

## ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

All quotes from Robert Wall in the New Interpreters' Bible unless otherwise indicated.

- 1) INTRO – Almost certainly written by Luke, after his gospel which he wrote c 85 CE or even later. All of the letters of Paul were written long before Luke wrote Acts and he was probably familiar with most if not all of them. The "first part" is the gospel of Luke. Dr. Robert Wall, who wrote the exegesis for the NIB, believes that Theophilus was a real person, probably a wealthy Greek patron and a God-fearer before converting to Jesus. A word of caution by Dr. Wall: "According to Acts, discipleship is defined in terms of active witness to the risen Christ, rather than a deeply affecting relationship with him...Acts' overemphasis in the life of the church can replace the centrality of an abiding relationship with the living Jesus that ultimately saps the spiritual energy we believe is drawn from him." /// The speeches which take up about one-third of the book are almost certainly literary creations of Luke, inserted to please and instruct the reader, embodying Luke's interpretation of the emergence of the new church. /// Although there is considerable discussion among scholars as to whether Luke was a companion of Paul, there are at least three places where it seems clear that he **was** with Paul: Philemon 24, Colossians 4:14, 2 Timothy 4:11. There are also many "we" passages in the book of Acts: 16:10-17, 20:5-10, 21:1-18. /// "Acts of the Apostles" is a misnomer – it is the "Acts of the Holy Spirit." Very little is written about any of the apostles other than Paul.

### Six distinct theological emphases:

- 1) Irenic, or conciliatory. Consolidating disparate faith communities.
- 2) Polemic: against idolatry.
- 3) Apologia for Christianity: underscores the authority and importance of the early church, specially its relationship with Rome, that it should not be compromised by obligation of citizenship.
- 4) As a tool of the church's evangelistic mission, to teach Theophilus and others how to relate to others who come in contact with the new Christians.
- 5) With pastoral intent, to deepen the fragile faith of Theophilus and others, to locate them chronologically within the historical movement, to emphasize the sharing of goods (especially to the urban well-to-do).
- 6) In response to a theological crisis: confusion or misappropriation of some core aspects of God's Word – such as the changing belief that Jesus's return was imminent, and the continuing unbelief of the Jews that God had sent Jesus to restore historic Israel. This was worrisome because some believers considered the destruction of Jerusalem as the Jews' just deserts for rejecting Jesus as the Messiah. But without this legacy the church could not be the church. Paul, in Romans 11:25-36, posits a full restoration of historic Israel to the Christian church, whereas Luke, 30-40 years later, is resigned to a permanent divided Israel (3:19-23).

### Reading Acts as theology:

Luke's "master story" in Acts is intended to orient the reader to the principal elements of God's "master plan" for the salvation of the world. Those elements are:

- 1) God, the only God, has a plan of salvation disclosed in Israel's scriptures.
- 2) According to the prophecy's script, Jesus of Nazareth is God's Messiah, the only savior, who realizes God's redemptive purpose as attested by his prophetic ministry and resurrection.
- 3) All who earnestly repent and call upon the living Jesus will be saved, the Jew first and also the Gentile.
- 4) Those who repent and belong to the Lord Jesus Christ receive the Holy Spirit and are initiated into the community of goods.
- 5) The community's resurrection hope during the last days is for the return of Jesus and the promised season of universal restoration he will fulfill.

Wall makes it clear that failure to study and understand Acts gives the reader a distorted picture of the gospels that precede it and Paul's letters that follow.

- 2) 1:2-3 – “Though God rarely appears as a character in Acts, God’s plan for human history controls the plot line of the story.” /// See Luke 24:50-53 where Jesus appears to ascend on Easter day. /// Luke here confines Jesus’ appearance wholly in Jerusalem, whereas the gospels report him to be in Galilee also. /// Three signals alert the reader to the importance of what’s to come: 1) Jesus leaving the earth inaugurates the ministry of the apostles. 2) It is the Holy Spirit that empowers the apostles, continuing the “Spirit of prophecy” that empowered the OT prophets. 3) Emphasizes that Jesus had chosen these apostles after a night of prayer (Luke 6:12) from all his disciples. /// The term Luke uses for “many convincing proofs” is “tekm\_rion,” found only here in the NT, and used in ancient rhetoric to indicate hard evidence that convinces the skeptic.
- 3) 1:9-12 – In Jewish legend, introduced by Philo c 40 CE, Moses also ascended bodily into heaven. He was therefore able to appear with Elijah in Jesus’s transfiguration. Wall claims that the “two men” who appear to the apostles in 1:10 are Moses and Elijah. Deuteronomy 19:15 states that one witness is not enough, that there must be two or three. Two angels appeared to the women at the empty tomb. Were they the same two in all three occasions? Not if they were Elijah and Moses at Jesus’s transfiguration. /// A “sabbath day’s walk.” 2,000 cubits, about 3,000 feet, or a little over half a mile. That figure is never given in the Bible. It derives from two sources. One, in Exodus 16:29, Moses commands the Israelites not to leave their place on the sabbath. Two, in Numbers 35:4-5, instructions are given as to how to build their towns. Their pastures were to be 1,000 cubits (1500 feet) from the city walls and extend another 1,000 cubits further out. One could walk around all day within that 2,000 cubit area (their “place”), but could not go further than 2,000 cubits in a straight line.
- 4) 1:14 – Public prayers in a group is not to solicit God’s benefaction (they’ve already experienced that), nor to ensure that God will fulfill what he promised, but to demonstrate their spiritual unity in the missionary vocation.

#### 4.5) REFLECTIONS ON 1:1-14

Acts is primarily a theological book: God is faithful to Jesus. God makes promises to Israel and intends to keep them. God’s people worship and pray, confident that God will keep his promises. Enabled by God’s Spirit, the community will preach, teach, perform miracles to awaken the people to God’s rule.

- 5) 1:15-26 – The verbs used makes it clear that it was Judas’s choice, not God’s, that he defected from the “ministry.” Luke is trying to make it clear that both Judas’s suicide and Matthias’s selection were acts of God only because of freely made human choices.
- 6) 2:1-4 – 50 days after Passover -- see Lev 23:15-16. The Jewish “Feast of Weeks,” a harvest festival. “When the day of Pentecost had come” – meaning that Jews from all over the world had come to Jerusalem for the celebration, swelling its population from one-half million to three-four million. Luke among all the NT writers makes this scene a big deal. John in 20:22 has Jesus “breathing the Spirit” onto his disciples after his resurrection. Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:6 has Jesus appearing to 500 people but says nothing about Jesus’s spirit. /// Wall likens this episode to Moses’ theophany on Mt. Sinai, with the symbolism of fire, sound, and speech. /// Being “filled with the Holy Spirit” confers on the individual the ability to replace the human intellect with a divinely inspired intellect, giving him an enriched capacity to exegete Scripture – to interpret the biblical word of God. Also to have keen insight into the human condition. This Spirit is not confined to the apostles but belongs to the people as shared, permanent property.
- 7) 2:5-13 – This passage emphasizes each man **hearing** in his own language more than it does the

**speaking** in tongues. There were about five million Jews scattered around the world, two million in Judea. All spoke Greek and many Aramaic. Did the apostles speak a mixture, and therefore all who heard them understood something? /// Weatherhead, in *The Christian Agnostic: What surprised the multitude* was that Galilean peasants could speak in eloquent Greek, the lingua franca of the entire known world then. /// Wall: This “gift of tongues” should not be confused with the spiritual gift of glossolalia (1 Corinthians chapters 12-14). Luke has **all** the apostles speaking in **foreign** languages. Paul spoke of a special language given to a few believers to edify the entire congregation. /// Some exegetes believe that God is reversing the curse of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). But Wall thinks that that typology would be more effective if all the various people heard the disciples speaking in one language. /// In v.10, “proselytes” refers to Gentiles who had converted to Judaism.

**Geography:** Parthia -- Afghanistan. Media -- western Afghanistan, eastern Iraq. Elam -- eastern Iraq. Mesopotamia -- Iran. Cappadocia and Pontus -- eastern Turkey. Phrygia and Pamphlia -- western Turkey. Note that Parthia and Elam no longer existed as nations. Also, the inclusion of Judeans is strange because they spoke the same languages as the apostles.

- 8) 2:10 – Proselytes here were “God-lovers” but not associated with a formal religion. Many became Christians when they heard Jesus’s message.
- 9) 2:14-41 – One third of Acts are speeches, probably Luke’s compositions to convince readers of the gospels’ central claims: God’s resurrection of Jesus confirms him as Messiah who will fulfill the biblical promise to save the world from sin and death.
- 10) 2:14 – Luke uses a very unusual word for “Listen.” He uses “en\_tizomai” which literally means “Let me place the word of God in your ears.” Moses used the same word in Exodus 15:26, when talking to the wandering Israelites. Also used by Luke in his gospel story of Jesus in Nazareth telling the congregation that the prophecy of Isaiah had that day been fulfilled for those “with ears,” or “in your hearing” (4:21).
- 11) 2:17-21 – Peter has “rewritten” Joel’s prophecy (Joel 2:28-32) in two ways: 1) substituted “in the last days” for “afterwards,” 2) added “God says....” /// Compare 2:22 to 15:12. The only difference is that Peter is describing what God has done among the Israelites, whereas for Paul it is the Gentiles. This gives us a fuller understanding of Joel’s prophecy. /// In 2:19-20, the original intent of these “special effects” in prophetic writings was the imminent “Day of the Lord,” a judgment on all the nations that had treated Israel badly. Peter uses these portents to signify the coming of God’s salvation to all people.
- 12) 2:34-36 – **The Jewish argument against Jesus being the Messiah.** In the first couple chapters of Matthew and Luke, Jesus’ lineage from David is given, and his birth in Bethlehem. Nowhere else is this taken into account. Instead, he is identified as being of Nazareth, as in Matth 21:10-11, and John 7:41. Suppose that it is only a legend of late origin that, one, Jesus was born in Bethlehem and, two, that he was of Davidic descent. Then Jesus would have to prove that the Messiah did **not** have to be of Davidic descent. He does this by quoting Psalms 110:1, where the second “lord” is the Messiah, and David would never address his own descendant as a superior. That is, the “lord” he refers to must be someone other than Jesus, who **was** a descendant, and therefore **not** his “lord.” (For Christians, this argument is fanciful, if for no other reason than that a descendant **can** be greater and worthy of the term “lord.”) To the Jew, this passage then presents only the “historic Jesus,” a Galilean carpenter who insisted on being regarded as the Messiah. /// If you read 110:1 in this way -- “The Lord *says to you*, my Lord, “Take your throne...”” -- then David is saying to *Jesus, his Lord*, to take his throne.
- 13) 2:38-40 – Although Peter knows that God did not give Judas a second chance, he assures the Jews

that they are being given a second chance. /// (It sounds to me that one must be baptized in order to have one's sins forgiven. You repent your sins, you're baptized and **then** your sins are forgiven.)

- 14) 2:42-47 – God's grace does not privilege the rich and famous; it's for everyone but only because of the empty tomb and **after** Pentecost. This new community of converts is a repentant Israel to whom the kingdom of God has been restored. /// This seems to us to be impractical, unrealistic, of another world, but to Luke this **was** the real world. Luke is not interested in **production** of goods but in **sharing** what they already have. Class divisions are dismantled under the aegis of the Holy Spirit because social inequity "fosters no good thing."
- 15) 3:1-9 – The choice of a lame beggar is not arbitrary on Luke's part. Leviticus 21:17-20 excludes from the temple many kinds of physical deformity, including lameness. The healing by Peter of a lame man – and his immediate entrance into the temple with them – is symbolic of the dawning of the messianic age when even flawed people can participate in God's kingdom. "The boundaries of Israel will one day be redrawn to include repentant beggars and the restored lame..." /// Almost identical to Paul's healing in 14:8-18. /// Why does Luke make such a point of the eye contract? Because the demonstration of divine mercy is always a personal concern. /// There's a problem with "Solomon's Portico." Josephus describes it as a shelter **outside** the Temple for Greek visitors to Jerusalem. So Wall thinks that Luke's knowledge of the Temple is suspect. /// Luke's choice of words for the response by the crowd is *ekstasis*, which nicely captures their feeling of ecstasy at this encounter with God..
- 16) 3:13-16 – Scholars see a clear connection here with 1 Peter 2 and Isaiah 52:13 and most of Isaiah 53, the "suffering servant" theme. Luke makes the execution of Jesus the primary symbol of unrepentant Israel, and believing that Jesus is the Messiah the primary mark of repentant Israel.
- 17) 3:21-25 – Luke's emphasis on the church's present mission should not overlook the "end of time" when all the families will be saved, including the Gentiles.
- 18) 4:1-5 – Sadducees were devout laity from wealthy Jerusalem families, close to political and financial institutions, but without direct power on temple protocol. Luke in Acts portrays them as the single most important group responsible for a divided Israel. They didn't believe in the resurrection so were offended by Peter's insistence on a raised Jesus. The men in v. 5 would be the Sanhedrin. Membership in the Sanhedrin: family pedigree (priests), social prominence (elders), education (scribes). Sadducees maintained control over all matters in the Sanhedrin. except legal matters pertaining to ethical issues, which would be resolved by the Pharisees.
- 19) 4:9-12 – Here and throughout Acts the verb "sozo" has the double meaning of "to heal" and "to save," echoing Joel's prophecy (see Acts 2:17-21). The psalm quoted is 118:22.
- 20) 4:19-20 – Luke's first readers would have known Plato's account of Socrates' trial where he responded to the Athenian civil jury: "I will obey the god rather than you – and never cease from the practice of teaching philosophy." (See also Daniel 3:16-18, 2 Maccabees 7:2.)
- 21) 4:21-23 – Emphasizes the deep division between the rulers and the people. Also the deep theological division between the rulers and God. They cannot bridge the division between repentant and unrepentant Israel.
- 22) 4:24-31 – Herod is Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee, son of "The Great," temporarily in Jerusalem during Jesus's "trial." Psalm 2:1-2 celebrates the enthronement of David as Israel's king and alludes to the competition already at work to plot his overthrow. In the psalm "Gentiles" is "nations." Luke obviously believes this is what the apostles face. Still, the following prayer indicates that there is a deeply rooted belief in God's provident care. The Lord's response in v. 31 is immediate and dramatic.

- 23) 4:33 – The apostles’ power does not derive from education or social status but is mediated only in the “name of Jesus.” But they themselves were not to be considered deities to be worshiped.
- 24) 4:36 – Joseph bar-nabas (“Son of Encouragement”) – a diaspora Jew from Cyprus – as Levite he should not have owned land, according to ancient tradition when the promised land was allocated to the other 11 tribes. /// That his name was changed underscores the authority of the apostles.
- 25) 5:1-11 – It is unimportant to know how Peter found out about Ananias’s deception. /// Selling one’s property and distributing the proceeds to the community was apparently voluntary (v. 4). /// Ben Witherington constructs a plausible reason for Ananias’s death: heart attack resulting from being publicly shamed by Peter. (JB: And Sapphira, the same?)
- 26) 5:12-16 – Peter’s shadow curing people is hyperbolic, but does recognize that Peter radiates power for the purpose of witness. /// The phrase “the rest dared not join...” cannot be explained satisfactorily. Perhaps the as-yet-not-believing Jews held the apostles in high regard and dared not join them because they had not yet called on the a “name of Jesus.”
- 27) 5:17-28 – Probably the same group who controlled the court that crucified Jesus, in opposition to the rules of the Pharisees. The prison symbolizes hostility against God’s redemptive plan. The captors’ befuddlement is testimony to their ignorance of God’s plan. The apostles’ return to the temple shows their confidence in God’s protective care. /// J. D. Dunn suggests that the “angel” was actually the bold work of a sympathizer on the prison staff. /// The word in Greek translated in v 24 as “perplexed” is the same one used by Luke to describe the reaction of the pious Jews to Peter’s speech on Pentecost.
- 28) 5:29-31 – Quoted by Calvin, Luther, Niemöller, and civil disobedience activists. Wall: A clear allusion to a lynching as prescribed in Deuteronomy 21:22-23. /// Peter points out that it was the same God who guided their ancestors who raised Jesus to be the salvation of **all** Israel, including the elders standing before them. /// Peter’s “civil disobedience” does not serve political ends, but missionary ends. /// “Savior” used for the first time in Acts.
- 29) 5:34-41 – Gamaliel was the grandson of Rabbi Hillel, and Saul’s mentor -- see Acts 22:3. Hillel was one of the most prominent rabbis and his work and reputation remained so for hundreds of years. This story is told of him (recounted by Karen Armstrong in *The Spiral Staircase*): Unbelievers came to him and one said he would convert to Judaism if Hillel could recite the whole of the Torah while standing on one leg. He did so, saying, “Do not do unto others as you would not have done unto you. That is the Torah. The rest is commentary. Go and learn it.” Tradition has it that the man was so impressed that he did study the Torah and did convert. (Armstrong believes that Jesus was a Pharisee because he taught a slightly different version of Hillel’s Golden Rule.) Scholars in general tend to believe that this speech by Gamaliel is conciliatory and in support of Peter. However, Luke T. Johnson believes that the speech is “disingenuous” and hypocritical, that the Sanhedrin’s Sadducees would not let a Pharisee speak unless they expected his support. Gamaliel therefore is cynical and expects the apostles to fail. /// We are reminded again that the Pharisees were not “pious nitpickers” but were devout believers who held rigidly to the laws of Moses. They often met in informal groups for Bible study and prayer. They were more likely to accept the apostles’ preaching than were the Sadducees. /// Luke Johnson also points out that Theudas’s popular uprising occurred ten years after Gamaliel’s speech, according to Josephus. /// V. 41 has produce guilt in believers to the point of self-inflicted suffering, a sort of “sanctified masochism.”
- 30) 6:1-6 – The Hellenists may have been Jews from the diaspora, speaking Greek, living in separate enclaves in Jerusalem. The Hebrews were Jerusalem Jews who spoke Aramaic. All recognized the authority of the 12, but the Hellenists may have had their own culture and the widows were

neglected. But thus begins the delegation by the 12 of their leadership in the spread of the gospel. All seven men have Greek names.

- 31) 6:7 – It is estimated that there were 18,000 “priests” in Jerusalem at the time, most with little responsibility, little money, low in public esteem, perhaps drawn to the Jesus-movement by the availability of food.
- 32) 6:9-11 – “Synagogue of Freedmen” was a religious movement within diaspora Judaism, comprised of former slaves. Apparently there was a “local chapter” in Jerusalem. V. 10 fulfills the prophecy of Jesus recorded in Luke 21:15. In v. 11, where they falsely accuse Stephen of blasphemy against God, they themselves are breaking Moses’s law of bringing false witness.
- 33) 6:14-15 – Jesus didn’t say that **he** would destroy the temple. In Luke 21:6 he says that pagans would, and in John 2:19 he says, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” And, of course, he was probably referring to his own body. V. 15 echoes the OT story of Moses’ descent from Sinai when his face shone because he had seen God. The irony is that it is Stephen who has been accused of blaspheming Moses.
- 34) 7:1-53 – Stephen never directly responds to the charges. He merely recalls a selection of stories that “carry his theological freight.” He makes these points:
  - 1) God is the principal subject of Israel’s story and God’s provident care throughout Israel’s history is its main predicate.
  - 2) God grants wisdom, special insight, and signs and wonders to those chosen and called by God to lead the repentant Israel.
  - 3) Unrepentant Israel is a “stiff-necked” people.
  - 4) The Lord God’s activity on behalf of Israel is not bounded by a particular place of worship or time of salvation.
- 35) 7:15-16 – There are some problems here. 1) According to Genesis 50:13, Jacob was buried in Hebron. 2) In Genesis 33:19, it is Jacob, not Abraham, who bought a plot of land in Shechem from the sons of Hamor. And he bought land, not a tomb. 3) However, in Joshua 24:32, it is the bones of Joseph who was buried in the plot of land that Jacob had bought, so that it becomes a tomb after all, many years later. 4) The Samaritan Shechem was scorned by the Jews because of its association with Mt. Gerizim, the most sacred site of the Samaritan religion. Wall suggests that perhaps Stephen was contending that true worship of God is not relegated to a single place.
- 36) 7:41-43 – The “host of heaven” derives from 1 Kings 22:19 and Jeremiah 7:18, and probably denotes astral powers such as angels and/or gods. Israel failed in the wilderness by turning to handmade idols and human calculations, neither of which leads to communion with God. /// Moloch and Rephan (Remphan) are Babylonian deities. Moloch demanded child sacrifice by burning them alive. Rephan is a star-god, probably Saturn.
- 37) 7:44-50 – “The words Stephen uses – land, tent, worship, God, our ancestors – shifts the definition of worship from the routines of a permanent structure to the dynamic presence of a transcendent God.”
- 38) 7:51-53 – Stephen switches from defending himself to accusing the elders of 1) being “stiff-necked” – the same word used by God in condemning the Israelites in Exodus 33:3,5. 2) “Uncircumcised of heart and ears” – reversing the definition of covenant renewal in Deuteronomy 30:6, where God will circumcise Israel’s hearts and echoes Jeremiah 6:10 where he accuses Israel of having ears that are circumcised so they can’t obey. 3) Forever opposing the Holy spirit – Isaiah 63:10. 4) Behave like **your** ancestors did – distancing himself from the Jews before him.
- 39) 7:54 - 8:3 – Stephen’s death marks a turning point in the church’s mission – it will shift from Jerusalem to the rest of the world. Also introduces us to Saul. In v 56 Jesus stands before

heaven's jury to give testimony in support of his servant Stephen. The first Christian martyr was therefore not one of the original disciples, nor even of the "Hebrew" party, but a Hellenist Jew of the "Grecian" party.

- 40) 8:4-8 – Philip is a “prophet-like-Jesus” vested with power by the Spirit to continue what Jesus had begun in Samaria (John 4:1-42 – the woman at the well to whom he gives “living water”). This Philip was a deacon of the church (see 6:5), not one of the twelve.
- 41) 8:9-24 – From Simon's attempt to buy this religious "power," we get the word "simony" and "simoniacal," the buying of religious offices. Writings of early Christians indicate that Simon fell away from the church and founded Christian Gnosticism and the Simonians, a heretical sect for two centuries. But why didn't Peter want Simon to be a missionary? Why didn't he just say he didn't need to pay for it because it was a gift?
- 42) 8:26-40 – The road to Gaza was not through wilderness, but went through at least two cities, Bethlehem and Hebron. But the story does parallel Luke 24, the Road to Emmaus. /// The eunuch was a diaspora Jew, the treasurer of Candace (Kandake), who was queen of Ethiopia, which geographically was what is now northern Sudan. Candace (Kandake) was the name of all the queens of Nubia in Roman times. So the treasurer more properly should be called a Nubian. He was a Jew, probably descended from Jewish mercenaries brought by Psamtik II of Egypt in the 26th dynasty to Elephantine Island c 593 BC, in the time of Jeremiah, to guard the Nile from incursions of Nubians from the south. /// He has made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem even though as a eunuch he can't enter the Temple. He is reading the Messianic text in Isaiah 56 which also includes 56:8 which says God promises “to gather the outcasts of Israel” and grant them a future with God. /// We know nothing of what happened to the eunuch but we know from Acts 21:8-10 that Philip established a mission in Caesarea Maritime. Irenaus claims that the eunuch founded the Ethiopian church, but there is no other hard evidence of this. V. 40: Azotus is Ashdod, 25 miles north of Gaza.
- 43) 9:1-19 – Compare this version to 1 Corinthians 15:8 where Paul says Jesus “appeared to me,” and to 1 Corinthians 9:1 where he says, “Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?” Actually this whole story (1-19) has serious problems, according to Gary Wills (*What Paul Meant*): 1) Ananias's role: In Galatians 1:16 Paul says he “consulted no flesh and blood.” 2) The Romans were not hostile to the Christians and would not have allowed Paul to “snort threats of murder” and haul people out of their homes. 3) Jews under Roman occupation could not put men to death. 4) The high priest could not have authorized Paul to arrest anyone *in a foreign country*. 5) Paul in his telling of his conversion says nothing of falling to the ground, being blinded, needing Ananias to restore his sight. Wills believes that “Luke's *faction* (a word coined by Bennet Cerf, one of the founders and senior editor at Random House, fifty years ago, to describe fiction based on some actual fact or facts) has replaced far more interesting facts.” /// In v. 17, Ananias welcomes Saul to the Christian community with the words, “Brother Saul.” /// In v 19, Paul is filled with the Holy Spirit, but is not baptized with water.
- 44) 9:23 – In Galatians 1:18, Paul says he was gone for three years before returning to Jerusalem. Tradition has him in Petra with the Nabateans, in what is now southern Jordan. In 2 Corinthians 11:32, he says it was King Aretas (a Nabatean living in Damascus, Syria) who wanted to kill him. Jerome Murphy O'Connor says he remained in Tarsus for 8-10 years with nothing known about what he did or why he stayed so long after his conversion experience.
- 45) 9:43 – Peter stayed in Joppa with Simon, a tanner, connecting Simon to Jewish purity even though tanning was an “unclean” trade. Connects his prophetic mission with Jonah's, who also left on his mission from Joppa. Jonah received a call to take the Word of God from Joppa to Gentile Nineveh

(Jonah 1:3). Perhaps remembering that Peter's Aramaic name is Simon bar Jonah, Luke repeats Jonah's story with Peter, a Jew converting Gentiles to their faith.

#### 46) REFLECTIONS ON ACTS 9:1- 45

- 1) Paul is not converted from one religion to another but remains a Jew converted to Jesus.
  - 2) Paul is changed by his encounter with the living Jesus – the change is graphic: he had headed for Damascus with “authority and purpose.” He is led into the city blind and helpless and finds that he’s the persecuted one.
  - 3) The conversion is the means to a missionary end – not sanctified self-absorption.
  - 4) Care must be taken not to use this story as a model for all Christian conversions. Many Christians never sense sudden epiphany, but can’t remember when they weren’t Christians.
- 46) 10:3 – Three in the afternoon was the time set aside by pious Jews for religious observance for all to see. /// Cornelius’s prayers have “ascended” like OT sacrifices “ascended” to please the nostrils of God. Though the content of his prayers are unknown, it’s reasonable to infer that the angelic vision is a response to them.
- 47) 10:34-35 – “began to speak”: literally, “opened his mouth,” a literary convention of the time indicating that the speech is inspired. Referring to Deuteronomy 10:17 (“...the great God who is not partial and takes no bribes”) and 2 Chronicles 19:7 (“for there is no perversion of justice with the Lord our God, or partiality, or taking of bribes”). Meaning that God does not discriminate by ethnic group or nationality, but does single out those who do right in his eyes
- 48) 10:43 – “Scripture witness” makes sense because as a God-fearing Gentile, Cornelius would recognize the authority of Israel’s scriptures.
- 49) 10:48 – So Cornelius and those with him became the first *Gentile* Christians who had not accepted Judaism -- including circumcision – first. A Gentile Pentecost.
- 50) 11:1-3 – The problem now facing the Jerusalem church is that they not only share food and money, etc., but also now are faced with sharing the same “spiritual food,” the gift of the Holy spirit.
- 51) 11:12-14 – Two differences from 10:9-33: 1) Paul cleverly claims six witnesses to Peter’s trustworthy report, 2) Cornelius mentioned not being of an angelic promise that Peter’s message would be the means “by which you and your entire household will be saved.”
- 52) 11:19-26 – Phoenicia: “purple dye people” – remnants of what is now northern Israel and Lebanon – major producers of purple dye from murex snails – circa 1000 BCE – in the next several hundred years they expanded westward and introduced the alphabet to much of the then-known world. At the same time, the nation state of Israel was established from 12 loosely confederated tribes. Seymour Gitin (BAR Nov/Dec ‘05) says that there is unambiguous evidence of settlement of “the people of Israel” in the 13<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. /// Luke recalls 8:3 and the fact that there was a considerable diaspora after the murder of Stephen. Barnabas was one of those who had fled to Cyprus and now is back in Jerusalem and is sent to Tarsus to find Paul. (Why at this particular time?) /// In v 23 Luke uses word play when he says that Barnabas exhorted (“encouraged”) the people to remain faithful.
- 53) 11:25 – **Saul - Paul.**
- From the tribe of Benjamin (Phil 3:5).
  - Named for King Saul, also a Benjamite.
  - Born in Tarsus, in Cilicia (now in south-central Turkey), at that time a city under Roman rule but with Phoenician history and Greek culture. Famous for the first meeting in its harbor of Cleopatra and Mark Antony, the latter living there as local ruler after Julius Caesar was assassinated.
  - Born c 10 AD to a well-to-do family, with Roman citizenship & its privileges (Acts 22:25).

Jerome Murphy-O'Connor: Paul's parents were forced to move to Tarsus by the Romans in one of the Roman purges of Palestine that sent Jews to all part of the Empire -- the Diaspora. These were in 61, 55, 52, 4 BCE, 6 AD. They had lived in Gischala, either a town or a region in Galilee. They probably went as slaves or bondmen and were freed and given Roman citizenship by their owners.

- Not much known about his relatives, but did have at least one sister and nephew (Acts 23: 16).
- Sent to religious school in Jerusalem where he learned Aramaic well enough to preach and teach in it (Acts 21:40, 22:2). Not known what year he went there. If he arrived 3-4 years before the stoning of Stephen, he would have been in Jerusalem during the hectic week preceding the crucifixion and would almost certainly have seen the mobs if not actually Jesus. He probably never met Jesus; if he had, he would have said so somewhere and there wouldn't have been the problem with the church at Corinth, some of whose members thought he should not be considered an apostle "because he never knew Jesus."
- Studied under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), and was a Pharisee (Phil 3:4, 23:6).
- Was a tentmaker by trade (Acts 18:3), meaning he was probably a weaver and not solely a tent maker.
- Was present at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58), and at least consented and probably participated.
- Conversion on the road to Damascus probably in 32-35 AD. Murphy-O'Connor does not think Paul was an "official" persecutor of Christians because he didn't have that power. He was probably a "tattle-tale" to those in power. His trip to Damascus was probably on personal business (perhaps en route to see his parents in Tarsus) and carried letters to authorities in Damascus.
- Physical description in the "Acts of Paul and Thecla": small in size, bald-headed. Bandy-legged. Well built, eyebrows meeting, rather long nosed, full of grace. "For sometimes he seemed a man and sometimes he had the countenance of an angel."

54) 11:26-27 – Ironically, the center of Jewish persecution by Antiochus IV. /// The word "Christian" appears in the NT in only three places: here, 26:28, Peter 4:16. /// The major significance of this food distribution is that it goes from Gentile Christians in Antioch to Jewish Christians in Jerusalem – probably in 47 CE. Luke was wrong when he has Agabus predicting famine "all over the world." There was a widespread famine during the reign of Claudius, but not all over the world. Why it did not affect Antioch is not clear.

55) 11:28 – See 21:10-11 for Agabus's role in Paul's arrest.

56) **Chapter 12** -- This is Herod Agrippa, son of Aristobolus, who was son of Herod the Great by his second wife Mariamne, the Maccabean. Received his name in honor of Agrippa, the son-in-law of Emperor Augustus. In 6 BC, Herod the Great executed Aristobolus and his brother Alexander, the last two adults of the Maccabean line. Herod Agrippa's sister Herodias would later be the death of John the Baptist. Herod Agrippa was taken to Rome to avoid Herod the Great's pathologically suspicious nature and there became friends with Caligula, heir to the throne. When Tiberius died, Caligula became Gaius Caesar and made Herod Agrippa king of Iturea, which had been held by his half-uncle Phillip the Tetrarch. Herod Antipas died in 39 AD and Herod Agrippa took over Galilee and in 41 AD the entire realm once ruled by his grandfather Herod the Great. He ingratiated himself with the Jews, hoping to make the Jews forget his Idumean origins, and began cracking down on the Christians, causing the death of James (12:2), the first of the original twelve to be martyred. He died three years later during the games at Caesarea Maritime (12:23).

This was a disaster for the Jews but a blessing for the Christians.

- 57) 12:12-17 – H. Conzelmann calls this episode “rich comedy,” with Rhoda leaving Peter at the door and running to the praying community who don’t believe her, thinking it must be Peter’s guardian angel because Peter could not have been freed. Peter’s reaction is to leave “and go to another place,” which Wall thinks implies that the reins of spiritual authority have now been transferred from Peter to James, the brother of Jesus. John Mark was probably Barnabas’s cousin.
- 58) 12:18-19 – The original Greek ms. says the guards were “arrested.” Luke’s attempt to show Herod as God’s foe changed this to “executed.”
- 59) 12:23 – As happened to Antiochus IV who fell from his chariot and while still alive was consumed by worms (2 Macabees 9:9). Non-biblical sources say that Herod died at the hippodrome in the city of Caesarea Maritime.
- 60) 13:2-5 – “Set apart” – the same verb as used by Paul in Romans 1:1 and Galatians 1:15, describing his call to be an apostle of God. Also used often in the OT to denote separation of clean from unclean for service or sacrifice, e.g. Exodus 13:12. Also for the commissioning of prophets in a manner similar to Paul’s, e.g. Isaiah 49:1. /// Salamis named by colonizers from the Greek island of Salamis, site of the battle between Greek fleet and Persians under Xerxes.
- 61) 13:9 – This might be a symbolic shift, the writer's transition from the Semitic Saul to the Greco-Roman Paul, when he makes his first Gentile conversion.
- 62) 13:13 – Another important transition. Though Barnabas is older and at one time Paul's mentor, Paul now becomes the leader: "Paul and his companions..." Paul has just taken the initiative in allowing Sergius Paulus to become a Christian without being circumcised or adhering to the Jewish dietary laws. Later he even castigates Barnabas (and Peter!) (Gal 2:11-14). And now John Mark leaves the group, probably due to a doctrinal quarrel with Paul. He was of the Hebrew group of Christians, and if he indeed was author of the second gospel, he would be a conservative follower of the Mosaic Law. The verb used to denote John Mark’s leaving Paul is used in Jeremiah 46:5 to mean a cowardly retreat. Also used in 2 Maccabees 2:33 where it connotes apostasy. Whatever the reason, Paul evidently finds him to be inadequate for the missionary task. /// The Pisidian Antioch was founded by Seleucus I who named it after his father as he had the other Antioch in Syria.
- 63) 13:15 – Bowker in “Speeches in Acts” concludes that the passage from Torah that was read was Deuteronomy 4:25-46, and from *Haftorah* 2 Samuel 7:6-16.
- 64) 13:46-48 – Confusing. Earlier, many Jews **had been** converted, along with God-fearing converts to Judaism. And only those **predestined** to be saved were saved? Barrett says, yes, “This is as unqualified a statement of absolute predestination as is found anywhere in the NT.”
- 65) 14:8-18 – Common Greek myths had Zeus (Jupiter) and Hermes (Mercury) coming to Earth, testing the hospitality of people. The most popular was by Ovid (*Metamorphosis*) and obviously known to the people of Iconium, even though it was now Roman. Barnabas is considered Zeus, Paul Hermes, often interpreted as meaning that Barnabas was more distinguished-looking than Paul. In 2 Cor 10:10 Paul demeans his speech, but his speech at Iconium (and later elsewhere for 30 years) produced results so it must have been forceful enough. /// Several important differences between this healing and Peter’s healing (3:1-8): 1) The faith of Paul’s lame man *precedes* his healing, 2) He does not enter the Temple, 3) The crowd mistakes Paul and Barnabas for Zeus and Hermes and try to worship them. /// No reason is given why the crowds were so easily turned against Paul and Barnabas by the Jews from Antioch. Perhaps something was said but not recorded? And why was Barnabas not stoned?
- 66) 14:23 – There is much evidence that the appointing of elders is a continuity between the Gentile and

Jewish churches, and that their model was the governing structures of the diaspora synagogue: Acts 11:30, Acts 13:1-3, Acts 20:17, 2 Corinthians 8:19, Titus 1:5.

- 67) 15:1-2 – Uncircumcised Titus was with them (Galatians 2:1), so after this confrontation they went to Jerusalem where Paul and Peter get into it also. Several decades earlier than Luke’s writing in Acts, Paul had written in Romans 2: 25-29 that circumcision was spiritual, not literal. So literal circumcision was rarely practiced in Gentile and diaspora Jews. And the first Jerusalem council had already given approval of Cornelius’s conversion without circumcision.
- 68) 15:6 – Probably the Council of Jerusalem, probably in 48 AD.
- 69) 15:7 – Probably a reference to Cornelius in Chapter 10.
- 70) 15:12 – This concludes Luke’s “narrative of conversion” and the fulfilment of Joel’s prophecy (Acts 2:17ff). **All** who repent and call upon the Lord Jesus in faith receive the gift of the Spirit.
- 71) 15:13-28 – Wall (and most other interpreters) consider this to be the beginning of a distinct “second part” of Acts. The first part ends with the proclamation by the Jerusalem Council that Gentile converts need not become Jews in order to be Christian. The second part then concentrates on the apostles’ mission to the Gentiles, beginning with James’ speech and quote from Amos 9:11. // The Simeon in v. 14 is thought by many commentators to be Simon Peter. But Gary Wills (*What Paul Meant*) thinks Luke is referring to the story of Simon in his gospel narrative (Luke 2:25-35). Wills thinks both stories are “inventions” by Luke. Luke goes on to describe a formal council that imposes four restrictions on new Gentile Christians, an “Apostolic Decree” (Acts 15:18-19) which disagrees completely with Paul’s account of his meeting with Peter and James (Galatians 2:1-10) // In v. 20, James clearly recognizes that the convert to the faith must give up various practices. For the modern reader, whatever holds primary value in place of God is an idol, and related institutions function as temples – market places, town squares, etc. we must be alert to the competing interests.
- 72) 15:39 – This is the last mention of Barnabas in Acts. There may be more to the story than the disagreement over John Mark. See Galatians 2:11-14 where Paul accuses Barnabas of hypocrisy. It is also the last time Paul went to Antioch. He was now estranged from the Jewish-Christian church there because Peter had allied himself with James on the question of Christian Gentiles needing to follow the laws of Moses. Still, it’s a stunning surprise when Paul and Barnabas part, although Barnabas had clearly sided with Peter (see Galatians 2:11-14). Not surprisingly, Luke doesn’t mention this spat here, saying that it was Mark who was responsible for the split. We don’t know why. Several possible reasons: 1) Mark is Barnabas’s cousin, 2) Mark’s mother is Peter’s patron (Acts 12:12). Paul’s reason for not taking Mark along is clear: he had deserted them at Pampyhlia, to Paul an act of apostasy (13:13). This causes a change in plans – not going to the churches of the first missionary journey, but going to Cilicia and Syria.
- 73) 16:1-3 – Timothy’s grandmother Lois (and perhaps also his mother Eunice) had been converted on Paul’s first journey to Lystra. The circumcision was done to restore his Jewish identity in order to maintain good working relations between faithful Jews and Gentiles – a commitment that agrees with James. V. 3 seems to imply that Timothy’s Greek father prevented the circumcision as an accommodation to James. Paul chooses Timothy to accompany him because he represents the “ethnic mix” that symbolizes Paul’s mission. He personifies and understands the tension between “being Greek” and “being Jewish.” “Asia” is now the western 1/3 of Turkey.
- 74) 16:6-8 – Galatia was so named because it was invaded by Gauls in 278 BC. The “Spirit of Jesus” is probably a reference to Jesus’s role in Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus. Troas was founded by Alexander the Great in 300 BC, near ancient Troy. Or it may be the Holy Spirit.
- 75) 16:10 – Suddenly Luke appears in the party. Did he join the group in Antioch? Or follow later?

- 76) 16:11-12 – The island of Samothrace was halfway on the 125-mile sea journey from Troas to Neapolis. Philippi lay ten miles inland, was originally a Greek settlement but captured by Philip of Macedonia (Alexander's father) in 356 BC. Its gold subverted Greek politicians and was instrumental as the army in gaining control of all Greece. Its other claim to fame: Brutus and Cassius lost a battle there to Mark Antony and Octavian. Cassius killed himself on the battle field and Octavian went on to become Emperor Augustus six years later.
- 77) 16:14 – Lydia was not a feminine name at the time, so she was probably a woman **from** Lydia (west-central Turkey now). See Rev 2:18 for the Lord's word to the church in Thyatira.
- 78) 16:16 – The "spirit" is literally "pythian," recalling the Greek myth of Python, a dragon guarding the Delphi oracle, killed by Apollo. In Luke's day, the legend was attached to someone with clairvoyant powers.
- 79) 16:30-36 – Contrary to God-fearing Lydia, the jailer represents the pagan's evil spirit and anti-Semitic sentiment. The combination of joy and a meal strongly implies the Eucharist, and the reader sees Paul's suffering for the sake of Jesus's name as a means of grace for the jailer and his family. // The magistrates were afraid because imprisoning and/or flogging a Roman citizen without trial was illegal, a criminal act worthy of execution. JBD: Why didn't Paul claim Roman citizenship **before** they were flogged and jailed?
- 80) 16:40 -- Note that the believers are now meeting in Lydia's home, **inside** the city limits, rather than **outside**.
- 81) 17:1-4 – Murphy-O'Connor sets Paul in Thessalonica for at least a year, probably more: Sept 48-April 50. He argues that three weeks were not near enough time to develop the relationship expressed in 1 Thess 2:13--4:2, and in Phil 4:16 where Paul thanked the Philippians for the **many times** they had sent him money while he was in Thessalonica. // Why are the Jews in Thessalonica (and elsewhere) so hostile to Paul's teaching? Fitzmeyer: the notions of a suffering and resurrected Messiah – rather than Israel – are foreign to the "plain teaching" of the OT. // Elsewhere in the NT, scripture is merely cited as fulfilled by Jesus. Here, Luke has Paul arguing with the potential converts **from** the scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise on the third day.
- 82) 17:8 – The word "disturbed" is better translated in the NIV as "thrown into turmoil." But neither captures the idea that the officials "were confused by conflicting reports," which is the proper sense. The "Jews" are motivated by a theological difference, yet they are appealing to a political difference, wherein Paul is accused of saying that Jesus is the Messiah, a king, which is treason in Rome's eyes.
- 83) 17:11 – JB: If the Bereans were of a "more noble character" (NIV) than the Thessalonians, why do we not have any letters to them from Paul or someone? Likewise, to the Athenians?
- 84) 17:16-18 – **Epicureans:** Founded by Epicurus in 306 BCE. The universe is made up of particles called atoms. All change occurs with random breakup and rearrangement of the atoms. Clearly atheistic. Man was conscious only of pleasure and pain and should strive for the most pleasure, which Epicurus believed came from moderation in eating, learning, emotions, etc. V. 25 would have appealed to the epicureans. They also were harsh critics of idolatry, that it is not rational to believe that impersonal deities could produce personal happiness. But his followers were often not as wise, and "epicurean" now means "given to luxury."

**Stoics:** Founded by Zeno about the same time. Taught in the "stoa poikile," the "painted porch," a corridor adorned with paintings of the Trojan War, so followers came to be known as "stoics." Recognized a supreme God, but his powers could descend on minor gods or even select humans.

Believed in putting oneself beyond both pleasure and pain by cultivating indifference and lofty detachment of mind, by living a life following a stern moral code. V. 24 would have appealed to the stoics.

- 85) 17:19 -- The Areopagus was the equivalent of a city council that would hear debates and render verdicts. Apparently Paul was led there by those philosophers in the *agora* who called him a “babbling,” to explain his “new teaching” to the intellectuals gathered there. Scholars claim this speech is the most important episode in all of Paul’s ministry because Athens symbolized the “high culture” of the time. This speech is the climactic element in Luke’s exposition of God’s plan to save all humanity and is paradigmatic of the gospel’s encounter with secular culture. Paul cleverly does not introduce a new “god” to Athens, but merely identifies their “unknown god” as his God. Luke has them listening with curiosity and courteousness but mostly dismissing his teaching as inapplicable to “modern” thinking. But most scholars agree that Paul’s speech in the Areopagus (Mars Hill) was probably Luke’s “idealized version of what ought to have happened...the emblem of what possibly could happen.” (L.T. Johnson). They argue that Paul would not have been drawn into an “intellectual sparring match” with Athenian philosophers. /// Yet Wall in the NIB argues that Paul gave this speech to remind students of letters that he is faithful to both the Athenian secular cult and the Pauline tradition. He says unequivocally that Luke did **not** make this up. This speech to pagan intellectuals plays up to the most skeptical listeners spiritual yearnings, evinced by one “ism” or another: scientism, materialism, individualism, nationalism, naturalism, humanism, etc. /// In vss 27-28, Wall believes that Paul is quoting Socrates. The NRSV states that the first quote is from Posidonius based on Plato, the second from stoic Aratus of Cilicia. (JB: does it make a difference?)
- 86) 17:34 – The only time he is mentioned, but vast tradition has followed, including becoming first bishop of Athens, and a martyr, and eventually the patron saint of France (St. Denis).
- 87) 18:1-3 – Paul went to Corinth in 50 CE. Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome in 49 CE, but it is unlikely that he expelled all of the 40,000 Jews living in Rome. Probably just those causing disturbances, including the believers in “Christus” (Seutonius), suggesting that there were believers in Rome and Corinth before Paul got there.
- 88) 18:12 – Gallio was the brother of Seneca, the most noted Stoic philosopher at the time, tutor of Nero, and Lucan the poet. He was proconsul in 52 AD when the Jews made this attack on Paul. **Achaia** was Greece proper, including Athens, Corinth, Sparta. (Gary Wills has real doubts about the veracity of this date, mostly because of the many demonstrable inaccuracies in Acts. He feels that it is an “untrustworthy date,” not necessarily wrong.)
- 89) 18:16-18 – The NIV’s “ejected” is better than NRSV’s “dismissed,” because it shows Gallio’s frustration in hearing a case that doesn’t belong in a Roman court. /// The attack on Sosthenes is not explained. He may have replaced Christus as head of the synagogue and was beaten because he failed with Gallio. Or he may have also been a convert and was beaten because he personified the undesirable effect of the Christian mission on their synagogue. /// Paul’s haircut is probably a Nazarite vow described in Numbers 6:1-21, indicating his continuing loyalty to his Jewish faith and his vocation as a “teacher of Israel.”
- 90) 18:23-28 – This begins Paul's **third missionary journey**. /// Alexandria was second only to Rome in the Greco-roman world – center of commerce, huge library, important community of diaspora Jews. Philo lived there and may have been one of Apollos’s teachers. Yet ironically Apollos had not received the Holy Spirit so was unable to be a prophet-like-Jesus. He teaches an “inadequate doctrine of the Spirit.” The original Greek words indicate that he knew the “Way of the Lord,” but not the “Way of God.” /// Paul had taken the new Christians out of the synagogue, and

established a church in Titius's house. Gallio had closed the courts. So Apollos must have "refuted the (unrepentant) Jews" in the town square. /// Apollos's acceptance by Priscilla and Aquila is demonstrated by Luke's use of the Greek word "protreptomai" for "encouraged" which connotes the "confirmation of a newly instructed teacher."

- 91) 19:1-10 – Luke's word for "disciples" is actually "students," indicating that the 12 are itinerant theologues searching for a mentor to replace John the Baptist and find him in Paul. Confusing is that they didn't get a hint of a "Holy Spirit" from John. Perhaps they just didn't **experience** being filled with the Spirit. /// During Paul's third journey he goes back to Ephesus, probably in 54 AD, and stayed for 2-3 years. Ephesus became the third Christian center, after Jerusalem and Antioch. /// Tradition states that John spent his later life and wrote the fourth gospel. Jesus's mother Mary, Mary Magdalene, the apostles Andrew and Philip, are supposed to have gone there also. /// So Paul lived in Ephesus for 27 months this time, which Jerome Murphy-O'Connor thinks is correct, but see 20:31. /// We shouldn't presume a formal relationship between baptism and reception of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes the Holy Spirit comes before baptism (9:17-19), or after (2:1-4), or at the same time (2:38-41). Nor does the arrival of the Holy Spirit always produce glossolalia or the ability to prophesy.
- 92) 19:11-12 – Since Ephesus was a center of the magic arts in the ancient world, Paul's healing powers would not have been seen as extra-ordinary. The difference is that Luke makes it clear that it's God working through Paul's **hands** or anything that has touched them, like a handkerchief or apron, not any paranormal gifts. Luke carefully distinguishes between human magic and divine miracles. Note that Paul dispenses "the word of the Lord" before he dispenses God's healing powers.
- 93) 19:13-16 – The seven sons of Sceva. It almost certainly alludes to the story of Simon's attempted simony. Jesus allowed the practice of casting out demons in his name (Luke 9:49-50). But Paul does not allow it because his miracles and the proclamation of the Lord Jesus are closely connected, whereas the work of the seven sons is not, and likely to subvert Paul's mission in Ephesus. The sons of Sceva knew the liturgical formula for exorcism (as did all Jewish priests at the time [cf. Josephus]) but did not have Paul's *authority* over demons. "Jesus I know (recognize your ultimate authority)...Paul I know (experience your authority first hand.)" (Two different words in Greek for "know.") Paul allows the demon to have its way with the sons in order to show them totally failing to be like Paul.
- 94) 19:20-21 – The Greek word for "prevailed" is the same one used to express Stephen's victory over his rivals in Jerusalem (6:10) and the mauling of the sons of Sceva by the demoniac in v.16. /// Although it seems that Paul's departure is not forced like it was in so many other places, he does say in 1 Corinthians 15:32 that he fought with wild beasts in Ephesus, and in 2 Corinthians 1:8 that "we were so utterly, unbearably crushed" in Asia, and "despaired of life itself."
- 95) 19:23-39 – Before the Greeks came to that part of the world, the people worshiped a fertility goddess, probably centered around a meteorite in the rough shape of a human (vs. 35). When the Greeks came, they identified this primitive goddess with Artemis (Diana in Roman mythology), a poor choice because Artemis was a virginal huntress. She was Apollo's sister. By New Testament times, the goddess worshiped at Ephesus was a woman naked from the waist up and bearing many baseball sized oval pendants, mistaken at the time and by many modern archaeologists as breasts. But the name stuck and temples were built. The one in Ephesus was called the "Artemision." It was arsonized on the same day that Alexander the Great was born. It was rebuilt by Alexander and was so elaborate that it became one of the seven wonders of the world. It would endure for seven centuries and was standing when Paul was in Ephesus. It was a tourist center, making rich

the silversmiths who furnished small silver shrines and trinkets to the tourists. /// This episode parallels Paul's experience in Philippi with the clairvoyant girl. It was a contest between God and Mammon and in both cases God wins. /// The anti-Semitism in both stories is characteristic of pagan culture and not unique to Paul's mission. /// We have no idea who Alexander is, nor why the Jews chose him to placate the silversmiths and the rest of the mob. But the undertone is fiercely anti-Semitic. /// The "town clerk" was actually the chief city official who was the liaison with Rome so he had a feel for the legality of Paul's case. He makes three legal statements: 1) Paul and his followers have done nothing illegal against the Artemis cult. 2) The mob had acted illegally by dragging Gaius and Aristarchus into the theater; there are legal courts to settle affairs like this. 3) This is not a legal case at all, but a religious one.

- 96) 20:1-16 – Parallelism of Jesus' and Paul's last trip to Jerusalem: 1) Both announce their intention to go to Jerusalem. 2) Both send delegates in pairs ahead of them. 3) Jews plot against their lives. 4) They go instead of threats. 5) Both enter Jerusalem for the final time. 6) Eutychus ("Lucky") falls three floors and is raised from the dead on the first day of the week. Note that Luke has Paul making light of his miracle. This emphasizes that there is no dichotomy between miracle and message. The hallmark of Christian community is not miracles but the message of the risen Jesus. /// v. 6 – The church in Troas was probably very well established by now. Paul's stay in Greece was in Corinth – see 1 Cor 16:5-6. /// v.15: Samos was the birthplace of Pythagoras and Epicurus. Modern science began at Miletus with Thales and his pupils Anaxamander and Anaxamenec. (See Note #2 at John 1:1.)
- 97) 20:17-38 – Paul's speech to the Ephesian elders at Miletus is his only recorded speech to believers. It is uncertain that Luke witnessed this event. He may have, may even have made notes. He may have had access to some of Paul's letters. Scholars agree that the letters agree with the speech, especially 1 and 2 Timothy. What also is agreed upon is that Luke wrote the speech himself, 20-30 years after it was delivered. /// This speech is a pastoral speech to elders and leaders in the church, not a missionary speech to unbelievers. It is analogous in many ways to Jesus's last message to his disciples just before his ascension (1:3-24). Both Jesus and Paul are preparing his successors to carry on his mission. One difference is that Jesus was expected to return to earth whereas Paul was not expected to return to Ephesus. In vs 26-27 he makes it quite clear that what he has started in Ephesus is no longer his responsibility but theirs to continue their own ministry in his absence. In v. 28 we have a very succinct instruction to church leaders, their role and character, in any age.
- 98) 20:29 – "Savage wolves." Probably a reference to the antinomian errorists (See 2 Peter 1, and Jude's letter). But it could also be Judaizers from Jerusalem.
- 99) 20:35 – Not found in the gospels. Implied in Sirach 4:31: "Let not your hand be open to receive and clenched when it is time to give."
- 100) 21:1-6 – Cos and Rhodes. Cos -- where Hippocrates was born in 460 BC. Rhodes -- where the "colossus" was built, a statue of the sun god. It stood on shore, never bestrode the harbor mouth, and lasted only 100 years, to 225 BC. /// Wall points out that Paul goes to Jerusalem not to suffer, although he will, but as a pilgrim doing what he thinks is God's will.
- 101) 21:7-9 – A "profound irony": Paul visits and stays with Philip, whom he had driven out of Jerusalem (8:1b-4) when he was Saul, and now Philip has founded a church in Caesarea, and from where Paul will journey to Jerusalem where he will be accused of being a Hellenist Jew like Philip. In 6:5 Philip was one of the seven Hellenistic Jews chosen to wait on tables. In 8:26-40 he taught and baptized the Ethiopian eunuch near Gaza.
- 102) 21:10-15 – Agabus's symbolic enactment of his prophecy is the only one in the NT. Also his, "Thus

says the Holy Spirit,” is unique, although there are parallels in the OT, “Thus says the Lord.” // In the Western Version, Mnason’s house is in a village two days walk from Jerusalem.

- 103) 21:17-26 – Luke has completely edited out that Paul has returned to Jerusalem to bring a collection of money donated by his mission churches. (See Romans 15:22-31). He does later refer briefly to this (Acts 24:17) but does not make it a priority.
- 104) 21:23 – The three primary vows of the Nazarites (Numbers 6:1-21) are abstinence from alcohol, not cutting the hair, and avoidance of anything dead.
- 105) 21:27-29 – “The “Jews from Asia (what is now western Turkey)” were probably pilgrims from Ephesus in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost. Their accusations that Paul was preaching against Moses was patently false. That he had taken Trophimus into the temple (penalty was death) was only circumstantial – no one says he *saw* them there.
- 106) 21:31-38 – A cohort was 760 infantry and 240 cavalry. Their barracks were in Fortress Antonio on the Temple Mount. There were stairs going down to the Temple area. The tribune is Claudius Lysias (see 23:26). V. 33 fulfills the prophecy of Agabus. The revolutionary in vv 37-38 predicted the destruction of the Temple, resulting in a riot that cost thousands of lives. Josephus reports that 30,000 “assassins” fled into the desert, but Luke’s figure is probably more accurate.
- 107) 21:40-23:35 – Four speeches, each in the form of the Greek-style *apologia*: 1) presentation of credentials, 2) narrative of present events, 3) proofs: eyewitnesses, textual support, 4) direct response to accusations. All attempt to show Paul’s Jewishness, a personal example of Jewish piety and a redemptive agent of Israel’s God.
- 108) 22:6-13 – See original account (9:3-6) and third one (26:12-18).
- 109) 22:17-21 – This vision alludes to Isaiah’s temple vision (Isaiah 6:1-13), and Jeremiah’s theophany (Jeremiah 1:5). Luke surprises us by telling us that Paul had a second christophany in the Temple, where Jesus in a vision – rather than the disciples – alerts him to flee Jerusalem.
- 110) 22:24-29 – “Examination by flogging” – a legal military routine for extracting information from a lower-class person in a confusing or indecisive case. Paul questions the legality in a case where the “floggee” is a Roman citizen who has not been condemned yet.
- 111) 23:1-2 – Paul’s claim of a “clear conscience” was provocative because it was a concept of Hellenistic moral philosophers, not a Jewish concept. However, Ananias’s order to strike him in the mouth was unreasonable in any case.
- 112) 23:3-5 – Three intertextual echoes:
- 1) Deuteronomy 28:20-22 – “The Lord will put a curse on you, defeat and frustration in every endeavor you undertake until you are speedily destroyed and perish for the evil you have done in forsaking me. The Lord will bring a pestilence upon you that will persist until he has exterminated you from the land you are entering to occupy. The Lord will strike you with wasting and fever, with scorching fiery drought, with blight and searing wind, that will plague you until you perish.”
  - 2) Ezekiel 13:10 – “For the very reason they led my people astray, saying, ‘Peace,’ when there was no peace, and that, as one built a (weak) wall, they would cover it with whitewash” to obscure the weakness.
  - 3) Exodus 22:27 – “You shall not revile God, nor curse a prince of your people.”  
Paul surely knows Ananias is the high priest. Johnson: “(Ananias’s) behavior makes him unrecognizable since it did not accord with his spiritual status and religious function.”
- 113) 23:12-15 – The motives of the Jews is not made clear by Luke. Wall concludes that they are pious Jews, probably Sadducees, “dedicated to their murderous mission of zeal to serve God and Israel.” Paul’s message about Jesus threatens Israel as a nation, at least the Sadducees, who feel that Paul’s

gospel is dividing Israel.

- 114) 23:23-26 – Claudius Felix was co-procurator of Roman Palestine and “governor” of Judea. Tacitus: “With all cruelty and lust he wielded the power of a king, and the mentality of a slave.” Felix was fiercely anti-Semitic with a particular animus against the Zealots. He treated them so brutally that he was dismissed as a procurator in 60 CE. /// Palace intrigue: After the death of Herod Agrippa I, Judea was placed under procurators again. There were many bandit leaders claiming to be messiahs and leading rebellions. Claudius Lysias, the cohort commander (see 21:31 and 23:19 where he isn’t named and 23:26 where he is), thought that Paul was one of these and took him to Antonius Felix, who had become procurator in 52 AD. Felix’s brother was Pallas, who was (too) friendly with Claudius’ fourth wife Agrippina, whose son was Nero. In AD 54, Agrippina poisoned Claudius and Nero ascended Rome’s throne. /// Drusilla was the daughter of Agrippa I and therefore sister of Agrippa II /// Gary Wills doubts that Paul was a Roman citizen. In 2 Corinthians 11:25, Paul asserts that he was whipped three times by Romans and five times by the Jews. Although there are some exceptions to the immunity to whipping of a Roman citizen, “are we to suppose that exceptional circumstances were found for Paul on eight different occasions?”
- 115) 23:31 – Antipatris: City founded by Herod the Great in honor of his father Antipas. About 45 miles NW of Jerusalem – on the site of Aphek (Joshua 12:18), on the Plains of Sharon.
- 116) 24:1-2a – The “elders” were almost certainly Sadducees, with no diaspora Jews who could have rebutted the false accusation of “some Jews from Asia.” Paul makes this clear in 24:19. /// Tertullus is not a Jewish name, so he was probably a Roman citizen, making Felix more likely to listen to him.
- 117) 24:6, 8 – Note that v. 7 is missing but recorded in the Bible footnotes. The Greek word used for “seized” is the legal term for “arrested,” which the reader knows there is no grounds for.
- 118) 24:10-20 – Paul refutes three of Tertullus’s charges. 1) He was not a pest in the Temple. In fact, he completed his Nazarite vows there. Furthermore, 12 days was hardly time enough to organize a rebellion against Judaism. 2) Rather than an admission of guilt in belief in a new sect, he admits that he worships the God of “our ancestors,” and has not invented a new God. 3) Paul was **inside** the Temple for legitimate reasons. Even his accusers have not shown up to accuse him, going against a strong Roman law against accusers abandoning their charges.
- 119) 24:22-23 – Felix was not informed about **Christianity**, but about Jewish beliefs (through his Jewish wife), and thought of “the Way” as a movement within Judaism.
- 120) 24:24-27 – Wall believes that Felix’s alarm and his keeping Paul in prison for two years is not because of his guilty conscience but because of his greed. Although illegal under Roman law, he hoped Paul would try to buy his way out of prison. Paul apparently was wealthy but would not use the funds accumulated for the Jerusalem church.
- 121) 25:1-12 – The persistence in conspiracy to assassinate Paul implies an ongoing importance of the imprisoned Paul to regional politics. Why? Because he has the support of the Jerusalem church, in opposition to the elders, priests and political leaders of the Sanhedrin. /// We simply do not know what “favor” Festus was doing for the Jews (v.9), nor do we know why Paul chose this moment to appeal to Caesar. Probably, Wall believes, because of his prophetic vocation “to bear witness also in Rome.” Other scholars believe it was a political move to gain a more neutral magistrate, that is, Caesar.
- 122) 25:13-27 – The “pagan outsiders” have grasped what Paul’s Jewish opponents won’t admit – Paul’s mission to the Gentiles falls within the bounds of Jewish ethos and has everything to do with Paul’s message that Jesus is God’s Messiah. /// Vs 13 – This was Herod Agrippa II, son of Agrippa I, in AD 61, and he would rule until AD 100. Bernice was his sister and lived with him.

It was rumored that they had an incestuous relationship. They lived together until Titus conquered Palestine, destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70, and took her as his Jewish mistress. He abandoned her when he became Caesar. /// Agrippa would have been well aware of the “Paul problem” because he was Roman curator of the Temple and titular head of the priestly establishment.

- 123) 26:1-3 – Paul is no longer speaking to rebellious Jews but to aristocratic pro-Roman Jews. (Josephus calls Agrippa and Bernice “half-Jews.”) His audience now represents the interests of the Roman empire, thus the mission field for Paul’s gospel. /// Assuming that Paul is speaking in Greek, there is a word play here. “Fortunate” is “makios,” “patiently” is “makrothymos,” indicating the eloquence of his opening address.
- 124) 26:8 – This question may be directed at those **not** in attendance, to Jews who share an ancestral hope in a resurrected Israel but have rejected its fulfillment in the resurrected Jesus. Paul is not surprised by Jesus’s resurrection; it made perfect sense to him. What other way would a life-giving God demonstrate the promise of new life. /// Wall notes that none of the NT writers describe the resurrection – they are concerned with the results of it. (JB: Because they didn’t know how he did it? If so, why didn’t Jesus tell them?)
- 125) 26:11 -- This suggests that Stephen and James weren’t the only Christian martyrs and Paul was responsible for their deaths.
- 126) 26:12-18 --Gary Wills believes that for its dramatic effect, Luke has borrowed from Ezekiel 1:28-2:8, just as he took Jewish canticles and created the songs of Mary, Zachariah, and Simeon for his nativity stories. (JB: The stories are very similar, but that could mean only that both men had the same experience. Moses had a similar theophany and came down off the mountain with his face shining.) /// V.14 – Goad. Used to prod cattle to go in the right direction. Paul was resisting God’s goading. /// V. 18 – Surely echoes Isaiah’s first Servant Song, in Isaiah 42:1-7. In Acts 26:15 Jesus tells Paul he will be called as a servant, not an apostle. Paul becomes the personification of Isaiah’s Servant Israel. /// No mention here of his blindness nor Ananias’s “cure.” /// Luke makes it clear here that Jesus will rescue Paul not only from the Jews but also from unrepentant Gentiles.
- 127) 26:20 – In Galatians 1:22, Paul says he was unknown “by sight” in Judea.
- 128) 26:22-23 – The “Christological climax of Paul’s defense” in all of Acts. The Messiah’s suffering and resurrection are fulfilled in the life of Jesus “according to prophecy.”
- 129) 26:27 – Paul is asking Agrippa if he believes that the prophets prophesied that Israel’s restoration was accomplished by **Jesus’s** ministry and resurrection, not if he just **knows** the prophecies.
- 130) 27:2 – Adramyttium – important sea port in northwest Asia – now called Karatash, but nearby Edremit preserves the name. /// Aristarchus traveled with Paul on his third missionary journey (Acts 19:29), was with Paul during the silversmiths’ riot in Ephesus (9:29), preceded Paul to Troas (20:4) and was imprisoned with him.
- 131) 27:16-17 – Cauda – now Gaudes – about 50 miles southwest of Crete. Syrtis – a shallow bay on the north coast of Africa.
- 132) 27:27 – They have arrived at Malta. Modern calculations confirm that a ship of Paul’s size would drift from Crete to Malta in two weeks.
- 133) 27:35 – Typological of the Eucharist, but should not be taken literally because Paul would not have celebrated it with pagans. (See 1 Corinthians 11:17-26.)
- 134) 27:42-44 – Throughout Acts Luke uses prophets and angels to carry out God’s will. Here he uses Julius, a Roman centurion, to save Paul and incidentally all the other prisoners from death at the hands of the Roman soldiers.
- 135) 28:1 – The bay where they landed is still called St. Paul's Bay.

- 136) 28:11-12 – The Twin Brothers were Castor and Pollux, sons of Zeus, astral deities venerated as the savior from stormy seas. Syracuse is at the east end of Sicily.
- 137) 28:13-15 – Puteoli was one of the most important harbors in Italy. Great grain ships from Alexandria unloaded there. Now called Possuoli, it lies across from Pompei and Mt. Vesuvius on the Bay of Naples. Was on the Appian way (built by Appius Claudius Caecus 300 years earlier) which went from Brundisium, a large new source of water, to Rome. Also on the Way were Appius, 40 miles from Rome, and Three Taverns, 30 miles from Rome.
- 138) 28:17-20 – There were a dozen or more synagogues in Rome, and thousands of Jews who kept in close touch with each other and with the Jews in the rest of the diaspora and Jerusalem. Hence Paul appeals to the leaders first, claiming brotherhood with them.
- 139) 28:23-24 – In the Greek, in the imperfect tense, only here in the NT, indicating to Wall that Paul's speech is inceptive, that is, it begins with Jesus's ministry and ends with Paul's conclusion, that God promised Israel's restoration through Jesus. /// What happened in Paul's lodging is what happened wherever Paul went – some Jews believed, some didn't, but here in Rome the unbelievers are not hostile.
- 140) 28:25b-27 – Another lesson in Greek grammar: Paul (Luke) quotes Isaiah in the aorist indicative rather than in the imperative as it stands in the OT. “This people's mind has grown dull,” rather than “Make the mind of the people dull.” “Ears are hard of hearing,” rather than, “Stop up their ears.” And, “They have shut their eyes,” rather than, “Close their eyes.” Isaiah's mission is clear: to **prevent** repentance and healing because the Lord's object is to destroy the people and their city, initially offering no hope. But vs. 13 offers a glimmer of hope. Jesus quotes these verses in all four gospels, Matthew 13:14-15, Mark 4:12, Luke 8:10, John 12:40. Jesus is appealing to this prophecy to explain why some in Israel fail to understand his teaching.

- 141) 28:28 – This final declaration of Paul’s in Acts should not be considered antisemitic or that Israel’s rejection of the gospel is responsible for Paul’s success with the Gentiles. Paul has persistently gone first to the synagogues with his message and only goes to the Gentiles when he is repudiated by the Jews.
- 142) 28:30 – The book ends just before Nero's persecution of the Christians in 64 AD. Paul probably was beheaded in 67 AD, 38 years after the crucifixion, 33 years (?) after Paul's conversion. Luke may have died before Paul, or perhaps just wanted to end the book on a high point with the Christian Church strong and Paul still alive and maybe even out of prison. Gary Wills believes that the case against Paul collapsed, he was set free, and went to Spain. This is based on Clement’s writing that Paul “taught all the world” after “he had reached the farthest form of the West.” Wills also believes that both Peter and Paul died at Nero’s hand, “in one of the obscene ways Tacitus describes, torn apart in animal costumes or serving as ornamental torches in Nero’s garden.” It was an end that Luke could not bring himself to write about. This end would negate the legend that Paul was beheaded and Peter crucified upside down. /// What should linger in our minds is not that the Jews reject the gospel while the Gentiles accept it, but that we have the assurance that the gospel is trustworthy and will progress triumphantly to the end of time when the Lord comes back to earth to inaugurate the season of universal restoration.