (14:13-15)
Tongues can be understood by someone who knows the language (2:8-11) but not to those who don't (2:13).	Tongues are understood when they are interpreted (which is a specific gift in its own right) (12:10, 30; 14:13)
Those who don't understand the tongues mistake it for drunkenness (2:13)	Those who don't understand the tongues (i.e., if there is no interpretation) may assume the speaker is out of their mind (14:23)
Pentecost depicts those who receive tongues (each/all of those who were in the original house or room, 2:4) vs. others who merely witnessed it (2:6). In other words, not everyone is depicted as receiving tongues.	Not everyone is given the gift of tongues (implied in 12:10; 14:22; specifically noted in 12:30, where the question is asked in a way where the answer must be "no").
Tongues functions as a sign to unbelievers (2:11-13)	Tongues functions as a sign to unbelievers (14:22)
In some contexts, tongues are not interpreted or understood (10:46; 19:6) with no obvious ministerial function, but clearly to edify the individual.	Without a gift of interpretation, tongues are not interpreted or understood (14:2, 16-19). But there is still edification to the individual who has the gift (14:4).
Tongues are viewed in positive terms (as a sign of the Holy Spirit) in Acts, whether or not they are understood. But none of the examples of tongues happen in the context of a worship service. They all appear spontaneously when the Spirit first comes upon people.	Tongues are viewed in positive terms in 1 Corinthians (Paul wishes all to receive the gift, 14:5, and has it himself, 14:18) except when it brings disorder to the worship service (14:26-28, 40). In other words, some believers have the ability to manifest the gift at will.

1. Tongues differ between Acts and 1 Corinthians in *function*. In Acts, it is spontaneous as the Spirit is first given to believers. In 1 Corinthians, it is a voluntary exercise that occurs in the context of worship. These aren't two types of tongues; they are different contexts and purposes. In Acts, the gift is the Spirit (Acts 2:28) and tongues is a result of a "filling"

by the Spirit (2:4). In 1 Corinthians, tongues is a gift from the Spirit (1 Cor 12:4, 10-11) for the common good of building up the body of Christ.

2. There is no definite, notable difference between the manifestation of tongues in Acts and 1 Corinthians except that, in Acts, there is no gift of interpretation (but it is not necessary because the tongues are known languages that are understood by some of the people present).
3. Nothing follows from this about the linguistic nature of tongues (whether a known language or not), though Paul indicates that tongues requires supernatural interpretation (which implies that it is not a known language, normally), and he uses the expression “the tongues of men or of angels” (1 Cor 13:1) which implies that while tongues is a language, the language may not be human.
4. The Spirit is given as a second work in Acts as the Spirit moves out to different groups of people (e.g., Acts 10:44-48). But every indication is that this baptism occurs directly in connection with receiving the Spirit at the point of salvation (Acts 2:38; 1 Cor 12:12-13), not as a secondary work of the Spirit subsequent to salvation.
5. Scripture doesn’t instruct believers to be baptized in the Spirit but rather to be filled with the Spirit (Eph 4:5).
6. Gifts of the Spirit can apparently be given at any time after salvation (see 1 Cor 14:1, where Paul instructs them to desire the gifts, cf. also 1 Cor 12:31). Gifts are distributed according to the will of the Spirit, which implies he can give them at any time (1 Cor 12:11). Paul wishes they would all receive tongues (1 Cor 14:5), which implies they may yet receive the gift. In other words, the gifts of the Spirit are not the same as the baptism of the Spirit.
7. There are no biblical grounds for asserting that tongues (or any other gift) cannot manifest in today’s world. Such a claim limits the Spirit’s ability to do what he determines (1 Cor 12:11). The only indication of a time when the gifts will end is the state of perfection which will occur in eternity, after the return of Christ (1 Cor 13:8-10). In such a state, the gifts would not be needed.
8. All this said, the gift of tongues can be counterfeited, like any of the gifts, but without a clear way to establish its validity. An unnatural preoccupation with this gift (or any gift that does not have an explicit point of validation) is suspicious. Paul’s emphasis is therefore on gifts that tangibly build up others (1 Cor 14:17-19). The validation to the work of the Spirit is the edification of his people.



## The Spirit in Your Life vs. Gifts in Your Life

1. When you trust in Christ, you are given the Holy Spirit. This gift is the key to the life you need, a life that never ends. But you still have the ability to grieve the Spirit (Eph 4:30), resist the leading of the Spirit (Gal 5:16-18, 25), and let something other than the Spirit fill (control) your life (Eph 5:18).
2. Gifts are special capacities for the Holy Spirit to work through your life for the edification of God's people. These gifts are distributed the way the Spirit determines, and your role in the church is typically related to the gift(s) you are given (1 Cor 12:7-31). We are not all given the same gifts.
3. Possessing and using a gift can be a blessing to you, as you see God work in and through you. But not all gifts are the same with regard to their role and significance in the body of Christ. Gifts that strengthen the body are more desirable than ones that merely encourage you as an individual. Paul therefore downplays tongues, which has a limited role in encouraging others, and elevates those which bring understanding. I would go so far as to say (and I think Paul would agree) that tongues is perhaps the least important gift in the list (in practical terms), and yet it is one that has a veneer of supernaturalism, which can lead to pride.
4. Paul puts all the gifts as secondary to love (1 Cor 13). Love is the focus of God's essence and the expression of the Spirit's power in and through us. When the gifts go away in eternity, love will remain. Any expression of the Spirit which does not occur as an outpouring of love is therefore misdirected. What God wants for each of us is that we become a certain kind of person. The Spirit actively works to change us.

## Prophecy and the Outpouring of the Spirit

1. When the Spirit is given, it happens in a context where the word is proclaimed. (Acts 2:14-36)
2. In the first stage of his sermon, Peter explains that the outpouring of the Spirit was always part of God's plan (Acts 2:17-21, quoting Joel 2:28-32). In other words, a supernatural manifestation of God's power among his people was part of the plan for the last days.
3. In the second stage of his sermon, Peter relates Jesus' ministry (including signs and wonders) to a fulfillment of prophecy regarding the Messiah. For David's words in Ps 16:8-11 and Ps 110:1 to be true, Messiah had to die and ascend to God.
4. The combination of these two components (the Spirit coming and the Messiah leaving) forms the basis for the church age. To participate in the great work of God, one must repent and receive the gift of the Spirit. Peter adds to this the need to be separated from the corruption of the current generation (Acts 2:38-40).
5. The result was that the church increased to more than 3000 people. This number increased through the ministry of the apostles and the unity of the church (Acts 2:41-27).
6. Prophecy and power continue to be the basis for our vision, faith, and behavior as we wait (together, in unity) for the return of our Lord and Savior.

## The Man Lame from Birth as a Case Study in the Power of the Spirit

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. <sup>2</sup> Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. <sup>3</sup> When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. <sup>4</sup> Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” <sup>5</sup> So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

<sup>6</sup> Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” <sup>7</sup> Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. <sup>8</sup> He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. <sup>9</sup> When all the people saw him walking and praising God, <sup>10</sup> they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. (Acts 3:1-10)

1. When God is preparing to work powerfully, he controls all the precedents.
2. The man had a need and expressed a desire for help.

<sup>4</sup> Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home.” <sup>5</sup> He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. <sup>6</sup> He was amazed at their lack of faith. (Mark 6:4-6)

3. God drew Peter and John’s attention to this man (Acts 3:4). They saw something in him that led them to act.
4. God’s intention and power surpassed the man’s need and expectation (Acts 3:3-6). The absence of their ability to help him monetarily meant room for the Spirit to work and bring attention to himself.
5. What happens occurs through the name (authority) of Jesus (Acts 3:6; see 3:16, 4:7, 4:10, 12, 17-18, etc.)
6. The outcome is that attention is drawn to the power of God. (Acts 3:9-10)
7. Peter confirms that this has nothing to do with him but rather God. (Acts 3:11-13)

8. The outcome is a call to repentance, to turn away from past sins and trust God. (Acts 3:13-26)

## Acts 4: The Response of Culture

The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. <sup>2</sup>They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. <sup>3</sup>They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. <sup>4</sup>But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand. (Acts 4:1-4)

1. The religious and secular elite of the day push back on the work of the Spirit. Culture always pushes back, and one primary attack is a challenge of authority on the basis of its own (worldly, secular) authority. (Acts 4:5-7)
  
2. Peter engages the religion authority of his time by rationally confronting their failure and bringing attention to the core of the Christian worldview, which is the power and preeminent authority of the resurrected Christ (Acts 4:8-12). The cornerstone (Isa 28:16-17; see also 1 Pet 2:6) is a metaphor that brings to mind the tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9; an edifice of human authority) and shatters secular kingdoms at the end of the age (Dan 2:31-35, 44-45).
  - a) The cornerstone was Jesus' self-identity as cultural (religious) opposition. (Matt 21:33-46)
  
  - b) The rock is a prophetic metaphor for the end of cultural authority at the end of the age. (Daniel 2:31-35, 44-45)

3. The unbelieving religious authorities recognize that the message they are hearing comes from ordinary people and validates that they were the same men who were with Jesus during his ministry, cannot dispute the power behind their message. (Acts 4:13-14)
  
4. Rather than being persuaded, the authorities actively oppose the message itself. (Acts 4:15-17)
  
5. The Christians refuse to obey the cultural authorities—in regard to their mission to proclaim the truth. Not as a fundamental right but because of the power and validity of the message. (Acts 4:18-22)

## Acts 4:23-5:11 – The Spirit and the Big Picture Behind His Person & Purposes

On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. (Acts 4:23)

1. The Spirit reveals and confirms God's sovereignty in the unfolding of his plan and purpose. (Acts 4:23-31)

- a) God is the architect of the universe and confirms that circumstances are not coincidental by the words of his prophets.

When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

"Why do the nations rage  
and the peoples plot in vain?  
The kings of the earth rise up  
and the rulers band together  
against the Lord  
and against his anointed one.'" (Acts 4:24-26)

- b) God's plan weaves together the evil intents of others to his great purpose. Circumstances are beyond Satan's ability to foresee.

Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. (Acts 4:27-28)

- c) Those who rest in God's sovereignty can persevere in the face of hardship and expect his power.

"Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." (Acts 4:29-30)

- d) The Spirit confirms and fills the men and women who follow him and adopt his mindset.

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. (Acts 4:31)

2. Those who are led by the Spirit bond as a community. A community treats one another as equally valuable in times of need. (Acts 4:32-35)

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. (Acts 4:32-35)

### **A Case Study in Fraud: Ananias and Sapphira**

1. The situation is framed by the selfless generosity of Barnabas.

Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4:36-37)

2. The actual sin was not a partial donation but the lie that it was a complete donation, like Barabas's. Behind the lie was a representation that their hearts were in alignment with the Spirit, but this was fraud.

Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. <sup>2</sup>With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 5:1-2)

3. The Spirit acted to expose the fraud and used Peter as an agent to make the situation clear, in the same way that his power had aligned with Peter's message throughout the first four chapters of Acts. The word and the work of the Spirit are necessarily connected.
4. The Spirit is revealed as a person with a singular mindset and perfect in holiness, not a generalized power or emotional sentiment. The source of power in Acts is God himself, not a spiritual force.
5. The Spirit is capable of authenticating his people, his message, and his purposes. Our purpose is not authentication but *alignment*.

## Acts 5:12-42 – The Spirit Unbounded

The Pre-conditions for the Spirit to work:

- All glory to him
- Men and women he can use (counterpoint, the fraud of Ananias and Sapphira)
- The outworking of his purposes, which is to draw people into the kingdom

1. The Spirit is unrestricted when conditions are right: Healing people and freeing them from the demonic (Acts 5:12-16).

The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed. (Acts 5:12-16)

### What is a demon? What is demonization?

- Demons are fallen angels with definite but limited ability to affect human beings.
- Demons are not a sickness, but bear some resemblance to sickness in that they occupy lives that are not spiritually healthy.
- Demons are a counterfeit to the work of the Holy Spirit, and appear (and are revealed) when the Spirit works.



2. In connection with the Spirit's work is cultural pushback, but the Spirit's power is unrestricted in its response to culture (Acts 5:17-20).

Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people all about this new life." (Acts 5:17-20)

**The recurring agenda behind the Spirit's work is the message of new life (v. 20).**

3. The response of those through whom the Spirit works is unwavering and uncompromising (Acts 5:21-32). These are pre-existing characteristics which reflect the Spirit's heart and priorities.

The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than human beings! (Acts 5:27-29)

4. Gamaliel's wager (Acts 5:33-40) shows that God's action is rational and intended to be verified. The Spirit does validate his people and purposes throughout Acts. Nothing has changed to this day.

"Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God." (Acts 5:38-39)

## The Ministry of the Seven: God's Power Moves Outward

1. As the Jerusalem church grew, a complaint arose among the Hellenistic Jews that their neediest people were being overlooked. The need inspired the Hebraic Jews to appoint new leadership among the Hellenistic Jews to care for the poor.

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. (Acts 6:1)

- a) The ministry of the church is and has always been to care for people who suffer in this life. Love is a tangible, active expression of God's character in and through his people.
- b) Responding to needs doesn't stand on its own but occurs in a context where the word of God is being proclaimed and disciples are being created. Our service is a confirmation of the reality of new life in Christ and not simply a humanitarian response. In this way, God is glorified. The eternal is always his focus and therefore ours.

So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." (Acts 6:2-4)

*Diakonos* – Table servant. This term is used of Christ (Rom 15:8) and Paul uses it of himself (2 Cor 11:23; Eph 3:7; Col 1:23, 25). It is therefore a general word for a servant (or minister), not a technical title.

2. Needs inspire opportunities to serve. Needs are opportunities for the Spirit to work and for people of character to become heroes in God's plan.

This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. (Acts 6:5-6)

*Note: Stephen and Philip—new leaders who become heroes in the story of Acts.*

3. Our ministry is validated by our active service and ministry to others.

So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:7)

## Hero #1: Stephen. Faith, the Spirit, and Life Fulfilled.

1. We were previously introduced to Stephen as a man full of the Holy Spirit and faith (Acts 6:5). Now we can see where this leads.

a) God's grace and power are available to people who are sold out for him. He Spirit fills those who trust him completely. They share his heart (grace) by the presence of the Spirit. God's grace is tied to the outworking of his power.

Trust > Spirit > Grace > Power

b) The Spirit gives wisdom (real-time) to guide speech to his ends.

*Side note: The Synagogue of the Freedman has members who are refuted. Saul of Tarsus?*

Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen. But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke. (Acts 6:8-10)

2. Satan has the ability to create adversity in culture through lies.

3. The message the Spirit inspires is one that exposes people who claim to follow God but live faithless, disobedient lives. People like this naturally oppose God's appointed (and empowered) representatives.

## Acts 7:2-60 – The Pattern of Heroes Under the Spirit’s Power

1. Abraham: One man, the father of Israel, prior to the law, believes God and acts out of *obedience*. God made him promises (and came through). (Acts 7:2-8)

To this he replied: “Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran. ‘Leave your country and your people,’ God said, ‘and go to the land I will show you.’ So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Harran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. He gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot on. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child.” (Acts 7:2-5)

2. Joseph: One man, the victim of the patriarchs of Israel, was rescued by God. He rose to prominence and power in a foreign land, during a time of suffering. God gave him *wisdom*. (Acts 7:9-16)

“Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt. So Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.” (Acts 7:9-10)

3. Circumstances seemed to shift against God’s people in Egypt and jeopardize the promise. They experienced hardship and suffering. But this was just a step in God’s plan to raise up one man—a hero. (Acts 7:17-19)

“As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had greatly increased. Then ‘a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt.’ He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our ancestors by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die.” (Acts 7:17-19)

4. Moses: One man, adopted by the household of Pharaoh, was raised within Egyptian culture and gained *wisdom*. He rose to a position of prominence. He was rejected by his own people (the many) as a leader and fled Egypt, but God had other plans for him. God revealed himself and gave him the law, and appointed him as the savior of his people—the same people who had rejected him. He performed miracles and signs by the power of God. (Acts 7:20-38)

“At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for by his family. When he was placed outside, Pharaoh’s daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action. ... This is the same Moses they had rejected with the words, ‘Who made you ruler and judge?’ He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. He led them out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness.” (Acts 7:20-22, 35-36)

5. Despite their suffering and the power of God, Israel (the many) refused to obey God’s appointed hero and desired to return to their bondage. They rejected God and worshipped an idol. God turned away from them and sent them into exile. (Acts 7:39-43; cf. Amos 5:25-27)

“But our ancestors refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt.” (Acts 7:39)

6. Israel (the many) had the law during their time in the wilderness (the tabernacle, i.e., the mobile temple) which remained with them for many years until only much later it came to rest in the temple, built by Solomon (not God’s hero, David). (Acts 7:44-47)

“Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the covenant law with them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. After receiving the tabernacle, our ancestors under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, who enjoyed God’s favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built a house for him. (Acts 7:44-47)

7. The temple is not, and has never been, a necessary residence for God's presence. (Acts 7:48-50; cf. Isa 66:1-2a)

"However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says:

"Heaven is my throne,  
and the earth is my footstool.

What kind of house will you build for me?  
says the Lord.

Or where will my resting place be?

Has not my hand made all these things?' (Acts 7:48-50; Isa 66:1-2a)

8. Application to Stephen's audience: You are the *many*—not the one who is faithful, obedient, wise, and empowered by God. You resist the Holy Spirit who works (and has always worked) through his faithful messengers. You persecute the ones God sends, including Jesus. You make claims on the basis of the law but have not obeyed it. (Acts 7:51-53)

*In other words, there is a pattern evident across salvation history. It includes suffering, the emergence of one person empowered by God and wise in the understanding of culture, and rejection of that person by Israel generally. This pattern is at work in the early church, and it is at work today in our time. The pattern has not changed because God has not changed.*

"You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it." (Acts 7:51-53)

9. The crowd, proving Stephen's words to be true, drags him outside the city and kills him. Stephen is rejected by the many but vindicated by Jesus—the only one who matters. This is the same pattern evident in Stephen's examples. Stephen turned out to be the kind of person used by the Spirit across salvation history. (Acts 7:54-60)

*You can be too.*

## Acts 8:1 - The Emergence of Saul, Enemy of the Church

1. Paul is first introduced as a force against the church. He is motivated the same as the crowd, which is a response against the perceived blasphemy of lifting Jesus up to the level of God. Paul is therefore present and approves of Stephen's murder.

And Saul approved of their killing him. (Acts 8:1a)

Say to the Israelites: 'Anyone who curses their God will be held responsible; anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD is to be put to death. The entire assembly must stone them. Whether foreigner or native-born, when they blaspheme the Name they are to be put to death. (Lev 24:15-16)

And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. (Matt 12:31-32)

2. The effect of Stephen's message is an intense persecution of the church in Jerusalem. The disciples scatter throughout Judea and Samaria to escape persecution. (Acts 8:1b-3)

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison. (Acts 8:1b-3)

3. The result of this suffering for the church is the spread of the gospel. (Acts 8:4)

Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. (Acts 8:4)

## Hero #2: The Man Without Boundaries and the Spirit's Movement Beyond Jerusalem

1. As a result of the scattering of disciples from Jerusalem, one of the seven, Philip, ends up in Samaria and proclaims the message of Christ. (Acts 8:5)

Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. (Acts 8:5)

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." (John 4:7-10)

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. (Rom 1:16)

2. Philip's message is accompanied by the power of the Spirit, evident in signs of the Spirit's working. This is the same as Stephen, Peter and the apostles, and (as we will see) Paul. The Spirit reveals his power and presence (in diverse but unmistakable ways) when his agenda is being addressed in people who follow the pattern of those who serve him. The result is freedom and life (which is also a sign of the Spirit's work). (Acts 8:6-8)

When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was great joy in that city. (Acts 8:6-8)

3. Satan Part 1: The work of the Spirit is opposed by Satan's counterfeit to the Spirit's power. But the counterfeit cannot free people from illness or the demonic (it does the opposite). (Acts 8:4)

Satan counterfeits the power of the Spirit in two ways:

- a) With secular force through culture or institutions that wield control over people;
- b) With lies (imitation) of inner, spiritual work or independent authority and control over nature (Exod. 7:10-12, 20-21; 8:18-19). This is abominable to God (Exod 22:18; Deut 18:10-12), but ironically, is rampant in the "church" today.



Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, “This man is rightly called the Great Power of God.” They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery. But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw. (Acts 8:9-13)

4. The news that the Samaritans were accepting the message of salvation promoted the apostles to see and validate what was happening. They prayed for the believers to receive the Holy Spirit, and they did—just as at Pentecost, when the Spirit was received for the first time by faithful Jews. (Acts 8:14-17)

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:14-17)

- a) The coming/receiving of the Spirit is different than salvation by faith.
- b) The fact that the Spirit came/was received at a different point in time than the moment of salvation does not indicate that it normally (or ever, aside from the times noted) happens this way. (Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:2; Eph 1:13-14; 4:30; 1 Pet 1:2)

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory. (Eph 1:13-14)

5. Satan Part 2: Simon wants power for his own ends. One of the true indications that the Spirit is not working is the promotion of self-interest over against the Spirit’s work. (Acts 8:18-24)
  - a) The mere fact that someone indicates a desire for something good doesn’t mean it’s not coming from sinful intentions. The veneer of divine power is a counterfeit for the legitimate work of God.

When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." (Acts 8:18-19)

- b) The fact that money could be seen as an exchange or qualification for spirituality (or ministry) is a sign that worldly values have crept into the work of the church. The Spirit's power is not available for money. People who offer it for money are not legitimate agents on behalf of the Spirit.

Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin." Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me." (Acts 8:20-24)

- 6. The Jerusalem church as a whole stood in support of God's work among non-Jews, submitting to the Spirit's intentions (however mysterious they seemed to be at this phase in the growth of the church). Spirit-led leadership can discern the true work of the Spirit.

After they had further proclaimed the word of the Lord and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages. (Acts 8:25)

- 7. The Spirit uses Philip to reach a Gentile (a Godfearer) who is from a foreign land and happens to be reading a messianic passage (Isa 53), showing a further deliberate intention by the Spirit to reach the ends of the earth with the word of salvation and his power (Acts 8:26-40; cf. Acts 1:8).

- a) Scripture reminds us that God is sovereign over all nations (including and specifically Africa)

"Are not you Israelites  
the same to me as the Cushites?"  
declares the LORD.

"Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt,  
the Philistines from Caphtor  
and the Arameans from Kir?" (Amos 9:7)

- b) The Spirit controls all the precedents. He brings the right people together at the right moment, and can act deliberately (and articulately) to make events happen to meet his agenda.
- c) The Lord has never been ethnocentric. What matters to him is (and has always been) faithfulness and obedience.

Let no foreigner who is bound to the LORD say,  
“The LORD will surely exclude me from his people.”  
And let no eunuch complain,  
“I am only a dry tree.”  
For this is what the LORD says:

“To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,  
who choose what pleases me  
and hold fast to my covenant—  
to them I will give within my temple and its walls  
a memorial and a name  
better than sons and daughters;  
I will give them an everlasting name  
that will endure forever.” (Isa 56:3-5)

## Hero #3: Saul, a Man in God's Plan. The Persecutor of the Church Becomes the Chosen Instrument of God's Mission.

1. In his encounter with Saul, Jesus makes clear that opposition to the church and the disciples is the same as opposition to him. God, in this instance, selected the person who was, on face value, least likely to follow him. (Acts 9:1-4)

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:1-4)

2. Jesus exposes Saul's lack of knowledge as the root of his failure. Saul does not know that the Lord is Jesus. Jesus does not correct his understanding; there is no need. He simply directs him to the next stage in his mission. As with the Spirit, Jesus controls the precedents. He does what is necessary to get the result, according to his plan. (Acts 9:5-6)

"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." (Acts 9:5-6)

3. The event that occurred was not purely visionary; Jesus appeared to Paul in a tangible manifestation. Others heard a sound but did not see Jesus. Paul, afterward, was not able to see anything. (Acts 9:7-9)

The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. (Acts 9:7-9)

- a) Blindness is used as a symbol for judgment (one of the curses in God’s system of blessings and curses under the law).

The LORD will afflict you with madness, blindness and confusion of mind. At midday you will grope about like a blind person in the dark. You will be unsuccessful in everything you do; day after day you will be oppressed and robbed, with no one to rescue you. (Deut 28:28-29)

- b) Blindness is a metaphor for spiritual confusion, lostness, and despair. God is, in these cases, the solution.

The LORD sets prisoners free, the LORD gives sight to the blind. (Ps 146:7b-8a)

I will lead the blind by ways they have not known,  
along unfamiliar paths I will guide them;  
I will turn the darkness into light before them  
and make the rough places smooth. (Isa 42:16)

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Cor 4:4)

4. God arranged the solution through other disciples who could then validate God’s calling on Saul. That calling, from the outset, would involve suffering. This fits the pattern of heroes in God’s plan, outlined by Stephen—people who are sold out for Jesus Christ and empowered by the Spirit. And also, who face suffering and uncertainty for the sake of Christ. Paul became one of them and is depicted as such throughout Acts. (Acts 9:10-19)

But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” (Acts 9:15-16)

5. Luke does not explain what happened in Paul's understanding, only that his actions were diametrically flipped. He began to preach in synagogues that Jesus was the Son of God. His beliefs are reflected in radical obedience. He is immediately in tension with the culture of his time. (Acts 9:20-22)

At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah. (Acts 9:20-22)

6. Like the other heroes of the Spirit, Paul is opposed by culture but is strategically (in practical real-life ways) protected from persecution. His ministry is validated by Barnabas, who discerns his heart and defends him on the basis of his words, fearlessness, and obedience. (Acts 9:23-30)

When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. (Acts 9:26-27)

7. The end result of Paul's conversion is the growth of the church. The central guiding figure is still the Spirit. (Acts 9:31)

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers. (Acts 9:31)

## Hero #4 - Peter: The Traditional Jew Becomes the Bridge to the Gentiles

Recap - The Pattern: The kind of people the Spirit can use in power.

1. Peter's healing ministry reminds us of the one he follows—Jesus. (Compare Acts 9:32-43 with Luke 5:18-26 and Luke 8:40-56.) When you reach a moment when God controls the precedents and is about to work, follow the pattern of faith shown by others. God works the same as he always has.

### Peter

As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the Lord's people who lived in Lydda. There he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years. "Aeneas," Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ heals you. **Get up and roll up your mat.**" Immediately Aeneas got up. All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord. (Acts 9:32-35)

### Jesus

But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, **get up, take your mat** and go home." Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. (Luke 5:24-25)

### Peter

Peter **sent them all out of the room**; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, **get up.**" She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. **He took her by the hand** and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon. (Acts 9:40-43)

### Jesus

When he arrived at the house of Jairus, **he did not let anyone go in with him** except **Peter**, John and James, and the child's father and mother. Meanwhile, all the people were wailing and mourning for her. "Stop wailing," Jesus said. "She is not dead but asleep." They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But **he took her by the hand** and said, "My child, **get up!**" Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. (Luke 8:51-55)

2. The one who has been prepared by the Spirit in power (Peter) is used to further the expansion of the Spirit's plan. The Spirit's power advances his purpose. His purpose is to bring the Gentiles into the people of God.

- A) The issue that needs to be solved for the Spirit's work to advance is concerning table fellowship. Can Jewish and Gentile Christians eat together? (See Acts 11:2-3)

So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them." (Acts 11:2-3)

- B) The real issue behind it is much bigger. The boundaries of holiness include separation from people who are associated with sin. But this confuses the metaphor with the reality: God's purpose all along was to reconcile himself to the world. That means social boundaries were never intended to be moral absolutes.

"You must therefore make a distinction between clean and unclean animals and between unclean and clean birds. Do not defile yourselves by any animal or bird or anything that moves along the ground—those that I have set apart as unclean for you. You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own." (Lev 20:25-26)

Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "'Come out of her, my people,' so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues." (Rev 18:4)

- C) The starting point for our perspective comes from recognizing that repentance is the context for mercy. Jesus made this abundantly clear through his ministry (Peter would have seen this over and over). See Matt 9:10-13.

While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (Matt 9:10-13)

3. When God is at work, he controls all conditions necessary to fulfill his purposes that are beyond the abilities of his servants. (Acts 10:1-23)

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. One day at about three in the



afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!"

Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked.

The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea." When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa. (Acts 10:1-7)

A) God sometimes needs to change our perspective to conform our will to his purposes. (Acts 10:9-23, 28)

About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

"Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." (Acts 10:9-15)

### The Law's Social Function: Boundary Marker

You must not live according to the customs of the nations I am going to drive out before you. Because they did all these things, I abhorred them. But I said to you, "You will possess their land; I will give it to you as an inheritance, a land flowing with milk and honey." I am the LORD your God, who has set you apart from the nations. You must therefore make a distinction between clean and unclean animals and between unclean and clean birds. Do not defile yourselves by any animal or bird or anything that moves along the ground—those that I have set apart as unclean for you. You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own. (Lev 20:23-26)

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ

Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. (Eph 2:11-16)

- B) God's plan makes sense of his purposes across salvation-history. The promise to Abraham was not invalidated by the ceremonial stipulations of the law. God's plan is fluid in connection with our limitations, but his purposes are unchanging. God always intended to save the whole world.

While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. (Acts 10:27-28)

- C) The antecedent to salvation is the message of the gospel. (Acts 10:34-43)

"We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." (Acts 10:39-43)

- D) The Spirit authenticates his purposes with his power (Acts 10:44-48)—the same as he did with the Jews (Acts 2:1-3) and Samaritans (Acts 8:14-16).

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. (Acts 10:44-46)

## Hero #4 - Peter: The Traditional Jew Becomes the Bridge to the Gentiles (part II)

1. That the Jewish Christians were operating from the old (and incorrect) mindset is clear when they accused Peter of having table fellowship with Gentiles. (Acts 11:1-3)

The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them." (Acts 11:1-3)

2. The ministry of Christ already prepared Peter and the apostles for the "new wineskin" of the new covenant in Him. The new covenant implies a change in traditional Jewish social categories. This also implies that Jewish religion had gone wrong in its fundamental understanding of clean and unclean. (See Luke 5:27-39)

After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.

Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

They said to him, "John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking."

Jesus answered, "Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast."

He told them this parable: "No one tears a piece out of a new garment to patch an old one. Otherwise, they will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, 'The old is better.'" (Luke 5:27-39)

3. Peter recounted what happened so that the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem could follow along the same process that God used to change his mindset. (Acts 11:4-17)

“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way?” (Acts 11:4-17)

4. The Spirit authenticated this change in the law by expressly working outside the social boundaries of the law. The Jerusalem church, not really understanding, nonetheless accepted the purposes of the Spirit. (Acts 11:18)

When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.” (Acts 11:18)

### Phase 3 of the Gospel: The Gentiles Turn to the Lord

1. In the case of Peter, he was used to confirm that Gentiles who were Godfearers were saved, but then the gospel spread to Antioch (in Syria), and many (previously pagan) Greeks come to Christ. (Acts 11:19-21)

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. (Acts 11:19-21)

2. This movement in Antioch was different from what Peter experienced, so the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to Antioch to witness what was happening. Barnabas (true to his name) encouraged the new believers. (Acts 11:22-24)

News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, **full of the Holy Spirit and faith**, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. (Acts 11:22-24)

Spirit-filling (so far in Acts):

All of them were **filled with the Holy Spirit** and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:4)

Then Peter, **filled with the Holy Spirit**, said to them... (Acts 4:8)

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all **filled with the Holy Spirit** and spoke the word of God boldly. (Acts 4:31)

Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be **full of the Spirit and wisdom**. (Acts 6:3)

This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man **full of faith and of the Holy Spirit**; (Acts 6:5)

Now Stephen, **a man full of God's grace and power**... (Acts 6:8)

But Stephen, **full of the Holy Spirit**, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. (Acts 7:55)

Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and **be filled with the Holy Spirit**." (Acts 9:17)

3. Barnabas (apparently) was inadequate to teach the new Greek converts, so he went to Tarsus to locate Saul (Acts 11:25-26). The last we saw Saul, he was in Jerusalem, debating the Hellenistic Jews, then was smuggled to Tarsus for safety (Acts 9:29-30).

Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. (Acts 11:25-26)

4. The coming of a prophesied famine meant there was a chance for the new Gentile converts to help the (Jewish) church in Jerusalem. Barnabas and Paul were chosen to carry the aid. (Acts 11:27-30)

During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul. (Acts 11:27-30)

**Insight Episode: The work of the Spirit cannot be stopped. The Spirit intervenes to advance his purposes, no matter how extreme the opposition.**

1. Persecution in Jerusalem intensified, and James is put to death. Luke mentions this as a "flavor" comment, without giving us details. This emboldens Herod (Agrippa I) to arrest Peter. (Acts 12:1-3)

It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. (Acts 12:1-3)

2. Peter is placed under an arrest in the citadel of secular power. It is a context for prayer and the Spirit to work. It is the fulfillment and confirmation of Peter as a man who fits God's pattern—someone he can use in power. (Acts 12:4-5)

After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover. So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. (Acts 12:4-5)

“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” But he replied, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.” Jesus answered, “I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.” (Luke 22:31-34)

3. The nature of Peter's rescue reveals a critical insight into the Spirit's purposes: Nothing can stop them. This is not an isolated adventure but an essential thread in the tapestry of the Spirit's plan for his people. (Acts 12:6-19)

The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. “Quick, get up!” he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.

Then the angel said to him, “Put on your clothes and sandals.” And Peter did so. “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me,” the angel told him. Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen.”

When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. When she

recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!"

"You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, "It must be his angel."

But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. "Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this," he said, and then he left for another place.

In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.

Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there. (Acts 12:6-19)

4. Luke reminds us that those who oppose the work of the gospel are accountable for their decisions. God is not only able and willing to save his people but to bring evil to justice. (Acts 12:20-25)

On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died. But the word of God continued to spread and flourish. (Acts 12:23-25)

## Paul and Barnabas Return to Antioch – With Mark

When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark. (Acts 12:25)

My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.) (Col 4:10)

She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark. Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ. (1 Pet 5:13-14)

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:1-3)

## The First Missionary Journey: The Spirit Confirms the Gentiles

<https://viz.bible/journeys/>

- 1. Stop 1: Cyprus. The first miraculous work of the Spirit happens through Paul as he confronts demonic (sorcerous) opposition. The Spirit works through people who fit the pattern after years of proven faithfulness and undivided heart. (Acts 13:4-5)**

The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper. (Acts 13:4-5)

I persevered in demonstrating among you the marks of a true apostle, including signs, wonders and miracles. (2 Cor 12:12)

The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!" He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. "Where is your faith?" he asked his disciples. (Luke 8:24-25)

A man in the crowd called out, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. A spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams; it throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him. I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not." "You unbelieving and perverse



**generation,”** Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you and put up with you? Bring your son here.” (Luke 9:38-41)

The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” He replied, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.” (Luke 17:5-6)

**2. Stop 2: Pamphilia (Perga) to Galatia (Pisidian Antioch). Paul’s normal approach is to start with Jews and Godfearers in the local synagogues and only turns to Gentiles when he faces large-scale rejection of the gospel. This is the approach that makes sense of God’s expressed intent and vindicates the Gentile mission. (Acts 13:13-15)**

From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak.” (Acts 13:13-15)

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. (Rom 1:16)

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” (Acts 9:15-16)

On the contrary, they recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised. For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles. James, Cephas and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along. (Gal 2:7-10)

- a) Paul begins his message of appeal to Jews by citing the history of Israel beginning with Egypt through the promised land. The central figure in this history is God’s power, despite the unfaithfulness of Israel. (Acts 13:16-20)
- b) Paul’s message then shifts to God’s work through individuals, culminating in one man who finally fits the pattern: He was a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam 13:14), who does what God wants. (Acts 13:20-22)

- c) David's descendants led to Jesus, Israel's savior. Jesus was identified by John the Baptist for the sake of Israel. But Israel rejected Jesus, and in doing so, fulfilled scripture. (Acts 13:23-31)
- d) The specific prophecies that were fulfilled were in Psalm 2, that God would send a son, that he would receive all the promises made to David, and that his body would not be subject to decay (Ps 16:10). These promises were not received by David but were fulfilled in Jesus. (Acts 13:32-37)
- e) In his conclusion, Paul gives the hearers the chance to become part of God's work of salvation through Christ, though warns that some will not believe. (Some within Israel have always refused to believe God.) (Acts 13:38-43)

**3. The church grows in Pisidian Antioch through Gentile conversion and faces intense cultural and religious opposition. The true work of the Spirit is always opposed. When the work of the Spirit is complete in that region, they move to the next destination. This became the pattern of their ministry. (Acts 13:44-52)**

On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. They began to contradict what Paul was saying and heaped abuse on him.

Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us:

"I have made you a light for the Gentiles,  
that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."

When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and **all who were appointed for eternal life believed.**

The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. But the Jewish leaders incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. **So they shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them** and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 13:44-52)

- 4. Paul and Barnabas continue their approach in Iconium, with the same results, but with the Spirit enabling them to perform signs and wonders as a confirmation of the message. The power of the Spirit always happens this way in Acts—as a way to validate the message and the messengers. (Acts 14:1-7)**
- 5. One of the examples of signs and wonders occurs in the next city, Lystra, where Paul performs a similar act to Peter (Acts 3), healing a man who was lame from birth. The**

**Lycaonians think Paul and Barnabas are gods and try to honor them as such. They immediately reject the association and direct their attention to the true God. (Acts 14:8-18) Those who follow the pattern (of people the Spirit uses) give glory to God.**

- 6. The opposition to the message and the work of the Spirit in Lystra is similar, but this time, Paul is stoned and nearly left for dead by the crowds. This causes them to move on again, heading to another city, Derbe, after which they returned to the previous cities (and new churches) to strengthen and encourage them, appointing leaders, and assuring them that hardship is part of the journey. They then return to Syrian Antioch. (Acts 14:19-28)**

Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.

From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they stayed there a long time with the disciples. (Acts 14:19-28)

## The Jerusalem Council: The Gentile Problem

Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses.” (Acts 15:1-5)

- 1. The reason the Council concluded that Gentile believers do not need to receive circumcision is because of something God did: He accepted Gentiles without the need for coming under the law, confirmed by the work of the Spirit. The implications of this (for the law’s applicability) were implied but not part of the Council’s conclusion.**
- 2. This implies that Christianity is not something new but rather a continuation of something always planned for God’s people. (Acts 15:12-18)**

Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. (Gen 17:3-6)

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.” He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not. (Rom 4:16-17)

“It is too small a thing for you to be my servant  
to restore the tribes of Jacob  
and bring back those of Israel I have kept.  
I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,  
that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”  
This is what the LORD says—  
the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel—  
to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation,  
to the servant of rulers:

“Kings will see you and stand up,  
princes will see and bow down,  
because of the LORD, who is faithful,  
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.” (Isa 49:6-7)

- 3. The law of Moses was always intended to be transitional with regard to its application. This does not mean it does not function as truth for people of all time, but rather was specifically applicable to the people of Israel. Parts of it are therefore not specifically applicable to God’s people in the current age. (Gal 3:23-25; 2 Cor 3:3; Eph 2:14-16)**
- 4. What is at stake is God’s plan to save the world. If the circumcision-group is right, then there is no mission to Gentiles as Gentiles. Forced submission to the law of Moses might mean rejection of the gospel on cultural grounds that God considers irrelevant. (Matt 9:12-13; John 4:42; Rom 1:16-17)**
- 5. Nonetheless, maintaining fellowship among believing Jews who have followed ceremonial laws their entire life is not unnecessarily burdensome, therefore the Gentile converts should act in a way that is conducive to that fellowship, without the need for circumcision.**

“It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.” (Acts 15:19-21)

- 6. In the end, the Council’s letter was used to confirm the mission to the Gentiles, which implies there were people (Jewish Christians) who were opposed to the decision. (Acts 15:30-35)**

## The Second Missionary Journey

Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.” Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. (Acts 15:36-41)

- 1. Paul takes new companions on his second missionary journey.**

- a) He doesn't want to take John Mark because Mark had deserted them during the first missionary journey.
- b) Instead of Barnabas, he brings Silas (also known as Silvanus).

For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silas and Timothy—was not “Yes” and “No,” but in him it has always been “Yes.” (2 Cor 1:19)

- c) Early into the journey he returns to Lystra and is joined by a young disciple named Timothy. Timothy ends up as Paul's protégé and close companion.

Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. (Acts 16:1-3)

But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. (Phil 2:22)

- d) The other member of the group is the Holy Spirit. He is with them and leads them actively, even though there are no missionary “wins” at this phase in the journey. Sometimes the Spirit leads us through difficulties before we see him work powerfully.

**Paul and his companions** traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So **they** passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” After Paul had seen the vision, **we** got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called **us** to preach the gospel to them. (Acts 16:6-10)

- e) In Troas, Paul is joined by Luke. Luke (who is the author of Acts) doesn't include himself in the story by name, but the narrative shifts to the third person plural to indicate that he is part of the group.

*Indeed Luke was an Antiochene Syrian, a doctor by profession, a disciple of the apostles; later however he followed Paul until his martyrdom, serving the Lord blamelessly. He never had a wife, he never fathered children, and died at the age of eighty-four, full of the Holy Spirit, in Boetia. (Anti-Marcionite Prologue to the Gospels)*

Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings. (Col 4:14)

**2. After passing through Galatia (Asia Minor), the group finally arrives in Europe. Arriving at the port of Neapolis, they travel inland along with Via Egnatia (a prominent Roman road) to the city of Philippi.**

From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days. (Acts 16:11-12)

- a) The first convert specifically noted on this trip is a woman—an affluent citizen of Thyatira who is living in Philippi and owns a home. (Acts 16:13-15)
- b) The missionaries draw the attention of the demonic, which is operating behind the scenes in Philippi. The demonic is always at work in the book of Acts, behind the scenes, and looks like a counterfeit of the work of the Spirit. (Acts 16:16-18)
- c) The actual goal of the demonic is to stop the progress of the gospel. The way this normally happens (seen in the book of Acts) is by engaging and motivating culture. While it is the crowds who rise up to oppose the missionaries, we are reminded that the battle isn't against flesh and blood. (Acts 16:19-24)
- d) The Spirit is powerful both in physical and spiritual realms; his purposes cannot be stopped. Circumstances are not a coincidence if you are living the Spirit's purposes. And you do not have to worry about anything. (Acts 16:25-28)
- e) The end of the matter, here and throughout Acts, is salvation for those who believe. (Acts 16:29-34)
- f) The circumstances serve another, less obvious purpose: The Spirit leads the missionaries onward, to new cities and new opportunities for the gospel. Even problems are part of his plan. (Acts 16:35-40)

**3. After leaving Philippi, Paul and his companions travel west and arrive in Thessalonica, one of the largest cities in Macedonia.**

*Note: Luke stops referring to the missionaries as “we,” implying that he remained behind in Philippi.*

- a) Paul begins in Thessalonica in his normal fashion—by speaking at the synagogue over the course of three Sabbaths. This formed the nucleus of a new church.

When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,” he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women. (Acts 17:1-4)

- b) This triggered a problem with local Jews who attempt to get them into trouble with Roman authorities by claims of sedition. One of the Christians (Jason) posts bond to permit them to escape imprisonment and leave the city. (Acts 17:5-9)

**4. They fled to Berea, which is a destination less likely for accusers to locate them (because it was not on the Via Egnatia). They had a more favorable reception in that city, but the Jews tracked them down and created more problems for them. Paul was forced to go on alone, making his way to the coast and then (most likely) by boat to Athens. The others would catch up with him later.**

As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

But when the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, some of them went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. The believers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. Those who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible. (Acts 17:10-15)

**5. Athens was still, in some ways, the intellectual center of Greece, but it had declined in importance under Roman rule. It was still a haven for philosophical thought and popular religion, and therefore receptive to new perspectives. This is Paul’s famous evangelical presentation of the gospel to pagans.**



- a) Paul begins his work (without the support of his comrades) by going to the synagogue, in his normal fashion, but he also debates philosophers in the agora (the marketplace).

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbling trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. (Acts 17:16-18)

- Stoicism: God is in everything and there is reason (logos) behind the universe. Virtue is found by keeping your emotions in check and focusing on reason (what makes sense).
- Epicureanism: Everything is material and that means there (probably) are no gods or meaning behind existence. Virtue is found by finding pleasure in life and avoiding pain.

- b) They bring him before the ruling council of Athens, which would include the key decision-makers and thinkers in the city. (The Areopagus is a hill inside the city, but here it is more clearly a reference to the group of people who met there and managed the affairs of Athens.) They want to hear Paul out.

Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean." (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.) (Acts 17:19-21)

- c) Paul begins his speech by directing attention to an idol to an unknown god. In other words, he starts with a point of common ground—something that his audience already believes, which in this case is the existence of a god they don't know anything about.

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. (Acts 17:22-23)

- d) Paul then distinguishes the God of the Bible from the gods they build idols to—by claiming that the true God made everything and therefore can't be represented by physical temples.

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. (Acts 17:24-25)

- e) Paul connects this God to humanity by claiming that he created all people for the expressed purpose of coming into a relationship with them. Paul supports this claim by reference to two stoic philosophers.

From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’ (Acts 17:26-28)

- f) Paul points out that, if these things are true, we shouldn’t try to represent God with an idol, and that, while God has been tolerant of this ignorance in the past, that time is over. God expects people to repent (turn around) from their ignorance and has intervened in human history by appointing a man (Jesus) to judge everyone, and has confirmed this by bringing that man back from the dead.

“Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.” (Acts 17:29-31)

- g) Notice that Paul draws people from a point of agreement (common ground) through reason (common sense) to revelation (information they don’t already know) to a critical point of decision (do I want to know the God he speaks of), but he doesn’t flood them with information or quote the Old Testament, as he did to the Jews.
- h) Those who are open to this presentation were able to seek additional information. In the end, the gospel makes sense. Some of those became converts.

When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.” At that, Paul left the Council. Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others. (Acts 17:32-34)

6. **Paul then heads to Corinth, the most prominent, affluent city (the capital) in the Roman province of Achaia (i.e., Greece).**

- a) He meets and stays with Priscilla and Aquila, fellow Jewish Christians who become co-workers in ministry.

After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. (Acts 18:1-3)

Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. (Rom 16:3-4)

The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house. (1 Cor 16:19)

- b) As usual, Paul began his work in the synagogue and the converts (Jewish and Godfearing Gentiles) formed the nucleus of the church in Corinth.

Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. But when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." (Acts 18:4-6)

And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for **the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed**. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so. (2 Cor 11:9)

I also **shook out the folds of my robe** and said, "In this way may God shake out of their house and possessions anyone who does not keep this promise. So may such a person be shaken out and emptied!" (Neh 5:13)

- c) Despite opposition, the Lord confirms to Paul that he should remain in the city. In other words, God informs Paul's strategy for the gospel when the situation itself is difficult to read. In this case, the opposition doesn't mean he should keep moving, and God makes sure he knows he is supposed to stay put. In the case of the gospel, for those who follow the pattern of God's heart, God controls all precedents and information when wisdom itself isn't a sufficient guide. (Acts 18:9-17)

- d) When Paul eventually leaves, he prepares himself for (what appears to be) a Nazirite vow and then heads to Ephesus with Priscilla and Aquila, where he starts another church.

Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sisters and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchreae because of a vow he had taken. They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. But as he left, he promised, "I will come back if it is God's will." Then he set sail from Ephesus. When he landed at Caesarea, he went up to Jerusalem and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch. (Acts 18:18-22)

- e) Paul then heads out from Antioch on (what will be) the third missionary journey, traveling through Galatia and strengthening the churches formed on the first missionary journey. His path will take him back to Ephesus. But we are given a glimpse of something going on in Ephesus while this is occurring—the appearance of a man named Apollos.

After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples. Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah. (Acts 18:23-28)

You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere human beings? (1 Cor 3:3-4)

So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God. (1 Cor 3:21-23)

How shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. (Heb 2:3)

## The Third Missionary Journey

1. **The primary scene for the work of the Spirit in Paul's third missionary journey is Ephesus. As Paul initially arrives, he meets some "disciples" who did not receive the Holy Spirit when they believed (Acts 19:1-7). This episode reminds us that the coming of the Spirit on a person's life is different than salvation. But it does not tell us that you can be saved and not receive the Spirit. These people clearly had a deficiency in their belief. They receive the Spirit when they act on what they are told. Nothing in this passage implies that there is an extended time-gap in receiving the Spirit or that you can have saving faith and not receive the Spirit.**

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

They answered, "No, **we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.**"

So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"

"John's baptism," they replied.

Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to **believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.**" On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all. (Acts 19:1-7)

For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. (1 Cor 12:13)

Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? (1 Cor 12:30)

I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified. (1 Cor 14:5)

2. **Ephesus was the greatest city in Asia Minor and one of the greatest cities in the Roman Empire. Paul had already briefly visited, formed a church, and left Priscilla and Aquila behind to tend it (Acts 18:19). On his return, Paul picks up precisely where he left off.**
3. **The ministry in Ephesus typifies two battles in the ministry of the gospel. The first is the battle in the material realm (cultural pushback / flesh and blood adversaries). This is the Satan's first line of attack. (Acts 19:8-10)**

Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord. (Acts 19:8-10)

- a) Pushback happens when you are living for Christ in a fallen world.

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

- b) When you speak the truth, expect people to put up walls and harden their hearts.

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Cor 4:4)

- c) It sometimes looks like people and circumstances are aligned against you, but behind it are the forces of darkness. (Eph 6:10-12)

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Eph 6:10-12)

**4. The second battle-front is in the spiritual realm (exposed demonic powers). It’s the same enemy as before but you are no longer dealing with cultural forces. (Acts 19:11-20)**

- a) The Spirit of God reveals his power to expose the counterfeit. (Acts 19:11-12).

God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them. (Acts 19:11-12)

- b) When the counterfeit is exposed, the weakness of the demonic is revealed. (Acts 19:13-16)

Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, “In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.” Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. One day the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and

Paul I know about, but who are you?" Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding. (Acts 19:13-16)

- c) When the weakness of the demonic is revealed, people turn to the true source of power and leave their sin behind. (Acts 19:17-20)

When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. (Acts 19:17-20; NIV)

5. **Satan does not stop. The Spirit can use opposition in our lives as a way to invoke wisdom as a leading—to continue moving ahead. When there is a public disturbance in Ephesus, Paul heads in the direction he was planning to go—toward Macedonia (Philippi and Thessalonica). Rome doesn't find Christians guilty of creating problems. (Acts 19:21-41)**
6. **When the missionary group passes through Philippi, the narrative again turns to the first person, indicating that Luke is (again) traveling with Paul. (The last time Luke says "we" is in Acts 16:12-13, when they arrive in Philippi. So Luke apparently stayed in Philippi over the last few years.)**
7. **In Troas, Paul is speaking and a young man named Eutychus falls to his death. He then returns to life in Paul's arms (Acts 20:7-12). Luke is providing a description of what he saw, and the implication is that God brought him back from the dead. It's a reminder to us that Luke is writing as a rational eyewitness who is recording what he sees.**
8. **Paul is intent on returning to Jerusalem, but he stops at Miletus to have a final meeting with the elders of the Ephesian church. He says goodbye to them, letting them know that hardships are ahead for him. He commissions and warns them and then commits them to God. It's a reminder that we are more than co-workers in the gospel; we are family. Christianity transcends ethnicity, background, and geography, and builds bonds of love that last forever. If you look at it that way, the Spirit can use you powerfully in people's lives. (Acts 20:13-35)**

## To Rome via Jerusalem

- 1. The group travels to Kos, then to Rhodes, Patara, then Tyre (Syria). From Tyre they travel to Ptolemais, then Caesarea (Acts 21:1-14). Paul is warned by the Spirit (through numerous people with prophetic insight) that difficult times lie ahead for him in Jerusalem. Difficulties are part of the Spirit's plan.**

After we had torn ourselves away from them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Kos. The next day we went to Rhodes and from there to Patara. We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail. After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo. We sought out the disciples there and stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. When it was time to leave, we left and continued on our way. All of them, including wives and children, accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray. After saying goodbye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home.

We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and sisters and stayed with them for a day. Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. (Acts 21:1-9)

- 2. When they reach Jerusalem they are warmly greeted by James (the head of the Jerusalem church) but a problem is raised regarding Paul's credibility among Jewish Christians. Paul is labeled as someone who advocates turning away from Moses. To remedy any ill will, they ask Paul to join other Jewish Christians who are taking part in Nazirite vows. Paul does so. (Acts 21:15-26)**

When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers and sisters received us warmly. The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. (Acts 21:17-19)

- 3. Paul is spotted at the temple from some Jews from Ephesus, who create a city-wide uproar that threatens Paul's life and causes Roman guards to get involved. Paul convinces a guard to let him address the crowd, and Paul does, sharing his testimony and mission. (Acts 21:27-40; 22:1-22)**
- 4. The Romans prepare to flog Paul (it is unlawful to cause a civil disturbance) but Paul tells them he is a Roman citizen. Roman citizens cannot be punished in this manner, especially not without a trial. This matter is escalated to the Roman commander in Jerusalem, who decides to put Paul before the Sanhedrin to better understand the charges levied against him. (Roman law relied on accusers to provide grounds for prosecution.) (Acts 22:23-30)**



As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, the commander ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and interrogated in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this. As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?"

When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. "What are you going to do?" he asked. "This man is a Roman citizen."

The commander went to Paul and asked, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?"

"Yes, I am," he answered.

Then the commander said, "I had to pay a lot of money for my citizenship."

"But I was born a citizen," Paul replied. (Acts 22:23-28)

#### Means of citizenship

- A person born to a Roman family
- A citizen of a city to which Roman citizenship was granted
- Selected aristocrats who benefitted Rome
- An honorably discharged auxiliary soldier
- A slave freed by a Roman master (with limited rights, but full citizenship for their children)

- 5. Paul uses the chance to speak to the Sanhedrin to make this an issue about the resurrection (a matter which divides Pharisees and Sadducees), which forces the Roman commander to offer him protection. The Lord then speaks to Paul the next day, confirming to him that, just as he testified in Jerusalem, so must he testify in Rome. Paul is the man God prepared to present the gospel to the ruling powers of the Roman empire. (Acts 23:1-11)**

The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome." (Acts 23:11)

## To Rome via Jerusalem (part 2)

- 1. The crowd forms a conspiracy to murder Paul (Acts 23:12-15). This fits the overall narrative of Luke-Acts and the idea of the Spirit's work through individual, faithful people and not (in contrast) the masses, who have always been disobedient to God's plan. Like they murdered the prophets and Jesus, they are now focused on eliminating Paul. This is precisely what we should expect (and this does not imply that God's plan has failed—exactly the opposite).**

The next morning some Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. More than forty men were involved in this plot. They went to the chief priests and the elders and said, "We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul. Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here." (Acts 23:12-15)

- 2. The plot is discovered by Paul's nephew (Acts 23:16-21). This is the only indication that Paul has relatives in Jerusalem, despite the fact that one's family is integral to identity in ancient Near Eastern culture. So we learn at least this much: What defines Paul, fundamentally, is what he does, not his past.**

But when the son of Paul's sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul. (Acts 23:16)

- 3. Paul is rescued by a Roman commander, who writes a self-serving letter and sends Paul under heavy guard to Caesaria to meet before the Proconsul, who is typically the judge in serious matters of interest to Rome (Acts 23:22-35). Luke makes clear that Paul didn't pose any threat to Rome.**

He wrote a letter as follows:

Claudius Lysias,  
To His Excellency, Governor Felix:

Greetings.

This man was seized by the Jews and they were about to kill him, but I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen. I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I brought him to their Sanhedrin. I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their law, but there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment. When I was informed of a plot to be carried out against the man, I sent him to you at once. I also ordered his accusers to present to you their case against him. (Acts 23:25-30)

Antonius Felix, the Roman Governor (Procurator) of Judea (52-59 AD)

4. **Paul stands before the Governor (Felix) with his accusers present. Paul refutes their charges and, in legal terms, it is clear that there is no legitimate case against him, with regard to Roman law (Acts 24:1-23).**

Charges against Paul:

- a) Paul is a troublemaker and political agitator
- b) Paul is the leader of a sectarian movement
- c) Paul attempted to desecrate the temple

Paul's defense:

- a) He did not make a disturbance
- b) His relationship with the Way is not a violation of Judaism; it is part of Judaism
- c) There was no temple desecration
- d) There is no proof of the charges (i.e., Paul committed no crimes)

5. **While Paul is awaiting dismissal of charges, he has the opportunity to witness to the Proconsul and his wife, Drusilla (Acts 24:24-27). We know (from historical sources) that they both were rather bad people, and the image here conveys a clear image: Paul does not hesitate to do the thing the Spirit has appointed him to do, regardless of consequences.**

Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, **Felix was afraid** and said, "That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you." At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him. (Acts 24:24-26)

Porcius Festus, Governor of Judea (59-62 AD)

6. **When the new governor is instated, the Jews (who have no doubt been waiting two years for the chance to have Paul eliminated) open a new appeal and present their charges, with the hope that they can kill Paul during transport back to Jerusalem. Paul again pleads his case, and the charges against him cannot be proven. Nonetheless, Paul is concerned that the governor might adopt a politically-expedient transport in order to wash his hands of the matter, so he appeals to Caesar. (Acts 25:1-11)**

## Herod Agrippa II

- 7. As Paul is awaiting transport to Rome to stand before Caesar, King Agrippa II and his wife show up (to greet the new governor of Judea) and have a chance to interview Paul. Paul gives Agrippa his entire testimony and the entirety of the gospel in Christ. (Acts 25:13-26:32) Paul's objective remains the same—to lead the rulers to faith in Christ.**

At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. "You are out of your mind, Paul!" he shouted. "Your great learning is driving you insane."

"I am not insane, most excellent Festus," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and reasonable. The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do."

Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?"

Paul replied, "Short time or long—I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains." (Acts 26:24-29)

*But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." (Acts 9:15-16)*

## To Rome and the Ends of the Earth

- 1. Paul was put on a vessel bound for Rome, along with other prisoners. They took a northern route, landing at Sidon, Myra, Cnidus, and Fair Havens (Crete). The wind was blowing east (which is why Paul normally travels by road when he is west-bound) which makes the voyage difficult. (Acts 27:1-8)**
- 2. The weather conditions become worse as they approach winter and continue to press west. Paul warns the centurion but they continue, and attempt to reach harbor in Crete. The waters around Crete are known to be disastrous, even in the best weather conditions. They are unable to make port and pass into open waters where they are caught in a violent storm. (Acts 27:9-20)**
- 3. The ship was driven across the Adriatic and entered shallow waters. Some of the sailors attempt to abandon the ship at night for fear of it coming aground, but Paul warns the centurion, who cuts the lifeboat free to prevent them from leaving. (Acts 27:21-32)**
- 4. Paul tells them that they should eat because their rescue is near and no life would be lost. They all believe him and are encouraged. They spot a bay and run the ship aground on the island of Malta. The ship is destroyed but the passengers are saved, just as the Lord told Paul. (Acts 27:33-41)**
- 5. Normally, the Romans would kill prisoners rather than let them escape, but the centurion stopped the guards and permitted everyone to reach the beach alive. (Acts 27:42-44)**
- 6. The islanders provide fire and welcome the shipwrecked passengers. While on the island, Paul is bitten by viper but nothing happens to him. The islanders are so surprised that they consider him a god. (Acts 28:1-6)**
- 7. They stay with Publius, the chief official of the island. Paul prays for his father who is dying of dysentery, and the man is healed. Paul similarly prays for the sick people on the island, and they also are healed. (Acts 28:7-10)**
- 8. After the winter months have passed, they get passage on a ship from Alexandria and finally arrive in Rome. Paul is put under house arrest. (Acts 28:11-16)**
- 9. Paul makes his case to the Jewish leaders in Rome, who have not received word of the charges against him and want to hear about Paul's position on Christianity. Paul witnesses to them, and some believe. Paul's final appeal is to the fact that Israel has hardened itself to the truth, but this has provided an opportunity for the Gentiles to**

hear. (This is the primary argument of Romans 9-11.) Acts 28:17-28

10. Paul continues ministering for two years in Rome (AD 61-62) while under house arrest, awaiting his trial before Caesar (Acts 28:30-31). This is mostly likely the time Paul writes letters to Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philippians. It is also possibly the time that Luke writes Acts, which is why the narrative ends here.
11. Since there is no mention of charges being brought against him (and since Luke has been clear that no Roman laws were broken), it is likely that Paul is released after the two years. Some have theorized that Paul completes his objective of traveling to Spain (Romans 15:24) and then returns to Rome a few years later. Most likely, Paul is simply traveling to the same churches he founded earlier in his ministry (i.e., a fourth missionary journey). It is during this timeframe that 1 Timothy and Titus are written.

But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to visit you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to see you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. (Rom 15:23-24)

12. Paul is (again) in prison when he writes 2 Timothy. This is very different than the house arrest in Acts 28; Paul is facing death and expects to die soon (2 Tim 4:6-8). He mentions that only Luke is with him, and asks Timothy to come to see him and bring Mark (2 Tim 4:9-11). The likely timing (AD 66-67) means that Nero's persecutions of Christianity have begun. (Rome was burned in July AD 64, and Christians were blamed for the damage.)

For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. (2 Tim 4:6-11)

- Martyrdom of Paul and Peter under Nero (AD 66-67)
- The beginning of the Jewish Revolt against Rome (AD 66)
- Josephus surrenders to the Romans (AD 67)
- Nero commits suicide (AD 68)
- Vespasian prevails as Emperor amidst civil war (AD 69)
- Destruction of the temple under Titus (AD 70)

## The Spirit in Acts: Takeaways

1. The Spirit is rational, purposeful, and personal. He is God and does not change. He is actively involved in the lives of those who serve his purposes.
2. The Spirit works powerfully for his purposes, which center on the kingdom—adding men and women to God’s people, bringing salvation to the ends of the earth.
3. The Spirit works powerfully (even miraculously) in connection with certain preconditions.
  - a) The Spirit works in support of the authenticity of the message of the kingdom.
  - b) The Spirit works in the lives of people whose hearts are aligned with his (who do what he directs them to do).
  - c) The Spirit works when he receives the glory.
4. Difficulties which arise to oppose the Spirit (and those who serve him) are expected. The Spirit is always opposed by the enemy, who utilizes both flesh and blood (culture) and counterfeits (demonic spirits) to oppose the work of the kingdom. The Spirit will expose the counterfeit and confound the power of culture when it suits his purposes. Hardships do not mean the Spirit is absent or that things are going wrong; quite the opposite. Those who follow the Spirit should buckle in and prepare for a battle. We should not expect things to always be smooth.
5. The work of the Spirit is not done. It will continue as long as necessary until the Lord’s objectives are completed. This means he is always looking for men and women who fit the pattern of people like Peter and Paul.