

Reading Notes on Acts

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THE TESTIMONY IN JERUSALEM (1:1-7:60)

A The Commission of Witnesses and Jesus' Farewell (1:1-26)

1 Prologue (1:1-2)

1:1-2 Compare Lk. 1:1-4.

2 The Apostles' Commission and Jesus' Ascension (1:3-11)

1:8 "My witnesses" is an important theme within Acts (see 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39; 13:31; 22:15).

3 The Upper Room and the Reconstitution of the Twelve (1:12-26)

B The Testimony in Jerusalem (2:1-7:60)

1 Pentecost (2:1-47)

a The gathering of the people (2:1-13)

b Peter's sermon (2:14-36)

2:14-36 The themes of this sermon became significant within the early church: (1) an explanation of events (2:14-21); (2) the gospel (2:22-36); (3) an exhortation for repentance and baptism (2:37-40). Compare to similarities in other sermons of Acts, e.g., chaps. 3, 10, 13. **2:17** Peter adapts Joel 2:28 from "afterward" (MT), "after these things" (LXX), to "last days" which is used in several other places (Isa. 2:2; Hos. 3:5; Mic. 4:1). See also 1Tim. 4:1; 2Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:1; 1Pet. 1:20; 1Jn. 2:18.

c Response (2:37-41)

d First major summary—Unified community life (2:42-47)

2 The Temple (3:1-4:35)

a The lame beggar healed (3:1-11)

b Peter's sermon (3:12-26)

c Peter and John before the Sanhedrin (4:1-22)

d Release and praise (4:23-31)

e Second major summary—Sharing community (4:32-35)

Chaps. 4-5 The trials of Peter and John (4:1-31) and the apostles (5:17-42) serve as a bracket or *inclusio* for the judgment on Ananias and Sapphira before Peter (5:1-11). The effect of juxtaposing these three trial scenes heightens the bold obedience to God over human beings over and against the swift judgment of those who sin against God.

3 Gifts to the Church (4:36-5:16)

a Joseph's gift (4:36-37)

b The gift and death of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11)

5:1-11 Compare accepting praise wrongfully 5:1-11 and 12:20-23. **5:11** "Church" is used for the first time in Acts—local (8:1; 11:22; 13:1); universal (20:28). The term could also be used of political or other assemblies as well (19:32, 40).

c Third major summary—Caring community (5:12-16)

4 Persecution and Ministry (5:17-7:60)

a The apostles arrest, divine-release, proclamation, defense (5:17-32)

5:19 "Angel of the Lord" is used five time in Acts: (1) releases the apostles (5:19); (2) Stephen speaks of him (7:30-38); (3) guides Philip (8:26); (4) frees Peter (12:7-10); (5)

strikes down Herod (12:23). **5:28** The religious leaders do not want to be blamed for Jesus' death (cf. 3:13-15; 4:10-11; Mt. 27:25).

- b Gamaliel's advice (5:33-42)
- c The choosing of the seven (6:1-6)
- d Minor summary (6:7)
- e Stephen's arrest (6:8-15)

6:9 Tarsus was a leading city of Cilicia. Perhaps Stephen argued with Saul (cf. 7:58; 22:3).

- f Stephen's discourse (7:1-53)
- g Stephen put to death (7:54-60)

7:59-60 Note the similar language used here and with Jesus' death: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59) with "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Lk. 23:46); and "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Ac 7:60) with "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34).

THE TESTIMONY THROUGH JUDEA AND SAMARIA (8:1-11:18)

C Saul and the Persecution (8:1-4)

D Philip and Simon in Samaria (8:5-25)

8:5 Philip was one of the seven of the Jerusalem church (6:5) Philip is last seen in this sequence going to Caesarea where he is still evangelizing more than twenty years later (21:8).

E Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch on the Gaza Road (8:26-40)

F The Persecutor Becomes a Christian Witness (9:1-31)

9:1-18 Paul's conversion is re-told six times in the New Testament—three of these times are in Acts. See Acts 9:1-18 (Luke's narrative); 22:1-21 (Paul to Jerusalem crowd from Fortress steps); 26:1-20 (Paul to King Agrippa and Governor Festus). Also see Gal. 1:11-17; Phil. 3:4-16; 1Tim. 1:12-17. **9:2** "The Way" is often used of Christianity in Acts (16:17; 18:25-26; 19:9, 23; 22:4 24:14, 22). Compare Jn. 14:6; 2Pet. 2:2.

- 1 Saul on the road to Damascus (9:1-19)
- 2 Saul in Damascus (9:19-25)

9:23-25 On Saul's time in Damascus compare 2Cor. 11:32-33; Gal. 1:17-18.

- 3 Saul's first visit to Jerusalem (9:26-31)

Chaps. 10-21 The dominant literary technique employed in the middle portion of Acts is framing effect: Peter's vision and the conversion of Cornelius are framed by Paul's beginning ministry and being befriended by Barnabus (9:23-30) and Paul went with Barnabus to Antioch (11:19-26); Peter's arrest and Herod's worms are framed by Paul and Barnabus on the famine relief visit to Jerusalem (11:27-30) and return to Antioch (12:25); the first missionary journey is framed by the commission of Paul and Barnabus in Antioch (13:1-3) and their return and report to the church at Antioch (14:24-28); the Jerusalem council is framed by Paul and Barnabus' dispute with the Christian circumcision group in Antioch (15:1-2) and Paul and Barnabus' dispute with each other over John Mark in Antioch (15:36-41); and the second (16:1-18:22) and third missionary journeys (18:23-21:16) are framed together and between by Paul circumcised Timothy and delivered the Jerusalem council's decree (16:1-4; cf. 15:21, 29) and Paul took a Nazirite vow (18:18) and James rehearsed the letter to Paul and advised him to support four Nazirites to show his continuing commitment to Torah (21:17-26). The series of *inclusios* not only advances the narrative but highlights significant counterpoints to the major plot developments. In specific, chapters 10-21 are

dominated by the gospel going to the Gentiles. Yet, immediately after the Jerusalem council finds in favor of Gentile converts without circumcision, the next two missionary tours of Paul are framed by his continued commitment—in some manner—to the Judaic regulations. The significance of this counterpoint should not be passed over quickly in light of the prevalent use of *inclusio*. See note on 18:18.

G Peter and the Gentiles (9:32-11:18)

1 Peter's miracles in Lydda and Joppa (9:32-43)

9:40 Peter sent them out before raising the disciple as when Jesus raised Jarius' daughter. He had been present on three occasions when Jesus had raised individuals (Mt. 9:25; Lk. 7:7-11; Jn. 11:1-44). Unlike Jesus, Peter prayed. Also compare 1Ki. 17:23; 2Ki. 4:33.

2 The conversion of Cornelius and his household (10:1-11:18)

a Cornelius' vision (10:1-8)

10:3 Cornelius praying at three in the afternoon suggests that he followed the Jewish religious practices (see 3:1). Also see note on Acts 18:18.

b Peter's vision (10:9-16)

10:12 Animal regulations are found in Lev. 11. Also see Mk. 7:1-23, esp. 7:19. Cf. Mt. 15:11; 1Tim. 4:3-5.

c Messengers from Cornelius to Peter (10:17-23a)

d Peter's testimony to Cornelius and his house (10:23b-48)

e Peter's self-defense at Jerusalem (11:1-18)

THE TESTIMONY TO THE END OF THE EARTH (11:19-28:31)

H The Church at Antioch (11:19-30)

11:26 "... first called 'Christians' at Antioch." **11:27-30** This passage has a framing effect with 12:25.

I Herod's persecution and last address (12:1-25)

1 Peter's arrest and night deliverance (12:1-19)

2 Herod's death (12:20-23)

12:20-23 Compare Herod's accepting praise as divinity and its results versus Peter's (10:25-26) and/or Paul and Barnabas' refusal of the same (14:12-18). Also see note on 5:1-11.

3 Summary and transition (12:24-25)

J The First Missionary Journey—Paul and Barnabus in Asia Minor (13:1-14:28)

1 Paul and Barnabus commissioned at Antioch (13:1-3)

2 Cyprus (13:4-12)

3 Pisdion Antioch (13:13-52)

13:15 This is the most specific description of a Torah Reading service in the New Testament. In James's view this was already an ancient tradition by the time of the early church (see Acts 15:21).

* Paul's sermon (13:16-41)

4 Iconium (14:1-7)

5 Lystra and Derbe (14:8-20)

14:20 Timothy may have been among those present to assist Paul after being stoned (cf. 2Tim. 3:10-11).

6 Return to Antioch (14:21-28)

14:22 “It is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God” (NRSV). Note esp. the many narrative accounts of Paul’s being persecuted—Acts 9:23; 13:50; 14:5, 19; 16:23; 17:5-6; 18:6, 10, 17; 21:11, 30-31; 22:25, 29; 24:14; 27:39-44. Also see 2Cor. 11.

K The Jerusalem Decision about Gentiles and the Church (15:1-35)

- 1 The Conflict (15:1-2)
- 2 The opening and Peter’s appeal to precedent (15:3-12)
- 3 James affirms proposals and outlines terms of challenge to Gentiles (15:13-21)

15:20 Compare 15:29; 21:25. **15:21** See note on 13:15.

- 4 The Jerusalem letter (15:22-29)
- 5 The decision reaches Antioch (15:30-35)

L The Second Missionary Journey—Paul and Silas (15:36-18:22)

Chaps. 15-21 see note on chaps. 10-21 above and 18:18 below.

- 1 Paul and Barnabus part with Silas and John Mark, respectively (15:36-40)
- 2 Derbe and Lystra (16:1-5)
 - * Timothy circumcised and joins Paul

16:3 Compare 15:5 and following with 16:3. Also note the difference in Titus’ case (Gal. 2:3).

- 3 Crossing Asia Minor (16:6-10)
- 4 Philippi (16:11-40)
 - * We-section (16:10-17)
- 5 Thessalonica (17:1-9)
- 6 Berea (17:10-15)
- 7 Athens (17:16-34)
 - * Paul’s sermon on Mars Hill (Areopagus) (17:22-31)

17:22-31 This sermon contains two quotations from their own poets: “In him we live and move and have our being” from Epimenides, *Cretica* (c. 600 BCE); “We are his offspring” from Aratus, *Phaenomena* (c. 315-240 BCE) as well as Cleanthes, *Hymn to Zeus* (c. 331-233 BCE). Paul quotes Greek poets elsewhere (see 1Cor. 15:33; Titus 1:12). In addition, there are many biblical allusions in this sermon, most notably from Deut. 32 and 2Sam. 22.

- 8 Corinth (18:1-17)
- 9 Return to Antioch (18:18-22)

18:18 It seems that Paul was participating in a Nazarite vow (Num. 6:1-12). Also compare James’ suggestion to financially support others who are under Nazarite vows in Acts 21:23-24. At other places in Acts, Peter and John went up to the temple to pray (3:1; cf. 5:21, 42; Lk. 24:53), Paul wished to celebrate Pentecost in Jerusalem (20:16), Paul affirmed himself as a Pharisee as a present condition (23:6). Simply put, there is not a clear-cut break from Judaism by the early Jewish-Christians in Acts. Also see note on chaps. 10-21 and compare Acts 15.

M The Third Missionary Journey (18:23-20:38)

- 1 Apollos in Ephesus and Achaia (18:23-28)
- 2 Ephesus (19:1-41)
 - a John’s disciples (19:1-7)
 - b Preaching and miracle (19:8-22)

19:21 From this point the narrative is directed toward Rome in a similar fashion to the directing toward Jerusalem of Lk. 9:51. Also see Acts 23:11.

- c The silversmiths riot (19:23-41)
- 3 Macedonia, Achaia, Syria (20:1-6)
* We-section (20:5-15)
- 4 Paul revives Eutychus at Troas (20:7-12)
- 5 Journey to Miletus (20:13-16)
- 6 Farewell address to Ephesians at Miletus (20:17-38)
- N Paul in Jerusalem (21:1-23:22)
- 1 Journey to Jerusalem (21:1-16)
* We-section (21:1-18)
- 2 Paul visits James and the elders (21:17-25)
- 21:23-24** See note on 18:18.
- 3 Paul's arrest (21:26-36)
- 21:28** Compare 17:30.
- 4 Paul's discourse from steps of the Fortress of Antonia (21:37-22:21)
- 21:37, 40; 22:3, 21, 25; 23:1, 6** Paul is identified as an insider with a series of different people groups in chapters 21-23. Paul addressed the commander in Greek (21:37); the crowds in Aramaic (21:40); claimed to be born a Jew (22:3); was commissioned to the Gentiles (22:21); held Roman citizenship (22:25, 29); and affirmed himself as a second generation Pharisee (23:6).
- 5 While being incarcerated in the Roman headquarters Paul reveals his Roman citizenship (22:22-29)
- 6 Paul before the Sanhedrin (22:30-23:11)
- 7 The plot to kill Paul (23:12-22)
- O Paul as a Prisoner and Testimony in Caesarea (23:23-26:32)
- 1 Transfer to Caesarea (23:23-35)
- 2 Trial before Governor Felix (24:1-21)
- 3 Two years of incarceration by and conversations with Felix (24:22-27)
- 4 Paul before Governor Festus and the appeal to Caesar (25:1-12)
- 5 Governor Festus invites King Agrippa to listen to Paul (25:13-27)
- 6 Paul's discourse before King Agrippa and Governor Festus (26:1-23)
- 7 The civil leaders' reactions to Paul's discourse (26:24-32)
- P Paul as a Prisoner in Rome (27:1-28:31)
- * We-section (27:1-28:16)
- 1 Departure for Rome (27:1-8)
- 2 Shipwreck (27:9-44)
- 3 Winter at Malta (28:1-10)
- 4 Paul's arrival at Rome and house arrest (28:11-16)
- 5 Paul's testimony to the Jewish leaders at Rome (28:17-31)
- 28:22** Compare use of "sect"—esp. considering of whom and by whom it is said in each case—see 5:17; 15:5; 24:5, 14; 26:5; 28:22. **28:25-29** The closing rejection of Jesus by the Jews of Rome is comparable and reminiscent in many ways with the rejection of Jesus in Nazareth in Lk. 4:15-31. Esp. note turning against Jesus after listening with interest and the theme of the gospel to the Gentiles. It seems that Lk. 4 and Acts 28 offer a thematic/theological framing effect to Luke-Acts.