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ACTS

*The unstoppable gospel*

WRITTEN

60-70 AD

KEY VERSE

*"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."*

1:8

Last updated May 9, 2023

To show how the gospel was spread throughout the known world

PURPOSE

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## INTRODUCTION

The Acts of the Apostles was written by Luke as a continuation of the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1:3, Acts 1:1). Both books mention Theophilus, who may have been the *"sponsor"* of Luke. But even though the books are dedicated to him, they are still intended for a universal audience. It was written in the year 62 AD at the earliest, which is the year the story ends. The book thus covers the years 30-62 AD.

Acts 1:2 says that Jesus *"through the Holy Spirit"* gave his instructions to the apostles, and in 16:6-7 we see that *"the Holy Spirit"* and *"the Spirit of Jesus"* are synonyms. Thus, it is the spirit of Jesus and Jesus himself who still guide the apostles in the Acts of the Apostles. We can see volume 1 (Luke) as what Jesus *"began to do and to teach"* (Acts 1:1), and volume 2 (Acts) as the continuation of what Jesus teaches and does through his Spirit.

In Luke 24, Jesus says that the disciples will be witnesses to the nations (Gentiles) about

1. his death and resurrection
2. repentance and forgiveness (vv. 46-48)

He also says that they will wait in Jerusalem until they *"have been clothed with power from on high"* (v. 49). This is brought up again in Acts 1:4-5 and 1:8. Verse 8 is a key verse. It tells about the source of power (the Holy Spirit) and the mission (to be witnesses). In addition, this verse gives a geographical direction to the mission: Jerusalem - Judea - Samaria - the ends of the earth.

This divides the book into three main parts: Chapters 1-7 take place in Jerusalem and are about how the Jews there receive the gospel. 8:1 tells us that the Christians are scattered around Judea and Samaria, and chapters 8-12 are about how the Samaritans (*"half-Jews"*) receive the gospel. In the third part (chapters 13-28), Paul takes over from Peter as the key figure, the geography goes abroad to the ends of the earth, and now the Gentiles are the audience. The Gentile mission is a very important event in the Acts of the Apostles, and Peter's visit to Cornelius in chapter 10 is therefore repeated in chapter 11 and mentioned again in chapter 15.

Luke wants to tell how the Holy Spirit uses ordinary people to spread the gospel throughout the known world (the Roman Empire). The Holy Spirit leads and guides the disciples as Jesus did in the Gospel of Luke.

The book could have been named *"The works of the Holy Spirit"*. It is part 2 of the Gospel of Luke and covers the period 30-62 AD. The gospel is unstoppable and is spreading throughout the known world.

**Geography in Luke-Acts**

From Luke 9:51, the geographical focus is narrowed down towards Jerusalem and from Acts 1:8, the focus is widened again as the gospel goes out to the whole world starting from Jerusalem.

### KEY VERSE: 1:8

*"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." 1:8*

**Power:** They will receive power from the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49).

**Witnesses:** The content of the testimony is described in Luke 24:46-48

*“He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” Luke 24:46-48*

* Jesus' death and resurrection
* Preach repentance and forgiveness of sins

**Where should they go?**

Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth

**To whom would they go?**

Perhaps they understood *"to the nations"* as the Jews outside of Israel since they did not immediately realize that it was the Gentiles.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Chapters** | **Where** | **Who** | **Year (approx.)** | **Main character** |
| Ch. 1-7 | Jerusalem | Jews | 30-33 | Peter |
| Ch. 8-12 | Judea and Samaria | Jews and *"semi-Jews"* | 33-44 |
| Ch 13-28 | The ends of the earth (the entire Roman Empire) | Gentiles | 46-62 | Paul |

**Who is the author?**

*"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." 1:1-2*

*The "we"* sections in 16:10-17, 20:5-15, 21:1–28:16.

**Main theme:**

The Holy Spirit equips the disciples with power, which makes the gospel unstoppable, and it is taken throughout the known world.

**Purpose:**

Luke continues writing the *"orderly account"* (Luke 1:3) to Theophilus.

### THE SPEECHES IN ACTS

About 365 out of 1000 verses = 1/3 of the book

Luke may have been present in chapter 20 (the Miletus speech) and Paul's defense speeches that begin in chapter 23, but probably did not hear any of the other speeches himself.

Without written documentation, an author at that time could rarely reproduce a speech word for word. Instead, they gave summaries that brought out the main points of what had been said.

Parts of the trial against Paulus may have been available via written documentation.

Luke says in Luke 1:1-4 that he has spoken to eyewitnesses.

Peter speaks 8 times, James 2 times, Stephen once, Paul 9 times, and non-Christians 4 times.

## CHAPTER 2: DAY OF PENTECOST

**Were they 12 or 120?**

1:15: about 120 Christians

*“In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty)”* 1:15

2:14: Peter + the 11 stepped forward

2:17: *“In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.”*

Why tongues of fire?

gr.: *"glossa"* = tongue/language = speaking in tongues

A "repair" of Genesis 11? (All were gathered in one place, all nations represented, great confusion…)

**The Holy Spirit in the OT:**

* Leaders (Moses, elders, Joshua, judges, kings)
* Prophets
* Priests

**The fulfillment of Joel's prophecy means:**

* that the Spirit is available to everyone
* that the last days have begun (2:16-19)

*"No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: “‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke."* 2:16-19

## MORE *"PENTECOSTAL DAYS"*?

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

4:31 *“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.”*

Who was filled now? It sounds like the same group as in chapter 2 ... again? This is a clear parallel to the Day of Pentecost. They were filled with the Spirit again, but this time they did not speak in tongues. It wasn't tongues they needed now. They asked for boldness and got it.

13:52 NASB - *"And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”*

*“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.” 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.”* 4:29-31

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Who gets filled?** | **Where does it happen?** | **Before/after salvation/baptism** | **How does it happen?** | **Results** |
| 2:1-42 | The apostles and disciples | Jerusalem | After salvation | While they were gathered. Sound of wind. Tongues of fire | Speaking in other tongues, boldness. (3000 added to the church) |
| 4:23-31 | Peter, John, and other disciples | Jerusalem | After salvation | When they had prayed, the place trembled | Speak God's word with boldness |
| 8:14-24 | Samaritans (*"half-Gentiles"*) | Samaria (*"semi-pagan"*) | After salvation & baptism | Pray for them and lay hands on them | Something visible (Simon will buy it) |
| 9:17-22 | Paul | Damascus (pagan) | After salvation Before baptism (?) | Ananias laid hands on him | Sight recovered? (Preach) |
| 10:44-47 (11:15-18) | Cornelius' house with friends (Gentiles) | Caesarea (*"Gentile city"* in Jewish land) | At the same time as salvation, before baptism | While Peter spoke | They were speaking in tongues and praising God (Gospel to the Gentiles) |
| 19:1-7 | About 12 disciples (Judeo-Christians?) | Ephesus (Pagan) | After salvation and baptism | Paul laid his hands on them | Speaking in tongues Speaking prophetically |

## CONCLUSIONS/ CLAIMS

The Holy Spirit follows no clear rules (John 3:8)

*“The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”* John 3:8

The point of these incidents of speaking in tongues is to show that the Spirit is not limited by nationality or geography:

1. Ch. 2: Jews in Israel

2. Ch. 8: Samaritans

3. Ch. 10: Gentiles in Israel

4. Ch. 19: Disciples outside Israel

The coming of the Spirit marks something new for all these different groups. They are filled in the same way, regardless of who they are or where they are. Shows that the time of the Spirit had begun and that the Spirit was spreading to different groups.

Acts does not give the impression that everyone who believes speaks in tongues. Mentioned only specifically in 3 events (2:4, 10:46, 19:6). Many people are saved without speaking in tongues being mentioned.

The first Christians were in a special situation because they had come to faith before the Holy Spirit was given. Therefore, *"salvation"* can be distinguished from *"received the Holy Spirit"* (e.g., in Acts 19:1-7).

*“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.”* 19:1-7

Now the Spirit is available to everyone (regardless of nationality and geography), and everyone who believes receives the Spirit the moment he/she believes (Acts 2:38, 1 Cor 12:13, 2 Cor 1:22, 5:5, Eph 1:13, 4:30).

*“Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Acts 2:38*

*"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*

*"set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." 2 Cor 1:22*

*"Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." Eph 5:5*

*"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," Eph 1:13*

*"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Eph 4:30*

*It is what makes you "born again"* and makes you want to live according to God's will, which is the main task of the Holy Spirit.

## HOW TO BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT WHEN HE DOESN'T FOLLOW ANY RULES?

The Bible does not give a fixed procedure or *"recipe"*, but perhaps it hints at some general truths?

**1. Be concerned with the things of the Spirit (Rom 8:5)**

*“Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.”* Rom 8:5

First and foremost, the gospel (John 6:63), the Bible (2 Tim 3:16), and what this has to say for how you live (Gal 5:16).

*“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life.”* John 6:63

*“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness”* 2 Tim 3:16

*“So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”* Galatians 5:16

**2. Ask for it. (Luke 11:13, Acts 8:15)**

*“Then, teaching them more about prayer, he used this story: “Suppose you went to a friend’s house at midnight, wanting to borrow three loaves of bread. You say to him, ‘A friend of mine has just arrived for a visit, and I have nothing for him to eat.’ And suppose he calls out from his bedroom, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is locked for the night, and my family and I are all in bed. I can’t help you.’ But I tell you this—though he won’t do it for friendship’s sake, if you keep knocking long enough, he will get up and give you whatever you need because of your shameless persistence. “And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. “You fathers—if your children ask for a fish, do you give them a snake instead? Or if they ask for an egg, do you give them a scorpion? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.”* Luk 11:5-13

*"As soon as they arrived, they prayed for these new believers to receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them, for they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." Acts 8:15-16*

*The most important characteristic of being "filled with the Spirit"* is not supernatural experiences, but the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23).

*“But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!”* Gal 5:22-23 NLT

## MIRACLES

Who *"performed"* the miracles?

**The Apostles (2:43, 5:12-16, 9:36-42)**

*"Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles."* 2:43

*"The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people."* 5:12

*"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."* 9:40

**Stephen (6:8)**

*"Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people."* 6:8

**Philip (8:6-7, 13)**

*"When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. 7 For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed."* 8:6-7, 13

**Ananias (9:17-18)**

*"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.” 18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized,"*

**Paul and Barnabas (14:3, 15:12, 19:11, 28:8)**

*"So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who* *confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders."* 14:3

" The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them." 15:12

*"God did extraordinary miracles through Paul," 19:11*

*"His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him." 28:8*

Luke does not give the impression that the whole congregation performed miracles, but a select few (16). It is not many when you remember that there were at least 3,000 Christians already.

## PREACHING/TEACHING

Preaching to the people: Acts 25x + others 15x = 40x in total

Preaching to the church: Acts 0x + others 1x = 1x in total

Teaching to the people: Acts 11x + others 1x = 12x in total

Teaching to the church: Acts 1x + others 8x = 9x in total

Preaching to the people 40 times more often than to the congregation in the NT.

In Acts, the apostles teach the people 11 times more often than they teach the congregation, while in the rest of the NT, it is the opposite: Teaching to the congregation 8 times more often than to the people. Total of 12-9 in favor of the people.

**Conclusion:**

While the NT speaks of teaching for both the congregation and non-believers, preaching seems to be only for non-believers. A similar thing within the congregation will be exhortation/encouragement.

## ANANIAS & SAPPHIRE (4:32 - 5:11)

The Holy Spirit is presented as a person at the same level as God (vv. 3-4).

*“Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? 4 Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God.”*

They *"put God to the test"* and thought they could deceive him.

Similarities to Achan in Josh 7:

* Stealing from God
* This shows that he has no respect for or trust in God.
* Admits nothing and shows no regret until the sin is exposed.
* Die on the spot. Whoever does not trust God will not be allowed to live. (= the gospel)

Josh 7 and Acts 5 are about two critical moments in God's plan: the taking of the land and the spread of the gospel.

The fellowship of the Spirit was at stake, and the spread of the gospel would probably be hindered.

The same God as in the OT; therefore, one should expect continuity in character and action. We cannot leave this passage out of our picture of God.

Result: The congregation was gripped by fear (vv. 5, 11). Fear of God is always in the context of the church growing:

* Many signs and wonders, unity, new believers added every day… (2:43-47)
* Many signs and wonders, great number added… (5:11-14)
* The congregation grew (9:31)
* Jesus' name was praised, confessions were made, and the gospel spread widely and grew in power (19:17-20)

How is it with our fear of God?

## PAUL'S CONVERSION (9:1-31)

*"But Saul began to destroy the church."* 8:3a

*"Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples."* 9:1

*"I put many of the Lord’s people in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities."* 26:10-11

*"...how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it."* Gal 1:13b

*"I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church."* Phil 3:6a NLT

Paul also did a lot for the church before he became a Christian. As a result of the persecution that he was a part of, the Christians were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, where they preached the word wherever they went (8:1-5).

## SIGHTS AND VISIONS IN THE NT

Sights and visions do not happen very often; only 10 are mentioned in the entire NT, distributed among 5 different people over about 60 years. Paul has 6 visions:

* The repentance (9:3-7): *"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?"* 9:3-4
* Ananias comes (9:12): *“In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”*
* Go to Macedonia (16:9): *“During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”*
* Assured of God's presence/protection in Corinth (18:9-10) *“One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.”*
* Assured of God's presence/protection on the journey to Rome (23:11) *“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.”*
* The third heaven (2 Cor 12:1-4) *“I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows — was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell.”*

**Other sights and visions in the NT:**

* Ananias: Go to Paul in Damascus (9:10-16)
* Cornelius: Ask Peter to come (10:3-6)
* Peter: The cloth from heaven (10:9-18, 28)
* John: The Revelation

Only 7 events, which all occur in stories that relates to Paul, Peter, and John.

## TABITHA IS RAISED (9:36-43)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Luke 8:49-54** | **Acts 9:36-43** |
| Jesus sends everyone out except Peter, John, James, and the parents | Peter sends everyone out |
| All cried | All the widows cried |
| *“Talita kumi”* (Mark 5:41) | *“Tabitha kumi”* |
| *"But he took her by the hand and said, 'My child, get up!'"* Luke 8:54 | *"He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet."* 9:41a |

**What does Luke (and God) want to show with this?**

* That the apostles continue Jesus' ministry
* That the same Spirit is in them
* That they are true witnesses of Jesus

## PETER & CORNELIUS (CHAPTERS 10-11)

Cornelius was one of the *"God-fearing Gentiles"*, who went to the synagogue and kept at least parts of the Law of Moses. But they were not circumcised.

God effectively jumps over the obstacles that might have made it difficult for the Jews to see the Gentiles as Christians on the same level as themselves (11:17).

*“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 11:15-17

11:19-20: A new step, now they come to a heathen land. Some of them understood that the gospel should be actively preached to the Gentiles.

## "CHRISTIAN"

Only in 11:26, 26:28, 1 Pet 4:16.

Non-Christians seem to have invented it but accepted it as a title showing honor and respect from the 2nd century.

Probably a historical reason why Luke mentions it. He wanted to tell us where this name came from.

They were also called (by themselves and others) *"disciples"*, *"believers"*, *"saints"*, *"brothers and sisters"*, *"the way"* or *"the Nazarene sect"* (24:5).

## HEROD

Herod the Great (37 - 4 BC) - Tried to kill Jesus in Matt 2.

Herod Antipas (4 BC - 39 AD) - Son of Herod the Great. Killed John the Baptist and interrogated Jesus.

Herod Agrippa I (37 - 44 AD) - grandson of Herod the Great and the nephew of Antipas. Became the fourth prince when Antipas was sent into exile. Killed James the Apostle and imprisoned Peter. Josephus says he had severe stomach pains for five days before he died.

Herod Agrippa II (50 - 93 AD) - son of Agrippa I. Was present during Paul's trial in Acts 25:13ff.

## FROM PETER TO PAUL

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Peter** | **Paul** |
| A man born lame is healed (3:1-11) | A man born lame is healed (14:8-18) |
| People are healed by his shadow (5:15-16) | People are healed by his handkerchiefs and work clothes (19:11-12) |
| Success makes the Jewish leaders envious (5:17) | Success makes the Jewish leaders envious (13:45) |
| Confronting Simon the sorcerer (8:9-24) | Confronting the sorcerer Bar-Jesus (13:6-11) |
| Raises Tabitha from the dead (9:36-43) | Raises Eutychus from the dead (20:9-12) |
| Miraculously delivered from prison (12:3-19) | Miraculously delivered from prison (16:25-34) |

## PAUL IN LYSTRA (14:8-18)

**1. Why does Paul find something in common with the inhabitants of Lystra?**

He identifies with the people: *"We are ordinary people just like you..."*

**2. What does he affirm as true?**

They are partly right that he is a *"Hermes"*, he has a good message.

**3. What does he challenge?**

Zeus and Hermes are empty gods.

**4. What 3 arguments does he use?**

* God is the creator and the reason behind the universe. Zeus is not big enough.
* Rain, harvest, food, and joy come from God. God is the explanation for the human experience of goodness.
* The story: Previously, he let the pagans go their own way, but now they must repent. We are heading towards judgment.

**5. What does he not mention?**

The OT or Jesus.

## THE MEETING OF THE APOSTLES IN JERUSALEM (CH. 15)

v. 1: *"Judaists"* come to Antioch and preach Jesus + the law.

v. 5: Some Christian Pharisees in Jerusalem agree with them.

vv. 6-7: *“much discussion”* - clearly not a simple question from our perspective. They saw faith in Jesus as a clear continuation of the Old Testament.

vv. 7-11: Peter's argument

- The incident at Cornelius shows God's will in this matter. God did not discriminate against the Gentiles but cleansed them by faith and gave them the Spirit.

- To add to the law is therefore to *"put God to the test"* and thus break the commandment in Deuteronomy 6:16 (Luke 4:12). He uses the same words about Ananias and Sapphira.

*“Jesus answered, “It is said: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”* Luke 4:12

v. 12: Paul and Barnabas support Peter and give more evidence that God does not require that the Gentiles get circumcised and follow the law.

vv. 13-21: James comes with support from the OT and says that the Gentiles should only stay away from:

1. That which is unclean because of idolatry (v. 29: meat sacrificed to idols)
2. Fornication (temple prostitution and sexual rituals)
3. Meat of strangled animals (the animals that were strangled in temple rituals)
4. Blood (tasting/drinking blood in the temples)

**Reason (v. 21):**

Because there were Jews everywhere. James wanted the Gentile Christians to be good witnesses and not unnecessarily alienate the Jews (also the Christians?) by participating in pagan festivals.

## THE PROBLEM MARK (15:36-41)

v. 39: *"sharp disagreement"*, *"irritation"*. Use of *"wrath"* in Deuteronomy 29:28 and Jer 32:37.

There need not have been a *"bitter"* dispute, but they did not agree and found it best to separate.

Luke is not afraid to describe his *"heroes"* with human emotions and flaws.

1 Corinthians 9:6 suggests that Paul and Barnabas worked together later. Paul speaks favorably of Mark (the same person?) in 2 Tim 4:11. Church historical tradition says he became the author of the Gospel of Mark.

## CHAPTER 16

vv. 1-5: Why did Paul circumcise Timothy?

- According to rabbinical law from the 100s AD (at the latest), Timothy would have been seen as a Jew. Possibly this view was valid in Paul's time as well.

- Paul did not do this because it had something to do with salvation, especially not after chapter 15 and when Silas was with him as a representative of Jerusalem and the decision.

- The Jews wanted to see that Christianity was not anti-Jewish (and that the accusations against Paul in 21:21 were false).

*“They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs.”* 21:21

vv. 6-10: *"The Holy Spirit hindered them"*?

- Probably because he wanted them to go to Macedonia at this time. Asia got the chance later (19:10).

## 16:16-18

*“And it came to pass as we were going to prayer that a certain female slave, having a spirit of Python, met us, who brought much profit to her masters by prophesying.”* 16:16 Darby Translation

*"a spirit of Python"*: Greek mythology said that the god Apollo killed the Python that guarded the oracle at Delphi and that Apollo was embodied in Delphi as a serpent. The people probably believed that she was a mouthpiece for Apollo, like the oracle at Delphi.

People probably wouldn't think of Yahweh when they heard *"The Most High God"*, but which of the gods did Paulus & co set highest?

*“She followed Paul and us and cried out repeatedly, saying, “These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you a way of salvation.”* 16:17 NASB

*"(a) way of salvation"*: one of several ways to salvation.

Paul does not use her statement to say that even Python confirms his message but instead becomes very annoyed. She was confusing the people instead of helping.

## AT THE AREOPAGOS (17:16-34)

Socrates (469 - 399 BC):

* Had encouraged the Athenians to walk away from their gods and instead search for *"the unknown god"*.
* Was executed because he *"rejected the gods of the city and introduced foreign gods and thus destroyed the minds of the youth"*.
* The ancient Jews and Christians held him in high esteem because he accused Homer's tales of the gods of ridiculing the true divine. Justin Martyr (100s AD) said that Socrates was a Christian.
* Most philosophers were monotheists and believed in a God who could have nothing to do with our world (transcendent).

Paul continues Socrates' attack on polytheism and receives almost the same accusation in the same place.

**1. What is Paul's starting point?**

Finds common ground when meeting people with no knowledge of Christianity. Begins with something they know and believe in (vv. 22-23).

**2. What does he say about God? (vv. 24-26)**

Explains God in a way that matches what they already believe.

* Creator of everything
* Does not live on earth (exceeding usual limits)
* Big enough not to need people (like Socrates)
* Gives life to everything
* Decides when and where people should live

**3. What was God's purpose?**

Explains what God's purpose (the meaning of life) is. They should seek him, even if it might be like searching in the darkness: *"seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him"* (v. 27). God is close to everyone, but the people are still in the darkness.

**4. What authority does he refer to?**

He uses their own *"authorities"*, the Stoic poets Aratos and Kleantes (third century BC) (v. 28), to support the point.

**5. What is his main message?**

They must repent before God judges the world. (vv. 30-31)

## PAUL'S SPEECHES IN CHAPTERS 22-26

Ch 22: The People

Ch 23: The High Council of the Jews

Ch 24: Felix

Ch 25: Festus

Ch 26: King Agrippa

## 9:7 and 22:9

Classical Greek:

*"akouo"* + object in genitive = to hear the sound of something (9:7)

*"The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone."* 9:7

*"akouo" + object in accusative = to hear and understand (22:9)*

*"My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me."* 22:9

* Luke follows older styles several times.
* 9:7 says they did not see anyone, while in 22:9, it says they saw a light.
* 22:9 does not say that they heard nothing at all, only that they did not understand the voice that spoke to Paul. It was only Paul who had an encounter with Jesus.

## CHAPTER 24

Antonius Felix: Governor 52-59 AD. The historians Tacitus and Josephus describe him as a corrupt and violent anti-Semite.

*"The technical details of this trial fit so well with other Roman judicial evidence that prominent historians of the Roman Empire field use them as a primary source for understanding Roman judicial procedures in the provinces."* Craig Keener

24:14 - Clear connection between Judaism and Christianity. This theme is repeated in 25:8-10, 26:6-7 and 28:17-20.

*“However, I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets,”* 24:14

*"Then Paul made his defense: “I have done nothing wrong against the Jewish law or against the temple or against Caesar.” Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?” Paul answered: “I am now standing before Caesar’s court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well."* 25:8-10

*"And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors that I am on trial today. This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. King Agrippa, it is because of this hope that these Jews are accusing me."* 26:6-7

*"Three days later he called together the local Jewish leaders. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: 'My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. The Jews objected, so I was compelled to make an appeal to Caesar. I certainly did not intend to bring any charge against my own people. For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.'"* 28:17-20

## PORCIUS FESTUS (59-62?)

Josephus describes Festus in a much better light than Felix. Festus sorted things out and captured more Zealots. He appears to have held the position until his death, just 1-2 years later.

More fair and cooperative than most governors in Judea. He wants to have a good relationship with the locals (25:9).

*“Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?”* 25:9

## CHAPTER 25

v. 7 - Still no evidence.

v. 8 - Paul claims he is innocent of both Roman and Jewish law.

*“If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!”* 25:11

v. 11

* The emperor was Nero (54-68 AD), but this was before he went mad.
* He did it because he felt he had to: *"The Jews objected, so I was compelled to make an appeal to Caesar. I certainly did not intend to bring any charge against my own people."* 28:19
* He knew he was going to Rome (19:21, 23:11): *"After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. “After I have been there,” he said, “I must visit Rome also."* 19:21
* "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.”* 23:11

*"Anyone invested with authority who puts to death or orders to be put to death, tortures, scourges, condemns, or directs a Roman citizen who first appealed to the people, and now has appealed to the Emperor, to be placed in chains, shall be condemned under the Lex Julia relating to public violence. The punishment of this crime is death, where the parties are of inferior station; deportation to an island where they are of superior station."* Sent. 5.26.1; Digest 48.6-7

## HEROD AGRIPPA II

Lived: 27-100 AD, king: 50-93 AD

Raised in the court of Emperor Claudius in Rome and a favorite of Claudius. Agrippa II was in practice the king of the Jews, which Festus probably saw him as.

Knew about Judaism but was on the Roman side. A suitable man to find out what the trial was really about.

## CHAPTER 27

*"...a journey that point after point has been shown to be historically accurate or at least plausible even in detail by both ancient and modern experts on these sorts of sea accounts."* Ben Witherington III

## THE END

Luke knows that something else happened after two years. Better to argue from evidence than from silence, and the evidence in Acts 21-28 suggests that Paul was not guilty.

Suetonius says that Nero strongly disliked signing execution orders and had little interest in long trials until 62 AD (when he lost both Burrus and Seneca as advisers).

Good reasons why Paul's case was dropped due to lack of evidence and perhaps also due to lack of prosecutors in Rome. The church historian Eusebius (4th century) says that according to tradition, Paul was released. 1 Clem 5:5-7 suggests the same (96 AD)

Paul's acquittal was not Luke's most important theme; he did not write a biography of Paul, but a historical work about how the gospel spread from Jerusalem to Rome.

## TWO TIMELESS TRUTHS

1. The Spirit of Jesus is with us too. He also empowers us to be His witnesses. The story isn't over yet!
2. Take the initiative! Tell the Gospel! - Leave the rest up to God.

## TWO REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How can we talk about repentance and the forgiveness of sins in a good way for people around us today?
2. How can we be witnesses of Jesus' resurrection when we have not seen him as the apostles had?