

An Outline Study Of

THE BOOK OF ACTS

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1. PURPOSE

- A. In order to ascertain the purpose of the book of Acts, we must start with the realization that Acts is the second part of a two part work. We know the first part of this work as the gospel of Luke. What originally appeared as one work was separated in our Bible by the church Fathers in order to keep the gospels together. Luke is joined with Matthew and Mark because these three books are similar to each other.
- B. A summary of the main themes of Luke
 - 1. Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the one anointed with God's Spirit to fulfill God's mission. The earthly Jesus speaks his words and does his works not out of his deity but out of his humanity as one filled with the Holy Spirit.
 - 2. In Jesus, through his life, death and resurrection, the kingdom of God had come near to restore our relationships with God through repentance and the forgiveness of sins and restore whatever the devil has broken. Healing is for the whole man.
 - 3. Every strata of Judaism is affected i.e., the men, women, "sinners," children, the sick, etc.
 - 4. Luke is the most universal of the gospels and foreshadows the gospel to the Gentiles (Luke himself is a Greek, indeed, the only Gentile writer in the Bible).
- C. The purpose and themes of Acts
 - 1. There has been much debate as to the purpose of Acts. The initial question regards the identity of Theophilus, the one for whom the book is written. The main issues revolve around whether he is a man (perhaps a Greek official for whom Luke/Acts is an apologetic for the gospel) or a kind of generic "everyman" since the name means "lover of God." If the latter then Luke/Acts appears to be a combination of selective historiography and an apologetic for a non-Christian audience.
 - 2. Acts 1.2 states that Luke was about all that "*Jesus had begun to do and teach.*" The obvious inference is that Acts will be about all that Jesus will *continue to do and teach*. Jesus was the word/worker who was empowered by the Spirit that had filled him at his baptism. That same Spirit was now going to be poured out to empower the Church for the ongoing ministry of Jesus.
 - 3. Luke has endeavored to show that the gospel will advance through all the nations despite every conceivable attempt to stop it. No matter what the early Christians are accused of, they are innocent, and the kingdom will go forth unhindered because it is energized by the Holy Spirit. The main vehicle for this advance was the planting of new churches.
 - 4. This progress of the gospel must not be tied to any particular culture, indeed, it is trans-cultural and can be contextualized into any of the cultures of the earth. Consequently, true Christianity must not be tied to the Jewish law even though it is the fulfillment of the law and the prophets. Luke will take pains to show that the word of the Lord is a law-free gospel.

5. There is a conjunction between three elements as the gospel goes forth:
 - a. The preaching of the gospel of Jesus and his kingdom
 - b. The power of the Holy Spirit to perform signs and wonders to confirm the preaching of the word
 - c. Rapid evangelism resulting in the establishment of local churches.
- D. The structure of Acts
1. Verse 1.8 is programmatic for the book: the gospel will go to every strata of culture within every people when the disciples are anointed with God's Spirit by the exalted Christ. It will begin in Jerusalem and progress out into the "uttermost parts of the earth."
 2. The structure is comprised of six, forward moving waves of the gospel, each one taking up more turf in fulfillment of verse 1.8. Each wave is concluded by a brief summary passage.
 - a. **The prologue** (1.1-7)
 - b. **Wave #1: the gospel to mainstream Judaism - Jerusalem** (1.8-6.7)
6.7: "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."
 - c. **Wave #2: the gospel to fringe Judaism - Judea/Samaria** (6.8-9.31)
9.31: "Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers living in fear of the Lord."
 - d. **Wave #3: the gospel to the Gentiles - Syria** (9.32-12.25)
12.25: "But the word of God continued to increase and spread."
 - e. **Wave #4: the gospel to the Gentiles - Asia** (13.1-16.5)
16.5: "So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers."
 - f. **Wave #5: the gospel to the Gentiles - Europe** (16.6-19.20)
19.20: "In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power."
 - g. **Wave #6: the gospel to the ends of the earth - Rome** (19.21-28.31)
28.31: "Boldly and without hindrance he [Paul] preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ."

2. THE PROLOGUE (1.1-7)

- A. The prologue is a literary recapitulation of the last paragraphs of the book of Luke. As his gospel ends, Luke introduces the themes reiterated here in Acts 1.1-7.
 1. The gospel being preached to all nations beginning at Jerusalem
 2. The disciples being empowered by the Holy Spirit to be missionary witnesses
 3. The ascension of Jesus
 4. The disciples waiting in an attitude of worship and prayer
- B. After the address to Theophilus and his statement of purpose regarding the ongoing ministry of Jesus by the Spirit, Luke describes Jesus' final instructions to his disciples. For a period of forty days he spoke to his disciple about the **kingdom of God**. His main message in the gospel was the kingdom (Lk. 4.43), it is the content he now gives his disciples as the risen Christ, and it is what Paul is teaching as the book of Acts concludes (28.31).
- C. The disciples have **eschatological concerns** about the time when God will "restore the kingdom to Israel." Their question reflects their Jewish understanding of the kingdom as something revolving around

ethnic Israel. Luke's recording of this incident shows that the disciples haven't "got it" yet. As will be shortly seen, when the Spirit comes (ch. 2) they will have a divine "aha!" moment when they will *begin* to "get it." As they will discover late in the book, the kingdom is not "Jewish" i.e., the kingdom will not be restored to Israel, but is a law-free (non Jewish) gift for all the nations. The chronology of events surrounding the end of the age is not to concern Jesus' followers.

- D. The instructions of the risen Lord are that the disciples should wait for the **gift of the Holy Spirit** who will empower the disciples to be witnesses. The earthly *bearer of the Spirit*, the Christ, the anointed one, will soon be the exalted Lord who is seated at the right hand of God and will be in the position to be the *dispenser of the Spirit*. This experience is linked to the prophecy of John the Baptist who predicted that Jesus would "baptize" i.e., totally immerse his followers with the Holy Spirit.

3. WAVE #1: THE GOSPEL TO MAINSTREAM JUDAISM (JERUSALEM; 1.8-6.7)

- A. 1.9-11: The first wave of the gospel begins with the ascension of Jesus. Two angels ("men dressed in white") put the mission of the church into an eschatological time frame. The disciples have their missionary orders. The next thing on the eschatological calendar will be the visible, bodily return of Jesus in the air. Until then, the gospel must go to the nations.
- B. 1.12-26: The next event recorded by Luke is a strange incident regarding the choosing of Matthias as the twelfth apostle. While not recorded as something prescribed by Jesus, the remaining eleven apostles, and later Luke by his inclusion of this event, thought it was important to fill the spot left by Judas after his betrayal and suicidal death. While their reasoning for doing so is not recorded in Acts, it most certainly has to do with the typological significance of the #12. The apostles saw themselves as the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel. After all, Jesus himself had predicted that the twelve apostles would one day sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Lk. 22.30).
- C. 2.1-41: The day of Pentecost
1. The setting of the coming of the Spirit is the feast of Pentecost, 50 days after the Passover. As the feast of firstfruits it would indeed be the first installment of the gift of the Spirit to the Church.
 2. The Spirit is sent from heaven with the sound of a rushing wind and "tongues of fire" resting on the 120 who had been gathered to wait for the power of God. Speaking in other languages, the newly empowered believers moved from place where they had been gathered (the upper room?), to the temple with its mass of pilgrims from all over the world.
 3. The Jewish pilgrims now hear the gospel being preached in their own languages. This is a symbolic reversal of the confusion of languages at the tower of Babel and indicates that the missionary purpose for which the Jewish people have been created is at hand. The very purpose for which God had divided the world into the different languages was about to be fulfilled.
 4. As Peter declares, this event also fulfills Joel 2.28-32 ("In the last days I will pour out my Spirit...") and Jeremiah 31.33 ("I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts"). God's people could now keep this new covenant through the impartation of a holy nature imparted by the Spirit.
 5. 3,000 people respond to the empowered preaching of the gospel and the Church of Jesus Christ is birthed in a single day.
- D. 2.42-47 is one of three summary passages (cf. 4.32-35; 5.12-16) in this first wave describing the quality of life experienced by the first church in Jerusalem.

1. Here we see them:
 - a. Learning
 - b. Fellowshiping
 - c. Observing the Lord's Supper in the context of communal meals
 - d. Praying
 - e. Healing the sick and demonized
 - f. Sharing economically
 2. The result was that they were respected in the community for their good deeds and people were being converted daily.
- E. 3.1-4.31: One of the signs and wonders done by the apostles is singled out, probably because it is the occasion of the first attempt by Jewish authorities to stop the fledgling movement. Here introduced, then, is one of the major themes of Acts; **Satan is going to try to stop the gospel any way he can.**
1. Peter and John heal a man crippled from birth at one of the entrances to the temple and use the opportunity to preach the gospel.
 2. Pricked with jealousy because the number of converts had grown to about 5,000, and disturbed because of the uproar caused by the healing of the crippled man, the authorities arrest Peter and John.
 3. After a night in jail, Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, preached the gospel before the Sanhedrin in fulfillment of Jesus' words that the disciples would be given words to witness before kings (Lk. 21.12f).
 4. The Jews can find no reason to hold the two apostles and turn them loose to a church that is praying for them.
 5. Rather than stop the gospel, it says that the church received so much power that the place where they were meeting was shaken!
- F. 4.32-35: In this second summary passage we see that the gospel affects economics. People shared their possessions so readily that there were no financial needs among them. Some even sold parcels of land and turned over the proceeds to the apostles to be distributed at the leading of the Lord. One of these land owners was a man named Barnabas. In this way one of the major players of the book is introduced.
- G. 5.1-16: Perhaps the Devil can stop the gospel by deceit from within. One of those couples that had sold a tract of land, named Ananias and Sapphira, lied about their sale price. After turning the alleged proceeds over to the apostles, they kept the hidden money for themselves. Not counting on the ever watching eye of the Holy Spirit, the couple is caught by Peter who receives supernatural revelation about what they had done. He rebukes them for "lying to the Holy Spirit" and they both drop dead. "Great fear seized the church" because nothing could stop the gospel.
- H. 5.12-16: In the third vignette describing life in the Jerusalem church, we see that the fear of the Lord was so strong that non-Christians were afraid for their lives and were afraid to attend worship services. Peter was so powerfully used of God that the sick hoped that even his passing shadow might heal them. Luke sums up saying, "Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed."
- I. 5.17-42: In a jealous rage, the Jewish authorities decide to arrest all the apostles but to no avail. An angel of the Lord set them free with orders to go right back to the temple to preach. Hauled into court the next day, they are accused of filling Jerusalem with their teaching and laying the blame on the Sanhedrin for

crucifying the Messiah. Things look bleak for the apostles until one of the Jews brings a word of wisdom to the hour. The rabbi Gamaliel (who turns out to be the mentor to Saul of Tarsus, the man destined to be the great apostle Paul) stands up and counsels that they let this phenomenon alone, reasoning that if it is not of God it will dissipate, but if it is of God, there is nothing they could do to stop it. The reasoning seemed good to the council and after flogging the apostles they let them go. The result was an unhindered gospel: “Day after day...they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ” (5.42).

J. 6.1-6: The problem of food distribution

1. In another attempt to get the church to unravel from within, Satan stimulates dissension in the ranks. We see here the surfacing of what has probably been a rising tension and one that will grow into a raging storm - there is a rift between the Hebraic and the Hellenistic Jews.
2. The Greek speaking Christian widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food in favor of the home town gals who had grown up in Israel and spoke Aramaic. But again it is the Holy Spirit who knows what to do. The apostles ask the Greek speakers to choose from among them those who could administrate the problem of daily food distribution. The ones who are chosen all had Greek names and were probably those who were already pastoring among the Greek speaking Christian community.
3. Not only is the problem of food distribution taken care of but we see here the first expansion of church leadership with the laying on of hands. The fact they these men are Hellenized Jews foreshadows the expansion of the gospel to the Greek speaking world. We also see introduced two of the major players for the next wave, Philip and Stephen. What the devil means for evil, God means for good (Gen. 50.19).

K. 6.7: The first wave concludes: *“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.”*

4. WAVE #2: THE GOSPEL TO FRINGE JUDAISM (JUDEA/SAMARIA; 6.8-9.31)

A. 6.8-7.53: Stephen

1. Up until now, the believers have seen themselves as Jews. Sooner or later someone would begin to realize that their new faith in Jesus was incompatible with Judaism as it had been interpreted by the rabbis. That person was Stephen, a man who “did wonders and miraculous signs among the people.”
2. Opposition arose against Stephen from one particular synagogue made up of Greeks who were “freedmen” (i.e., those who had been freed from slavery), but they could not stand up against Stephen’s “wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.” In their frustration in not being able to stop him they raised up false witnesses to accuse him of two things, speaking against both the temple and the law. In regards to these accusations, a few things are to be noted.
 - a. Stephen had not spoken against either of these things (the witnesses were “false”).
 - b. In his oral defense, Stephen does not speak to these charges directly but rather turns the tables and accuses *the Sanhedrin* of being the ones who had rejected the law and the temple!
 - c. Ironically, though, the very things the Hebraists accuse Stephen of were, in fact, the two points at which Christianity and Judaism *would* prove to be incompatible.
 - (1) The Mosaic law had been made obsolete by Jesus, “the greater than Moses” (Heb. 3.3), who had declared his teaching to be new Torah (“You have heard it said...but I say to you...”).

While what Jesus taught was consonant with the spirit of the law, he had freed his followers from the letter of the law so it could go forth to the nations without any cultural trappings.

- (2) The temple was no longer needed because, as the writer of Hebrews declares, Jesus was the once for all sacrifice for sins; the sacrificial system, then, was no longer needed (cf. Heb. 10). As the gospel writer, Mark, had declared, the veil separating us from the Most Holy Place had been ripped from top to bottom (Mk. 15.38).
 - d. In making their accusations, the Jews were unknowingly predicting their own spiritual death.
 - e. In his speech (ch. 7), Stephen demonstrates with a rendition of Jewish history that the Jews had always been stiff-necked and resisted the Holy Spirit. It had been *they* who had rejected Moses and *they* who had rejected the true sanctuary of God, which Stephen saw as the tabernacle in the wilderness and not Solomon's temple (the writer of Hebrews also felt the same way; cf. Heb. 9).
3. Persecution against the church
 - a. This infuriates the Jews who prove by their actions that Stephen was right. They resist the Holy Spirit one more time and stone him to death. As he was dying, he followed the ways of his master saying, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."
 - b. This begins a persecution against the church at Jerusalem, the first of many attempts by the devil to destroy Christianity. But as we have seen, all the demonic attempts to stop the gospel have served to further it, and this is no exception.
 - c. The persecution forces all the Christians in Jerusalem to scatter throughout Judea and Samaria in fulfillment of Jesus' word in 1.8 ("in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria"). The Jewish believers now begin to fulfill their destiny which was to be witnesses to the nations. The one exception to this is that the apostles do not leave Jerusalem. This appears most unusual in that it is the apostles who were to have led the way out into the nations. They stay around the ranch, however, probably to continue to evangelize the Jews at the risk of their lives.
 - d. This text also introduces Saul of Tarsus, the student of rabbi Gamaliel (22.3), who was going to become Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles. Here we find him giving approval to those who stone Stephen and initiating a campaign to destroy the church.
- B. 8.4-25: The gospel goes to Samaria
 1. It is Philip, one of the Greek speaking pastors (6.5) who first carries the gospel across cultural boundaries. Going to the hated Samaritans, he saw incredible success with the gospel. He preached the word with signs and wonders following and many Samaritans believed.
 2. While the Samaritans had believed and had been baptized, the Holy Spirit had not, as yet, come upon any of them. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard about the Samaritan converts, they sent Peter and John to visit the young church. When they arrived they placed their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.
 3. The question of the Holy Spirit
 - a. This text brings up tremendous questions in regards to:
 - (1) When does someone truly become a Christian (were the Samaritans saved when they believed, when they were baptized, or when they received the Holy Spirit?). Paul told the Romans that the key mark of the Christian was the presence of the Spirit (Rom. 8.9). Are Luke and Paul in disagreement here?

- (2) Are we to expect a time gap between when we believe and when we receive the Holy Spirit? Unfortunately, Luke's purpose in writing is not to speak to our 20th century questions about the order of our individual Christian experience. Luke isn't speaking, first of all, to individual experience anyway (his concerns are corporate) nor, secondly, is he rendering a pattern for all time. He is simply recording what happened and was interested only in the fact that another cultural group has received the gospel and the Holy Spirit in the same manner as the Jews. This validates what the Samaritans have as the genuine article. The gospel is going to the nations!
- b. Doctrinal precision will fall to the writings of Paul. It is the Spirit that marks a true believer. What is going on with the Samaritans is the initiation of a new era in redemptive history. This experience of the Spirit is initiatory and epochal and should not be put treated as a pattern for the church for all time. How do we know this? Because the pattern is different every time in Acts.
- (1) Jerusalem (ch. 2): believe, filled with the Spirit, baptized
- (2) Samaria (ch. 8): believe, baptized, received the Spirit
- (3) Ethiopian eunuch (ch. 8): believe, baptized, no experience of the Spirit recorded
- (4) Paul (ch. 9): believe, filled with the Spirit, baptized
- (5) Cornelius (ch. 10): believe, Spirit came upon, baptized
- (6) Missionary journeys of Paul: general pattern is believe, baptized, no experience of the Spirit recorded
- (7) Ephesians (ch. 19): believe, baptized, Spirit came upon them
- c. Conclusion: The experience of the Spirit is for all, evidence of the Spirit is normal, but the pattern of the Spirit's filling is up to God.
4. Simon the Magician
- a. Luke is very interested in a powerful magician named Simon who confesses to believe during Philip's preaching in Samaria. When the apostles come from Jerusalem to inspect what is happening, Simon is intrigued with the apostle's ability to perform "magic" by healing and doing miracles in Jesus' name. He is especially interested in buying from them the ability to impart the Holy Spirit (probably the ability to release people to speak in tongues). He is sorely rebuked by Peter when the apostle sees into his heart (via revelation? cf. Ananias and Sapphira in ch. 6) saying, "you are full of bitterness and captive to sin." It is worthy to note that the church Father Irenaeus calls Simon the originator of the heresy called "gnosticism."
- b. Luke's interest in Simon appears to be that he represents one more attempt by the devil to stop the gospel, this time by infiltrating the ranks of the church with a powerful sorcerer. Luke may have also been prophesying as he wrote if it is true that Simon went on to found Gnosticism. But the gospel goes forth unhindered through the very same gifts of the Spirit that Simon wanted to buy.
- C. 8.26-40 The Ethiopian eunuch prefigures the next wave to the Gentiles
1. The Spirit again demonstrates his ability to sovereignly lead the church when he "translates" Philip to a desert road to encounter an Ethiopian eunuch, an official returning home in the service of Candace, queen of Ethiopia. He just happens to be reading the scroll of Isaiah and just happens to be at chapter 53 which is a prophetic word about the crucifixion of Christ. Philip just happens to know about the fulfillment of that text and just happens to be walking next to the chariot to explain the way of salvation to the man. The man believes, is baptized, and carries the gospel to the Gentiles for the first time.

2. This gospel is incredible! Jesus is in complete control of his Church and nothing can stop him. The message of Jesus and the kingdom is triumphantly going to the nations despite all odds.
- D. 9.1-30: The conversion of Saul
1. The conversion of Saul is so important for Luke that he has Paul tell the story in full two more times (ch. 22 and 26).
 2. Saul, meanwhile, had continued his threats against the church and was on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians there to stop their expansion.
 3. Enroute Saul is knocked supernaturally off his horse and the voice of Jesus calls him not only to himself but to be an apostle. Not even the zealous attempts of a human killing machine can stop the gospel. Indeed, the instrument of Satan himself is converted to be the Messiah's greatest ally!
 4. Saul is blinded and sent into the very city and church he was trying to destroy. At the hands of one of the believers he had probably come to arrest, he is healed of his blindness and baptized.
 5. Saul does an immediate 180 and begins to preach the gospel he had tried to destroy.
 6. As is to be expected, persecution broke out against Saul almost immediately. The Jews in Damascus tried to kill him and he had to escape at night by being let down in a basket through a hole in the wall.
 7. Traveling to Jerusalem, Saul is rebuffed by the apostles who think his conversion is a trick until Barnabas is subtly reintroduced into the story. God uses Barnabas to convince the apostles that a miracle conversion had indeed happened.
 8. Again the Jews try to kill him and he escapes to Tarsus until the time is right for him to reemerge.
- E. 9.31: The second wave concludes: *"Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers living in fear of the Lord."*

5. WAVE #3: THE GOSPEL TO THE GENTILES (SYRIA; 9.32-12.25)

- A. The third wave is primarily concerned with Peter's sparking the Gentile mission and introduces the first clash with the power of Rome.
- B. 9.32-43: More from the ministry of Peter
1. After initiating the Samaritan pentecost, Peter continued to venture out with the gospel. His travels took him north into Lydda and Joppa.
 2. In Lydda the paralytic named Aeneas was healed. The preaching of the word and its confirmation through a sign resulted in all those living in Lydda and Sharon turning to the Lord.
 3. In nearby Joppa, a woman named Tabitha (Luke gives also the Greek name Dorcas) had died. But Peter prayed and the dead woman got up. The text says that "This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord."
- C. 10.1-11.18: The Gentile pentecost
1. The incidents surrounding Peter and Cornelius is very important for Luke and is a turning point in the history of the church. He records it three times as he did Paul's conversion (11.1-18; 15.7f).
 2. Cornelius was a Roman centurion and a devout "godfearer." Godfearers were Gentiles who worshipped the God of the Jews but had not gone all the way to become Jews by being circumcised. They wanted to know God without having to obey the law of Moses. If someone, at sometime, were

- to offer these godfearers a law-free gospel, there would be a massive response all over the world. That is exactly what they are waiting for!
3. In a vision an angel instructed Cornelius to go south from Caesarea (30 mi.) to Joppa and bring Peter back. As to why he is to get Peter is not stated. In obedience Cornelius sends men to get Peter.
 4. 10.9-22: Peter's vision
 - a. As Peter was on a roof praying, he too had a vision. In it he saw unclean animals being let down from heaven on a great sheet and the Lord told him to eat them. In his horror Peter said, "Surely not Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." He could not comprehend why the Lord would ask him to eat things that had been forbidden in the law of Moses. But the vision happened three times leaving Peter thoroughly confused.
 - b. While he was contemplating the meaning of the vision, the Spirit told him that men had arrived for him and he was to go with them. Perplexed but obedient he left with them the next day and traveled with Cornelius' messengers to Caesarea.
 5. 10.23-48: The Gentiles receive the Spirit
 - a. Cornelius, meanwhile, had gathered all his friends, relatives and members of his household to hear the message of Peter. When Peter arrived to find a crowd waiting for him, he was forced to make a decision that would alter the history of the church. It was unlawful for a Jew to go into the house of a Gentile, but God had just given Peter a vision in which he had changed all the rules; he had declared the entire Mosaic law obsolete. Would Peter trust the voice of the Spirit who was the instrument of the ongoing ministry of Jesus? Was Jesus, then, making new Torah? Yes! That is exactly what he had said while he was alive and now he was saying the same thing through the Spirit. He would go in...
 - b. In a decisive moment, Peter walked across the threshold into Cornelius' house and began to share the good news of Jesus. The Spirit was so excited about coming on the Gentiles that he fell on them before Peter could even get to the end of his message! They spoke in tongues and praised God just as the Jews had. The Jews who had come with Peter marveled that "the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles," and so they baptized them.
 - c. Upon hearing that the Gentiles had received the gospel in a law-free package, the Jews from Jerusalem were furious. In a defense of his actions at headquarters Peter says, "So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us...who was I to think that I could oppose God." It is important to note here that Peter was the first Jew to have understood that God was accepting the Gentiles *as Gentiles*; i.e., they didn't have to become Jews first by being circumcised. To the Jewish mind this was unthinkable, but those listening to Peter couldn't resist his reasoning and pondered in amazement that God had even granted the Gentiles repentance unto life.
 6. It should be noted that while these are not the first Gentile converts (remember the Ethiopian eunuch? Cf. 13.19f), their initiation by the Spirit inaugurates "the era of the Gentiles."
- D. 11.19-30: The church in Antioch
1. Some of those who had been scattered from Stephen's persecution had traveled to Antioch and converted the Gentiles without knowing that they had needed apostolic approval. Apparently the Spirit didn't care! A church of Gentiles is birthed in Antioch and Barnabas is sent up from Jerusalem to monitor what was happening. Through him a great number of people came to the Lord and a mighty church took shape.

2. It is at this point that Saul of Tarsus comes back into the story. Barnabas, once again the man who can spot potential, goes and gets Saul from Tarsus so they can co-labor together in the new church.
- E. 12.1-23: Foreshadowing the Gentile mission is the first run-in with the Roman state.
1. Herod had James, the brother of John, put to the sword, and when he saw that this pleased the people, he arrested Peter.
 2. Peter was released again by an angel and returned to a praying church.
 3. Herod, however, was struck down by an angel of the Lord for his arrogance. He was eaten by worms and died. Not even the mighty state of Rome could stop the gospel. After seven state initiated persecutions against the church, the Roman emperor Constantine would convert to Christ (A.D. 312) and Christianity would conquer Rome. Rome to this day is the center of the catholic see.
- F. 12.24 The third wave concludes: *“But the word of God continued to increase and spread.”*

6. WAVE #4: THE GOSPEL TO THE GENTILES (ASIA; 13.1-16.5)

- A. 13.1-14.27: The first missionary journey
1. At this point in the narrative, everything will begin to change
 - a. Headquarters will change from Jerusalem to Antioch.
 - b. The leadership will change from Peter to Paul.
 - c. The focus will change from the Jews to the Gentiles.
 2. Just as the Holy Spirit had initiated every important event in the Church thus far, it is no different here. It is while prophets and teachers from the church at Antioch are ministering to the Lord and fasting that the Spirit spoke to them to separate Barnabas and Saul for the work to which the Lord had called them. In obedience they laid their hands on them and sent them off to make the first evangelistic thrust into Asia.
 3. Their initial apostolic strategy was to preach in the synagogues to reach both Jews and godfearers. The mission was headed for trouble from the outset, though, because the clash between a law-free gospel was good news to the Gentiles but unthinkable for the Jews.
 4. Their initial stop is on the island of Cyprus where their is yet another run-in with a sorcerer. Saul, whose name now changes to his Greek name “Paul,” pronounces judgment on him and he is struck with blindness. It is the first hint of the power by which Paul will proclaim the gospel. The proconsul of the island believes having been “impressed” with the power that confirmed the word.
 5. When they arrived in Asia Minor, their apprentice, John (also called Mark), left them to return to Jerusalem.
 - a. Paul and Barnabas will later have a severe disagreement over the meaning of this incident.
 - b. Many reasons for John’s departure have been conjectured.
 - (1) Mark is related to Barnabas and as the leadership of the apostolic mission is now changing from Barnabas to Paul, some have thought that this had soured John on the mission.
 - (2) Still others have noted that the mission is about to turn very dangerous and John is scared.
 - c. But the lack of internal loyalty will not hinder the gospel. Indeed, the word is about to make its first inroads into Asia.
 6. 13.13-51: Pisidian Antioch
 - a. When they got to Antioch in Pisidia, Luke gives us an example of Paul’s preaching in the synagogues on their first Sabbath there. His approach is to present Jesus as the Messiah predicted

- by the biblical writers, unjustly killed by the Jews, but now raised from the dead to bring the good news of the kingdom of God to all who believe.
- b. The next week “almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord” but the Jews were filled with jealousy and rejected the gospel. This is a decisive moment in the history of the Church because Paul and Barnabas declare, “*Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.*” From here on out their mission will focus first on the godfearers in the synagogues and then on complete pagans. As they do so, the churches that result take on a very “non-Jewish” character. The church of Jesus Christ takes on the cultural forms of those being ministered to and this the Jewish mind cannot comprehend. The tension will continue to mount.
 - c. The Gentiles “were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed to eternal life believed...the word of the Lord spread throughout the whole region.”
 - d. The Jews, on the other hand, incited persecution against Paul and Barnabas so they “they shook the dust from their feet” and moved on, filled with joy for all that God had done.
7. 14.1-22: Iconium, Lystra and Derbe
- a. The same patterns continue in the next towns also; the Gentiles respond favorably but the Jews are riled. The Gentile crowds in Lystra are so impressed with the miracles performed by Paul that they mistake he and Barnabas for the gods Zeus and Hermes. While Paul and Barnabas were trying to correct the errant theology of the crowd, some Jews who had come up from Antioch and Iconium stoned Paul and gave him up for dead.
 - b. In one of the greatest scenes in the book of Acts, the text says that “he got up” and went back into the very city in which he had been stoned. Had God raised him from the dead or simply revived him? Whichever is true, this is at the same time supernatural and “down right” gutsy. The next day Paul and Barnabas left for Derbe, the next city on the circuit. Not even being given up for dead can stop the gospel!
8. 14.23-28: After a harvest in Derbe, the first missionary journey closes with Paul and Barnabas returning through each of the cities and appointing elders over the young churches before returning to Syrian Antioch to report to their “home church” all that God had done among the Gentiles.
- B. 15.1-35: The Jerusalem council
1. Luke has given us hints all along that there had been problems surfacing with Jewish believers but he waits to deal with the subject all at once here in chapter 15. The particular teaching that emerges as the problem is whether or not one must be circumcised (i.e., become Jewish) to be saved. Paul had clearly been preaching a gospel where the Gentiles could be saved as Gentiles and the heat finally precipitated the original show-down at OK corral.
 2. A council convened in Jerusalem attended by a contingent from the church in Jerusalem that is now led by James, advocates from Judea who represented the “circumcision party,” and some from Antioch including Paul and Barnabas.
 3. In the course of the council, Paul and Barnabas were given the opportunity to share about all the conversions among the Gentiles, but the joy of their report was dampened by believers from the Jewish party of the Pharisees who insisted that these Gentiles must be circumcised in order to be truly saved.
 4. The ensuing discussion gave Peter the opportunity to share the story of Cornelius for the third time. It had been no less than God himself who had accepted the Gentiles as is, for it was he who had given

them the Holy Spirit. It is Peter who sums it up as the gospel of grace: “We believe that it is by the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved.”

5. The same logic that had persuaded the Jews earlier persuaded them now. How were they to argue with God? It was James, the leader in Jerusalem who renders a judgment; they are not to make it difficult for the Gentiles turn to God. With the drafting of a letter to be delivered to the Gentile churches by Paul and Barnabas, a law-free gospel is sanctioned by Jerusalem. With the baton now passed, the importance of the church in Jerusalem fades in Luke’s account. It’s all Gentiles from here on out, and nothing is going to stop it.

C. 15.36-16.5: The second missionary journey (part 1)

1. Desiring to see how the churches in Asia were doing, Paul and Barnabas now prepare for a second missionary journey. They have a “sharp disagreement,” however, over whether they should take John Mark along with them. Not being able to resolve the issue, Paul and Barnabas actually split up.
2. But instead of stopping the gospel, the split produces two teams instead of one.
 - a. Paul takes Silas and heads back into Asia Minor.
 - b. Barnabas, ever the man of the underdog, takes John Mark and goes to Cyprus.
3. Not only is the gospel not hindered from going forth, we find out from comments in passing from the epistles that both the relationships with Barnabas (cf. 1 Cor. 9.6; Gal. 2.11-13) and John Mark (cf. 1 Pt. 5.13; Col. 4.10; Phm. 24; 2 Tim. 4.11) were eventually healed.
4. The first part of the second missionary journey sees Paul:
 - a. Strengthening the churches he had planted.
 - b. Delivering the letter from James.
 - c. In Lystra he adds a valuable member to the team in a young man named Timothy. Even though he didn’t have to, he had him circumcised to better enable the gospel among the Jews.

- D. 16.5: The fourth wave concludes: “*So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.*”

7. WAVE #5: THE GOSPEL TO THE GENTILES (EUROPE; 16.6-19.20)

- A. The fifth wave of the gospel’s advance among the nations will see a shift of Paul’s focus from the east to the west where major church centers are established in cities like Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Ephesus.
- B. The material that Luke includes from these accounts shows, as we have seen throughout Acts, the progress of the gospel through church planting despite repeated attempts to stop it.
- C. 16.6-10: Going west and not east
 1. The second missionary journey was hardly underway when the apostolic team met resistance not from the Jews or Rome but from the Holy Spirit himself. The text tells us that they had “been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.”
 2. Paul and company retreat to the seaport town of Troas where God speaks to Paul in a dream. A man from Macedonia (Greece) begs Paul in the dream to come across the Aegean Sea to Greece with the gospel. When Paul awakes and shares the dream with the brothers, they immediately conclude that it is the Lord and abandon their efforts to go east.
 3. This is a major turning point in the history of the Church because the gospel now goes into Europe and not Asia. While church history tells us that at least the apostle Thomas took the gospel to India, the

church did not take root in Asia as it did in Europe. The religious vacuum in the lands to the east would see the rise of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, the greatest non-Christian religions in the history of the world. These areas of the world to this day are the least evangelized and the most resistant to the gospel.

4. Some have conjectured that the Lord sovereignly sent the gospel west because the west had a value for writing which would proliferate the transmission of the New Testament.
5. It should be noted that it is in Troas where the so-called “we” passages in Acts begins. Luke at this and other points in the story is an eye-witness to the events.

D. 16.11-40: **Philippi**

1. Lydia, a godfearer, and her family are sovereignly converted to begin the church in this Roman colony.
2. Luke records next the story of Paul’s casting out a demon from a slave girl who made money for her owners by telling fortunes. In anger the owners, who now realize that their means of making money is gone, have Paul and Silas severely flogged and thrown in prison. Things look bleak, but we have been here before.
3. An earthquake causes the prisoner’s chains to fall off and the prison doors to fly open. Upon waking to see the doors ajar, and knowing what would happen to him now, the jailer lifts up his sword to commit suicide.
4. When he is halted by Paul he exclaims, “What must I do to be saved?” He and his whole household were baptized that night.

E. 17.1-9: **Thessalonica**

1. After gaining both Jewish and godfearing converts from preaching in the synagogues, the Jews became jealous and roused a “lynch mob” declaring, “These Jews have caused trouble all over the world.” Apparently news of Paul and the gospel had traveled through the Jewish ghettos of the world.
2. For fear of the Jews, the brothers sent Paul and Silas out of the city by night.

F. 17.10-15: **Berea**

1. The next town on their route was Berea where the Jews “were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” Many Jews responded as did a number of Greeks.
2. Jews from Thessalonica trailed Paul to Berea, however, and Paul and company were forced to leave town again. They split up for safety and Paul was taken alone by escort to Athens.

G. 17:16-34: **Athens**

1. It is in Athens that we get one of the great missionary moments of the New Testament. Paul arrives in Athens all alone after what might have seemed like a discouraging start to their second thrust with the gospel. Their efforts had gone nowhere in Asia and he had now been kicked out of three towns in a row. Certainly this was a time for a good “sulk.”
2. But Paul will have none of that. He uses his time to study the culture and engages the Athenians in dialogue about the Christ, for he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.
3. Paul is eventually invited to the Areopagus, a place on Mars Hill where decisions were made about issues of religion and morals. Paul’s speech is a study in what missionaries call “contextualizing” the gospel. Through his study of their culture he had found a “point of contact” for the gospel. Somewhere in the city he had found an altar entitled “*agnosto theo*” (to an unknown god). The legend

of this altar had been recorded in Greek literature and a brilliant rendition of the facts surrounding it are found in Don Richardson's *Eternity in Their Hearts*.

- a. Greek writers and philosophers describe an incident dating back to 600 B.C. when Athens had been stricken with a plague. They had sought the advice of a Cretan named Epimenides who advised them to let a number of sheep graze on Mars Hill. If any of the sheep were to lay down in the grass at feeding time, this was to be an indication that an unknown god was acknowledging his presence and was asking for those sheep that had refused to graze to be sacrificed to him.
 - b. The legend says that some of the sheep did lay down and were sacrificed on altars built and dedicated to an "unknown god." The plague did break and from that day on there was preserved at least one altar in Athens dedicated to a benevolent god who had yet to reveal himself.
 - c. As Paul studied the city and its literature he discovered what missiologists call a "redemptive analogy" left by God within the culture and used it for the purposes God had given it - as a hook for some future preacher of the gospel.
 - d. Did Paul know the story behind this altar? We can't know for sure but we do know that he was familiar with Epimenides for he quotes the poet's description of God here in his speech ("In him we live and move and have our being" *Cretia*; cf. Tit. 1.12 where Paul quotes Epimenides again).
4. The result of this "connection" was that some of the men of Athens believed, one of whom was Dionysius who later tradition tells us became the first bishop of the church in Athens.

H. 18.1-28: **Corinth**

1. After leaving Athens, Paul was met with the same Jewish resistance in the thriving metropolis of Corinth. Thus far he has failed to gain firm ground in any of the cities of Greece. Hadn't he seen a vision of a man begging him to come to Greece? These Greeks did not seem to be begging for the gospel!
 2. After the Jews rejected him, Paul declares in exasperation, "From now on I will go to the Gentiles." As he does so, he begins to find the harvest he had anticipated. The text says that "many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized."
 3. In confirmation that Paul had finally struck pay-dirt, God spoke to Paul in a vision. He told him to continue without fear saying, "I have many people in this city." Paul stayed 1 1/2 years and, at last, built a solid church in Greece.
 4. We also see here the introduction of Apollos, one of the most gifted teachers in the early church.
- I. The second missionary journey comes to a close as Paul sails from Greece back to Antioch. Enroute, however, he made a brief stop in the Asian city of Ephesus, a city he will return to for a mighty harvest on his third missionary journey.

J. 19.1-41: **Ephesus**

1. After a respite in Antioch, Paul ventured out again, this time to an anticipated harvest in Ephesus. As was his typical pattern he began in the synagogue and preached the kingdom of God until the resistance became so great that he moved out exclusively to work with the Gentiles. He led discussions daily for two years in the lecture hall of Tyrannus and had so much success "that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord."
2. Luke seems to indicate that Paul's tenure here was characterized by unusual demonstrations of the power of the Holy Spirit. Even articles of clothing that had touched Paul were used to heal the sick. Many sick and demonized were freed and the name of Jesus was held in high honor among the people.

Even those who had been involved in the occult were freed. At one point those who had practiced sorcery destroyed hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of occult literature in a public burning.

K. 19.20: the fifth wave concludes: *“In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.”*

8. WAVE #6: THE GOSPEL TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH (ROME; 19.21-28.31)

A. 20.1-21.17: Paul’s journey to Jerusalem

1. It is at this point that Paul decides to go to Jerusalem to personally deliver money collected by his predominately Gentile churches for the churches in Judea. This collection was a matter of great urgency for him for he wanted to show the Jewish brethren that the Gentiles cared about them (cf. 1 Cor. 16.1-4). The churches in Judea had perhaps become impoverished due to the famine predicted by the prophet Agabus (cf. 11.27-29).
2. After delivering the money, Paul intended to go to Rome and then on to Spain in his efforts to expand the kingdom.
3. After Luke’s account of a riot in Ephesus that came to naught, Paul began his long journey to Jerusalem. Instead of sailing direct he was rerouted inland due to another Jewish plot to take his life.
4. As Paul lectured all night in Troas due to his departure the next morning, a young boy named Eutychus fell asleep in a window and dropped three stories to his death. Paul ran downstairs, stretched himself out on him, and he came back to life! Paul continued to teach until daybreak and then continued on his way.
5. Not wanting to be deterred in Ephesus, Paul sailed to Miletus where he sent for the Ephesian elders. In one of the most poignant scenes in the New Testament, Paul gives these men his final good-bye knowing that he would never see them again. We see here something of the servant lifestyle of the great apostle and the deep love these men shared for one another.
6. In his final stop in Caesarea, the prophet Agabus prophesied that imprisonment awaited Paul in Jerusalem but he refused to be deterred. He wanted to personally deliver the love gift from the Gentile churches.

B. 21.17-26.32: Paul on trial

1. Luke now begins the long narration of Paul’s trial sequence where Paul will have to defend himself no less than five times. Luke is making it very clear to his Gentile readers that Paul and his gospel were innocent of all charges, even as Jesus had been. The Jews, on the other hand, were hardened of heart and despite all their attempts, nothing was going to stop the gospel. The Holy Spirit had determined that it was going to the ends of the earth, and so it would be!
2. 21.27-22.29: **Before the Jewish mob**
 - a. Paul finally arrives in Jerusalem in 21.17 and is warmly greeted by the brothers. Their warmth is tempered, however, by their prediction that the Jews would try to harm him. This they did as Paul was trying to fulfill a vow in the temple to demonstrate his heart for the law. Someone recognized him and a riot ensued. If it hadn’t been for the intervention of the Romans, he would have been killed.
 - b. They were accusing Paul of essentially the same things that had accused Stephen of.
 - (1) Paul was against the Jews
 - (2) Paul was against the law of Moses
 - (3) Paul was against the temple

- c. Granting his request to address the crowd, Paul gave his first defense. At the point where he explained that Jewish rejection had forced him to take the gospel to the Gentiles, the Jews went berserk. Again the Romans had to protect him with custody. They would have flogged him but when he told them that he was a Roman citizen, they were shaken. It was against Roman law to do so.
3. 22.30-23.22: **Before the Sanhedrin**
 - a. The next day, the Roman commander stood Paul before the Sanhedrin to give his defense. Paul purposely divided the assembly by highlighting the doctrine of the resurrection. The Pharisees believed in a final resurrection but the Sadducees did not. Paul thus polarized his opponents and caused such an uproar that the Romans feared he would be torn to pieces.
 - b. The following night the Lord “stood by Paul” in his cell and assured him that he would be preserved, for God had purposed that he preach the gospel in Rome.
 - c. When a plot to kill Paul is brought to the attention of the Roman commander, he is dispatched by night to Caesarea to stand trial before Felix, the Roman governor.
4. 23.23-24.26: **Before Felix**
 - a. Five days later, Paul had a hearing before Felix. His accusers had now secured the services of a lawyer but they could not produce any solid evidence to prove Paul’s guilt. Paul, on the other hand, continued to maintain his innocence.
 - b. Felix put off the trial until the arrival of the Roman commander, but Paul wound up languishing in jail for two years until the Romans replaced Felix with a new governor, Porcius Festus.
5. 24.27-25.12: **Before Festus**
 - a. Hardly able to unpack his bags, the Jews presented their case to Festus and begged him for Paul’s transfer to Jerusalem because they were hoping to ambush him on the way. Festus refused, however, and another hearing convened in Caesarea. Once again the Jews presented a case that could not be proven while Paul continued to maintain his innocence.
 - b. Again the Jews requested Paul’s transfer to Jerusalem, knowing that they were going nowhere with the legal system. Their only hope for “justice” was murder. Probably sensing where things are heading, Paul appeals his case to Rome and the highest court in the land.
6. 25.13-27: **Before Herod Agrippa II**
 - a. It was while King Agrippa was visiting the new governor that Festus asked for his help. He had hoped that with Agrippa’s background he could help him understand the ways of the Jews and this new sect called “the Way.”
 - b. Once again Rome could find nothing wrong with Paul. Just as Jesus had been innocent before the Roman courts, so also now. Luke/Acts thus shows its Gentile readers that the gospel of God’s grace has always been opposed yet has always been innocent.
 - c. Agrippa makes the comment that if Paul had not appealed to Caesar, he would have been free to go. Under the sovereign plan of God, however, he was destined for Rome.
- C. 27.1-28.10: The journey to Rome
 1. Despite Paul’s prophetic warning, the centurion who was in charge of the ship ordered them to sail into the fair winds. The “northeaster” came on them suddenly and with a great fury. They eventually broke up on a sandbar and swam to shore after almost two weeks without food.

2. A Poisonous viper bites Paul on the island of Malta but he does not die. The islanders think he is a god. Giving the credit to Jesus' power, he prays successfully for all the sick on the island.
 3. Three months later they set sail for Rome.
- D. 28.11-31: Rome!
1. When in Rome, Paul calls for the Jews who live there so they can present their case to the Roman courts. But they have no knowledge of the case!
 2. Paul is put under house arrest and freely shares the good news about Jesus and the kingdom of God for two years. In this way, even though the man is chained, the gospel is not. The word of the Lord cannot be stopped and will continue to spread.
 3. Luke concludes his account by citing the standard New Testament "proof text" from the prophet Isaiah for why the Jews have persisted in resisting the gospel when it is the fulfillment of all the law and the prophets. Isaiah's explanation is that God has supernaturally hardened their hearts (cf. Mt. 13.14-15 and par.; Rom. 11.7-10, 25). Paul will go on in Romans to prophecy that while this hardening coincides with the Gentiles receptivity, the Gentile harvest will one day provoke the Jews to so much jealousy that there will be a massive Jewish harvest and "all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11.26).
 4. Luke ends his account with Paul alive. By reaching Rome which is the center of the civilized world, Luke is saying that the gospel had indeed reached the ends of the earth. The clear inference is that the book of Acts will continue to be written, not as inspired Scripture, but as church history, until all things are fulfilled.
- E. 28.31: The sixth wave concludes: *"Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ."*