

# Course Study Guide

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NT222

## *Acts: Crucifixion, Resurrection & Proclamation*

By Dr. Craig Blomberg

Updated 2014

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Our Daily Bread  
Christian University

# Lesson 1 Study Guide

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NT222

## *Acts: Crucifixion, Resurrection & Proclamation*

From the World to the Cross,  
From the Cross to the Skies

Updated 2014

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# Objectives

This lesson will explore Maundy Thursday through Saturday of Passion Week. You will study Jesus' Last Supper with His disciples, His arrest, trials, and crucifixion.

When you complete this lesson, "From the World to the Cross, From the Cross to the Skies," you should be able to:

- Discuss and draw personal lessons from Jesus' upper room discourse with His disciples.
- Describe and explain the significance of Jesus' crucifixion.
- Describe and explain the significance of Jesus' resurrection.
- Worship God for His unfathomable sacrifice to redeem you from sin's curse.

# Scripture Reading

Read Matthew 26-28, Mark 14-16, and John 13-20.

# Transcript

## Course Title: Acts: Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Proclamation

### Lesson One: From the World to the Cross, From the Cross to the Skies

#### I. Introduction

At last we come to the events which form what scholars call the passion narrative, Mark 14 and following (and the parallels in the other gospels). We pass over Wednesday of Passion Week in silence. There is nothing in the Gospels unambiguously attributed to this day.

#### II. Maundy Thursday

And we come to Thursday, the Thursday which in the history of Christian literature and liturgy has come to be known as Maundy Thursday from the Latin word *mandatum*—or the commandment, the commandments that Jesus gave His disciples that Thursday night in the upper room.

##### A. Last Supper

The Last Supper occupies a central role in all four Gospels, although, as we pointed out in an earlier lesson, the actual account of Jesus' words over the meal, the Passover ceremony around which this last supper was built, are absent from John. They are found only in the other three gospels, even while John gives a much fuller account of Jesus' teaching for His disciples after the meal. That meal, which indeed was originally the Passover celebration, following the commandments of the book of Exodus to commemorate the Israelites' liberation by God from the land of Egypt, is given new significance by Jesus as He celebrates this meal with His twelve disciples as the head of the household would typically celebrate the meal with family members.

On this occasion He takes the customary bread and wine and He says, "This is my body, which is given for you. This is my blood." He says, "It is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." In the original context of a Jewish man holding up a loaf of bread and cups into which wine was poured and drunk, there would have been no misunderstanding His statement as somehow claiming that these elements of food and drink were supernaturally transformed into molecules or portions of His physical flesh, as some later church controversies have seemed to suggest.

Rather, this is a vivid way of symbolizing the significance of His death, just as Jesus has been using symbolism in parables—symbolic, prophetic-like actions—all throughout the days and weeks leading up to His crucifixion. He is pointing out in a very graphic way the saving or atoning significance, the substitutionary nature, of His death—paying the penalty for sins—for the sins of all humanity, for those who will come to Him and trust in Him. Therefore, the church has rightly, in all its diverse forms, almost always ever since celebrated Communion, the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper—it goes by many names—but some form of reenactment of

taking of bread and wine, both to memorialize the significance of Christ's death for us and also to point forward to His return and to the Messianic banquet yet to come when He does return—even as His words on that initial night were spoken: “I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.”

## B. Farewell Discourse

After the supper, Jesus predicts Peter's denial. He has already alluded to Judas' upcoming betrayal, though cryptically enough that all of the disciples do not yet understand. John's gospel adds considerable amounts of additional teaching, what is often referred to as Jesus' farewell discourse. John, in John 13, has already included the unique segment of Jesus taking a towel and washing His disciples' feet to teach them about servant leadership.

Then in chapters 14-17, He teaches them about His need to go away and His promise to return and an even more precious guarantee that He will send the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, the Comforter, the Exhorter, the Encourager, to empower His disciples for the ministry that they will carry on—a ministry that can expect to receive hostility and tribulation, and yet He promises that in Him they have overcome the world. These chapters also contain, as we noted in our introduction to John's gospel, some of the clearest teachings that form the seeds for the later, more full-orbed Trinitarian doctrine of the church, as Jesus talks about His oneness with the Father and with the Spirit.

Particularly in chapter 17— what has been called Jesus' high priestly prayer (perhaps the more true candidate for the title the Lord's Prayer, the one the Lord actually prayed) we see glimpses not only into His unity with His Father and His completion of all the tasks that the Father has sent Him to perform, but also His prayers for His disciples and strikingly for those who had become disciples through their testimony, which by extrapolation include all Christians of all ages in all times and places. Fundamentally, His prayer for them centers on the theme of unity. It is undoubtedly a disgrace in our contemporary world how many hundreds, if not thousands, of Christian denominations have emerged, making a mockery of this call to Christian unity.

There have, no doubt, been key times in the history of the church when its teaching has moved so far from the fundamentals of the New Testament that reformation and division and starting afresh have been necessary. But it is difficult to claim that this has been the case in more than just a handful of key periods throughout church history. It is interesting, too, to see in John 17 that the primary reason for Jesus' call to unity and prayer for unity among His disciples is an evangelistic one that the world might see and might know that they are in Christ and He is in them. The unity of the church can have a powerful evangelistic function in every culture, in every time and age, and as one Christians today should take far more seriously. After these final teachings and prayers in the upper room, Jesus then departs for the Garden of Gethsemane.

## C. Garden of Gethsemane

Along the way He continues to teach His disciples, and when He arrives on the slopes of the Mount of Olives He calls Peter, James, and John, the inner core of the three closest to Him, to come with Him while He goes ahead to pray. Then He leaves them at a certain place and goes

off to a further distance and begins to pray one of the most marvelous and incredible prayers of Scripture, a prayer, on the one hand, that demonstrates absolutely Jesus' complete humanity. He does not wish to go through the agony of crucifixion any more than any other natural mortal would want to. "If it be your will, if there is any way possible," He prays, "Lord let this cup pass from Me." But at the same time He also recognizes His utter dependence on His Father and His utter submission to the will of God. If it must be His will, then He is prepared to undergo this ordeal. What a contrast with the disciples' inability even to keep awake, much less to pray, just a short distance further afield.

#### D. Betrayal and Arrest

At the end of this time in the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas, who has already left the little troupe of disciples and gone after the soldiers, who may well be a combination of the Jewish temple police and Roman soldiers, comes leading this arresting party into the garden. He kisses Jesus as his sign in the dark as to who the ringleader of this small sect is; and Jesus, putting up no defense—indeed rebuking Peter who pulls a sword and tries to start a slight revolt and healing the servant's ear whom Peter has cut off. Defenseless by choice, Jesus is led away for captivity and for trial. Meanwhile the disciples flee, providing another ignominious contrast between those who had recently boasted they would follow Jesus even unto death if necessary and Jesus' own exemplary response. We are now well into nighttime on Thursday night, and the events which proceed do so throughout the night that ultimately turns into Friday morning.

### III. Thursday-Friday

There are a series of quickly assembled, hurried, nighttime gatherings—hearings in which Jesus participates. In John's gospel, we learn that He is taken firstly and briefly to the home of Annas, the former high priest and father of several sons who took turns being high priest, including Caiaphas the currently reigning high priest. It was Rome who set up and at times overthrew the various high priests. According to Jewish law one was a high priest for life, so this trial or brief hearing before Annas is understandable as an appropriate Jewish gesture to the one who technically, in their eyes, should still have been reigning as high priest.

#### A. Trial before Caiaphas

All of the Gospels then describe in varying detail and to varying degrees Jesus' subsequent hearing before Caiaphas the legal high priest in the eyes of Rome. However, there seems to be a considerable discrepancy between Matthew and Mark, who place the account of this hearing during the nighttime, and Luke, who explicitly states that this took place when it became dawn. However, in fact it was illegal by Jewish law to come to a binding verdict in any kind of nighttime hearing and so it is quite plausible that some brief repeat, as it were, of the nighttime hearing did take place in the morning, and Luke chooses to narrate those particular events. In fact, a close reading of Mark 15:1-2 and its parallel in Matthew shows that Mark and Matthew also knew of a brief morning hearing before the Jewish leaders then took Jesus and handed Him over to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate.

What transpires at these hearings? Even as Peter is denying Jesus three times outside to people

no more significant than servant girls, Jesus, by striking contrast, is giving the good confession before those who have the power to turn Him over to be crucified. The question that is finally posed after various false witnesses are brought, who themselves cannot agree on testimony to indict Jesus, is the question: “Are you the Christ, the Son of the living God?” In Mark 14:62, Mark’s account of Jesus’ answer is described simply as having him say, “Yes, I am.” Matthew and Luke put it a bit more euphemistically: “You say that I am.”

## B. Son of Man

This is probably not a denial but a more literal translation of Jesus’ Aramaic words, which were undoubtedly, a veiled affirmative but not an unqualified one, because all of the gospel writers, the Synoptic writers that give an account at this point, go on to say that Jesus qualified or clarified or explained His remarks by saying, “and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand and coming in the clouds with glory.” You see, there were many different kinds of Messianic expectations in Jesus’ day. Even the title Son of God for some people, particularly at Qumran, meant little more than a Messiah. Neither of these terms necessarily meant, either on Caiaphas’ lips or in conventional understanding, a supernatural divine figure who would atone for the sins of the world. And so as Jesus goes on to allude to teaching in Daniel 7, especially verses 13-14, about the ministry of a heavenly Son of Man—one who is prophesied to have the power to come before the Ancient of Days, the very throne room of God Himself, and to receive universal dominion and authority over all of the peoples of the world.

Paradoxically, Jesus, by using this title, Son of Man—one which He has used somewhat more cryptically throughout His ministry—is using a title that for some Jewish listeners would have been more exalted than the titles Christ, Messiah, or Son of God. We may have to revise our popular Christian thinking where so often we associate Son of Man with Jesus’ humanity and Son of God with Jesus’ deity.

Although there are contexts in the New Testament where these implications appear, in the initial Judaism into which Jesus came Son of Man could actually be a more exalted title—one that more clearly referred to Jesus’ divinity than the title Son of God. And it seems that that sequence accounts for the reaction of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish supreme court, to Jesus’ words here. It is when He speaks of being the Son of Man, sitting at the right hand of the Father and coming with the clouds of heaven, that the high priest then tears His robes and the court agrees on the charge of blasphemy.

## C. Questions about Trial

Now, there are many alleged historical inaccuracies surrounding the trial of Jesus: He was not allowed what we today would call a defense attorney; too much happened at night; proper protocol was not followed in the order of witnesses (even the gospel writers speak of false witnesses being attempted to be subpoenaed); and on the list goes. We should reply to this question of the authenticity of the Gospel accounts in at least two ways. First of all, some of these later laws, written down in the Mishnah near A.D. 200, may not have yet been in force prior to A.D. 70 and the destruction of the temple and the emergence of Pharisaism as the main branch of Jewish thought.

But it is also important to realize that desperate men may choose to break the law or choose to create a veneer of legality, even while ignoring various details, under desperate or exceptional circumstances. After all, that seems clearly to be what happened with the stoning of Stephen. John's gospel makes it clear that the Jews did not have the right to put someone to death, to inflict capital punishment on them. But what begins in Acts 7 as having a semblance of legality seems to degenerate simply into mob action, and there may be some elements of that here in the trial of Jesus as well. However, all of the details worked out, the Sanhedrin reaches a guilty verdict; and in the morning, when Pilate heard court cases brought to him, they delivered Jesus up to the Roman governor and appealed for His crucifixion.

#### IV. Friday

##### A. Jesus before Pilate

Pilate at first seems convinced of Jesus' innocence and tries to find ways to release Him. Ultimately, however, the crowd calls for Barabbas, an insurrectionist—not simply a thief, but one who probably was a zealot or terrorist. There was a Passover custom that one prisoner should be released, and Pilate hopes that he can release Jesus following that custom. The Jewish leaders whip up the crowd who call for Barabbas instead. Ironically, Barabbas in Hebrew means “son of a father.” Jesus, the one who is the true Son of His true heavenly Father, is the one unfortunately who is not released in favor of this other individual. Pilate tries also to get off the hook by sending Jesus to Herod, who happens to be in town for the Passover festival. This is Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, who is ruling in Galilee in those days, the area of jurisdiction for a Galilean like Jesus. We read of this account in Luke's gospel, but Herod is not willing to be the person of final judgment either and passes the buck back to Pilate, who eventually gives in to the crowd to crucify Jesus.

##### B. Death by Crucifixion

Jesus' death by crucifixion may well be one of the most agonizing and ignominious forms of torture and execution that humanity has ever devised. It was usually a long and protracted procedure, occupying two to three days. It was not blood loss that eventually led to the death but the victim's inability to lift his head up far enough from his chest to breathe; and therefore he would die of suffocation. Jesus actually dies unusually quickly for a crucified victim. Perhaps this is due to the lashes, that scourging or flogging that Pilate had ordered the Roman soldiers to give Jesus previously in hopes that that would satisfy the Jewish leaders. Or perhaps there is a more supernatural or voluntary element to Jesus' death, since it appears He has the strength to still cry out with a loud voice just before He dies. Perhaps the gospel writers want us to understand that even in the moment of Jesus' greatest agony He is able to consciously and voluntarily lay down His life.

##### C. Seven Sayings

The theology of the cross, of Jesus' time on this torture stake, is also profound; and perhaps as good a way to epitomize it as any in a short survey like this is to focus on what has come to be known as Jesus' seven last words on the cross, actually referring not to individual words but



to the seven sayings that the gospel writers, all four of them, in different places, record. The probable sequence of these seven words and their significance may be as follows:

1. The first words that are recorded from Jesus on the cross show that even in this situation of great agony He is prepared to forgive His accusers, His torturers, His enemies, as He cries out, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.” We have commented earlier on Jesus’ call to His followers in the Sermon on the Mount to love their enemies, then clearly He exhibits this even under the most extreme and difficult circumstances.
2. Secondly, He turns to one of the thieves or criminals (better translated “rebels” or “insurrectionists”) surrounding Him on the two crosses on either side of Him, who has cried out for remembrance when Jesus comes into His kingdom. Jesus replies, “Truly, today you will be with me in paradise.” As soon as they both die, they can enjoy the presence of God the Father in eternal bliss.
3. Thirdly, Jesus turns to his mother and to the beloved disciple, the apostle John, and says, “Woman, behold your son. Son, behold your mother”—speaking of both of them in terms of family endearment. Even on the cross He has not forgotten those closest to Him. Many believe that Joseph, Jesus’ adopted father, may well have died by now, and therefore He is calling upon His beloved disciple John to care for Mary, His mother.
4. Fourthly, Jesus cries out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Although theologians wrestle with all of the implications of what it means to bear the sins of the world, this one thing is clear: that Jesus felt some awareness of now being separated from His heavenly Father. The consciousness of oneness and intimacy that He had enjoyed throughout His life was broken.
5. Fifthly, He cries out, “I thirst.” And yet He refuses to drink what was either a painkiller or a poison, anything that would relieve His suffering or speed up the process of His death. And so His statement, “I thirst,” is probably not merely a statement of human anguish but also one of spiritual anguish following His acknowledgment of separation from God.
6. Sixthly, He says, “It is finished”—certainly referring to His life, but again perhaps we are meant to see the whole plan of salvation has now been accomplished.
7. Lastly, He cries out, remarkably, with that well-known Jewish prayer of children, childlike trust in the Father whom He no longer feels is present: “Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit.”

## V. Sunday

### A. Resurrection

If that were the end of the story it would be the great tragedy of a great human martyr, but all four Gospels stress that it is not. After death, after the remaining hours of Friday, Saturday and early Sunday morning, with His body lying in the tomb, He is raised. God raises Him from

the dead. There are many who stumble at this part of the Gospel account more than any other, believing it impossible for modern individuals to come to grips with such a miraculous story. And yet the alternatives seem to require even greater faith.

## B. Possible Alternatives

Some have argued that Jesus never really died; He simply passed out and revived in the tomb and somehow rolled the huge stone away and convinced His disciples He was in great health. Others claim that the body was stolen. But why then was it never produced? Why, if the disciples were the ones who stole it, were they prepared to die martyrs' deaths for that which they knew was a lie later in their careers. Others claim the women went to the wrong tomb, but then clearly the correct one could later have been pointed out. Others argue for mass hallucination, but the psychology of the disciples, defeated and cowering behind locked doors, is not one which inspires hope leading to visions of a risen Lord.

Most scholars who cannot accept the literal, bodily, physical resurrection, therefore, simply refer to this as a later mythological accretion on top of Christian faith. Yet Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, referring to what was taught to him at the time of his conversion perhaps no more than two years from the events of Jesus' death, already lists a litany of more than 500 witnesses, most of whom are still alive, who can attest to the truth of the resurrection. Supernatural though it may be, the evidence for the resurrection is stronger, more powerful, than for most other normal, ordinary events in history.

## C. Significance for Believers

If we are open to the possibility of the supernatural, we must acknowledge this marvelous event; but we must also talk about its significance. The possibility of our life after death, as Paul teaches also in 1 Corinthians 15, is directly dependent on Jesus' resurrection. His resurrection, as it were, was the firstfruits of the general resurrection of all believers, of all of God's people throughout human history (see especially 1 Corinthians 15:14); but also the nature of Christ's resurrection body points forward to the nature of our resurrection body—continuity as well as discontinuity with our current bodies.

Jesus, in His various resurrection appearances, shows that He is no longer bound by the limitations of the human body. He is able to pass through locked doors; He is able to appear and to disappear, and yet at the same time He makes it clear that it is a real human body. It can be touched, it can be felt, it can eat food. This same combination of completely redeemed and glorified and perfected humanity—the second half of 1 Corinthians 15 (vv. 12-58) teaches—will characterize all believers' future resurrection bodies. So while there are many things that we do not understand about this final and climactic episode in Jesus' life and ministry, we must admit that it is the single most important element. Without the Resurrection, His death could not have been atoning. Without His death, the Resurrection would not have been a real, genuine human event.

# Discussion Questions

How would you respond to the person who says that it really doesn't matter whether or not Jesus rose from the dead?

What does Jesus teach us about unity through His prayer for His disciples in John 17? How would you define unity in the church? Do you think it is possible to accomplish unity in the church? If so, how? If not, why not?

How does Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane reveal His utter dependence on the Father? What can you learn from this prayer and how can you apply it to your life during times of suffering?

# Further Study

## **Suggested reading for this lesson:**

Stedman, Ray C. *Adventuring Through the Bible: A Comprehensive Guide to the Entire Bible*.

Discovery House Publishers: 1997.

Read Chapter 53: “The Unfinished Story” (Acts)

## **Philip Yancey Devotional**

### **The Last Temptation - Mark 15:21-47**

With a loud cry, Jesus breathed His last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. (Mark 15:37-38)

Long before, at the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus had resisted Satan’s temptation toward an easier path of safety and physical comfort. Now, as the moment of truth drew near, that temptation must have seemed more alluring than ever.

On the cross, a criminal at Jesus’ left taunted him, “Aren’t you the Christ? Then save yourself and us.” The crowd milling about took up the cry: “Let him come down from the cross, and we will believe in him. . . . Let God rescue him now if he wants him.”

But there was no rescue, no miracle. There was only silence. The Father had turned His back, or so it seemed, letting history take its course, letting everything evil in the world triumph over everything good. How could Jesus save others when, quite simply, He could not save Himself?

Why did Jesus have to die? Theologians who ponder such things have debated various theories of “the Atonement” for centuries, with little agreement. Somehow it required love, sacrificial love, to win what could not be won by force.

One detail Mark includes may provide a clue. Jesus had just uttered the awful cry, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” He, God’s Son, identified so closely with the human race—taking on their sin!—that God the Father had to turn away. The gulf was that great. But, just as Jesus breathed his last, “The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.”

That massive curtain served to seal off the Most Holy Place, where God’s Presence dwelled. No one except the high priest was allowed inside, and he could enter only once a year, on a designated day. As the author of Hebrews would later note, the tearing of that curtain showed beyond doubt exactly what was accomplished by Jesus’ death on the cross. No more sacrifices would ever be required. Jesus won for all of us—ordinary people, not just priests—immediate access to God’s presence. By taking on the burden of human sin, and bearing its punishment, Jesus removed forever the barrier between God and us.

**Life Question:** When have you most wanted a “miracle” in your life and been disappointed? What did you learn from that experience?

# Glossary

**Paraclete** — A transliteration of Greek *parakletos*. The word has been translated as “Comforter,” “Counselor,” “Advocate,” “your Advocate,” and “Helper.” The Lord applied the term to the Holy Spirit in John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7. John uses it of Jesus in 1 John 2:1.

**Bar** — Aramaic for the Hebrew *ben*, “son.” In the New Testament “Bar” is frequently employed as a prefix to names of persons, e.g., Barabbas, Bar-Jesus, Bar-Jonah.

# Quiz

1. According to the apostle Paul, how many witnesses could attest to seeing Jesus after His resurrection?
  - A. More than 50
  - B. More than 100
  - C. More than 500
  - D. More than 5,000
  
2. After the final Passover meal Jesus was to share with His disciples, Jesus did **not**:
  - A. Predict Peter's denial
  - B. Allude to Judas' upcoming betrayal in a way that all the disciples understood
  - C. Say he had to go away
  - D. Say He would send the Holy Spirit
  
3. Technically, in the eyes of the Jewish people, their true high priest at the time of Jesus' trial would have been considered to be:
  - A. Aaron
  - B. Annas
  - C. Caiaphas
  - D. Jonathan
  
4. There are no activities recorded in the Gospels that can be clearly attributed to Jesus on this day of Passion Week:
  - A. Tuesday
  - B. Wednesday
  - C. Thursday
  - D. Friday
  
5. What did Jesus pray in His high priestly prayer in the gospel of John?
  - A. For unity with the Father and among believers
  - B. For believers to be willing to sacrifice their lives for the Gospel
  - C. For God to love all believers as much as Jesus loves them
  - D. For God to forgive the sins of all believers
  
6. What is the meaning of the term "Maundy" Thursday?
  - A. The day Jesus gave His disciples the "mournful" news of His death
  - B. The day Jesus pointed the disciples to the coming "Monday" of proclaiming the truth of His victory over sin
  - C. The day Jesus taught the disciples to be "servants"
  - D. The day Jesus gave His disciples His final "commandments"

7. What resulted in the Sanhedrin agreeing to charge Jesus with blasphemy?
  - A. When false witnesses claimed Jesus said, “I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days”
  - B. When Jesus refused to answer their question, “Are you the Christ?”
  - C. When Jesus claimed to be the Son of God
  - D. When Jesus spoke of being the Son of Man, sitting at the right hand of the Father and coming with the clouds of heaven
  
8. Which gospel does not include the actual words of Jesus during His last Passover meal?
  - A. Matthew
  - B. Mark
  - C. Luke
  - D. John
  
9. Which of the following is **not** true of Pilate and his encounter with Jesus?
  - A. At first he seemed convinced that Jesus was guilty.
  - B. After he questioned Jesus, he tried to release him as part of a Passover custom.
  - C. He tried to get off the hook by sending Jesus to Herod.
  - D. He ordered Jesus to be flogged in the hope of satisfying the Jewish leaders.
  
10. Which reason was **not** given by Jesus for celebrating the Lord’s Supper?
  - A. In memory of the Feast of Tabernacles celebrated by the Jews
  - B. As a memorial to His death on the cross
  - C. As a memorial to His resurrection and victory over death
  - D. In anticipation of the coming heavenly banquet

Answers: 1. C 2. B 3. B 4. B 5. A 6. D 7. D 8. D 9. A 10. A

# Lesson 2 Study Guide

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NT222

## *Acts: Crucifixion, Resurrection & Proclamation*

What Influenced Life's Daily  
Routines for Jesus

Updated 2014

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Our Daily Bread  
Christian University



# Objectives

Geography and politics have enormous influence on how we function in our day-to-day routines. This lesson gives you insight into how those realities helped shape daily life for Jesus and the people He ministered to during His time on earth.

When you complete this lesson, “What Influenced Life’s Daily Routines for Jesus,” you should be able to:

- Describe and explain the impact of geographical and climatic factors in Palestine.
- Discuss everyday life in Palestine.
- Name and discuss the influence of five Roman emperors who reigned in the New Testament era.
- Name and discuss the influence of six kings and three Roman procurators who reigned during the New Testament era.
- Discuss the Gentile religious setting in the New Testament era and explain its influence on Jesus and the Church.

## Scripture Reading

Read Luke 22-24.

# Transcript

## **Course Title: Acts: Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Proclamation**

### **Lesson Two: What Influenced Life's Daily Routines for Jesus**

#### **I. Introduction to Physical, Political, and Gentile Religious Settings**

In this second part of the New Testament setting, we will discuss the topography of Palestine, its climate, and everyday life. We will then examine the political environment and the Gentile religious setting of the New Testament world.

#### **II. Topography of Palestine**

The topography of Palestine can be divided into four zones which run north to south. These are (1) the coastal plain, continuous with the Phoenician coast; (2) Galilee and the central hill country, continuous with the Lebanon Mountains; (3) the Jordan rift valley, continuous with the Bekaa (Beqa) Valley; and (4) the Transjordanian highlands, continuous with the Anti-Lebanon Mountains.

##### **A. The Coastal Plain**

The coastal plain extends northward from Sinai along the Mediterranean Coast to the border of modern Lebanon. It narrows progressively from a twenty-mile width near Gaza on the Philistine plain to twelve miles near Joppa on the border of the Plain of Sharon, to less than two miles along the Plain of Dor, south of Haifa. Mount Carmel, a northwesterly extension of the central highland, interrupts the coastal plain where it meets the Mediterranean Sea at the modern city of Haifa. North of Mount Carmel the Plain of Acco, some five to seven miles in width, ends abruptly at the white limestone cliffs of Rosh Hanikra.

##### **B. Galilee and Central Hill Country**

The hills of Galilee comprise one of four main regions into which the central highlands can be divided. The Galilee consists of alternating ridges and valleys running east-west. Then comes the Jezreel plain, enclosed by mountains, but with gates to the coast, the Sea of Galilee, and the Transjordan. South of it stretches the central range from the north to south. It dips to the Beersheba depression, which runs east-west. The land then rises into the mountain wilderness of the Negev and Sinai.

##### **C. Jordan Rift Valley**

The Afro-Syrian rift is a north-south fault that runs from Asia Minor to Africa. This cleft in the earth's surface begins in the plain between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon Mountains to the north and extends southward through Palestine, the Gulf of Eilat (Aqaba), and on into Lake

Nyasa in Africa, a distance of 3,000 miles. The rift valley in Palestine averages ten miles in width and varies in altitude from about 300 feet above sea level in the north to 1,290 feet below sea level on the surface of the Dead Sea, the lowest place on earth apart from the ocean depths. The rift valley can be divided into five areas: the Huleh Valley, the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan Valley, the Dead Sea, and the Arabah.

#### D. Transjordanian Highlands

The Transjordanian hills that rise sharply from the eastern floor of the rift valley are broken into regions by wadis, which penetrate into the valley from the east. In the north, the Yarmuk River enters the valley slightly south of the Sea of Galilee. It provides a natural boundary between the present states of Syria and Jordan, while in biblical times Bashan to the north was separated from Gilead to the south. No natural boundary separated the region of Moab from that of the Gilead, but the northern boundary was generally eastward from the north end of the Dead Sea. The Wadi el-Hasa, the biblical brook Zered, provided a natural boundary between Moab and Edom to the south. The mountains of Edom rise in places to a height in excess of 5,000 feet.

### III. Climate

Palestine contains the same latitudes as the southern United States. Its climate is controlled generally by the prevailing westerly winds from the Mediterranean Sea. However, because of the diversity of topography, the climate varies considerably from place to place. Overall, there are two distinct seasons: a warm dry summer and a cool winter with rain. Sometime in October the first of the early rains moistens the ground enough for plowing and planting. The late rains of April and early May are needed to help the crops reach full maturity. With the onset of spring, vegetation begins to wither and die, and by midsummer drought conditions prevail. The only climatic relief to the summer drought comes in the form of characteristically heavy dews, particularly in the coastal plain and the higher elevations. The hot, dry blast of the sirocco, a southeast wind from the desert areas, makes its presence felt from April to early June and from September to November. Average temperature ranges for Jerusalem are 41 to 54 degrees Fahrenheit in January and 65 to 85 degrees in August.

The amount of rainfall in any given place in Palestine is controlled by a combination of factors, primarily geographical position and altitude. Precipitation tends to be heavier in the north and west and lighter in the south and east, while at the same time higher elevations tend to get more rain than the lower. As it works out, the central hill country and the Transjordanian highlands usually receive the heaviest rainfall, and within these areas the rainfall tends to be heavier in the north. Thus, Upper Galilee averages about forty inches of rain a year, the Ephraimite hill country (Samaria) around thirty, Jerusalem twenty-four, and Hebron twenty-two, while Beersheba in the Negev only receives about nine inches a year.

### IV. Everyday Life in Palestine

Palestine in antiquity was largely an agricultural nation. Because the coast offered no suitable harbors (except Acco), there was little maritime trade. It is difficult for us in modern times to

imagine what life was like in Palestine during the time of Christ, but archaeological research is especially useful in this regard. Material remains, such as houses, official buildings, tools, weapons, pottery vessels, and coins, which all contribute to a better understanding of everyday life in Palestine.

### A. Agrarian Society

The rhythm and routine of life in pre-industrial Palestine was thoroughly immersed in the climatic and agricultural patterns of the land. Fall plowing and sowing, winter pruning, spring harvesting, early summer threshing, and late summer gathering set the dominant agricultural chores. Pastoral pursuits were carried out in the context of this same larger rhythm of life. During the rainy months, when crops were growing, the wilderness areas provided pasturage; in the summer, the freshly harvested lands could be grazed and the crop residue, after threshing, used as fodder.

### B. Diet

Since there was no means of refrigeration, the diet of fresh food was seasonal. As fruits and vegetables ripened, they were consumed before they spoiled. Some could be cured and preserved in various forms: grapes became raisins and wine; figs were dried; olives were pickled or made into oil; beans and lentils were dried; and cereal grains needed merely to be preserved from dampness. The diet was essentially vegetarian, with meat consumed only on special occasions.

### C. Towns and Villages

Farming families lived in small towns or open villages, not in houses on the land they farmed. They walked to the fields in the early morning and returned in the evening, except perhaps during the harvest when they might stay in lean-tos. Inside the walled towns, living quarters were tightly packed together, with space at a premium. The courtyard of the main city gate provided opportunities for gathering and socializing. Here court was held, vendors sold their wares, speeches were made, elders philosophized and gossiped, and one could find company and watch neighbors come and go.

### D. Family Life

Large families were considered a blessing, since they provided labor, social security for a person's future, and continuation of the family name. It has been estimated that the infant mortality rate may have been as high as forty percent and that as many as thirty percent of the female population died in childbirth. The elderly and the sick were the responsibility of the family. To be an orphan or widow without family was to be in a state of destitution. Crafts and special skills tended to be handed down from parent to child. The lack of major technological innovations meant that the skills of one generation rarely differed from those of its predecessor.

## V. Political Setting

The Roman Empire was the culmination of a long, complex process of political, military, cultural, and social development that gives a lasting significance to Roman history. Rome did not superimpose a uniform governmental procedure upon its conquered territories. All areas were naturally subject to the emperor and to the Roman armies, but many localities were permitted to govern their own affairs so long as they did not violate Roman sovereignty or directives (Ac 19:35-41).

Subjugated areas were generally organized into provinces. There are at least fifteen mentioned in the New Testament, for example, Cilicia (Ac 6:9) and Judea (Gal 1:22). Provinces were ruled in two different ways. Proconsuls (Ac 13:7; 18:12), who were responsible to the Roman senate, ruled over those areas where the inhabitants were submissive to Roman law. Those provinces considered to be troublesome and possible breeding grounds for rebellion (for example, Judea) were ruled by governors called procurators, propraetors, or prefects. Proconsuls gained and kept their positions by annual appointment and renewal; procurators were assigned directly by the emperor and kept their offices as long as the emperor wanted them there.

## VI. New Testament Roman Emperors

The Roman Empire was the resolution of 700 years of struggle by various social classes and competing political systems. During that period, the Roman Empire, with its vast dominions, had been converging both from internal and external causes toward a one-man government. Caesar was the title assumed by the Roman emperors after Julius Caesar.

### A. Augustus (Octavian; 27 B.C.–A.D. 14)

The battle between Octavian and Antony with Cleopatra of Egypt, on the field of Actium on September 2, 31 B.C., decided the fate of the old Roman republic. The commonwealth had sunk into exhaustion after protracted civil and internecine strife. Octavian realized that supreme power was the only possible solution for surviving the crisis. On his return to Rome he began to do what Julius Caesar had done previously: he gathered the reins of government into his own hand. He succeeded with caution and shrewdness, and became the founder of the Roman Empire, which formally began January 16, 27 B.C. The Roman senate also conferred upon Octavian the title Augustus, which implied divinity, although he did not claim such for himself. The genius of Augustus' reign was that he acted as a constitutional monarch while maintaining the outward trappings of the republic. Further, the machinery of government was so well thought out that not only was it passed on smoothly at his death, but it continued to function and keep the peace at home, for the most part, for another two centuries.

### B. Tiberius (A.D. 14–37)

Augustus chose Tiberius, the son of his wife Livia by a previous marriage, born in 42 B.C., to be his successor. For the people of the provinces, Tiberius' reign was a peaceful and well-ordered time. Governors behaved themselves, and there were no destructive or expensive wars. In the domestic sphere, however, the concentration of power in one person made all the greater the threat of misbehavior by ambitious subordinates like Sejanus, the prefect of the praetorian

guard. As a result, although he was not a tyrant himself, Tiberius' reign sporadically descended into tyranny of the worst sort. Over time, Tiberius began to believe the allegations that Sejanus wanted to become emperor, and denounced Sejanus. The emperor died in March 37 and Caligula, his nephew Germanicus' son, was proclaimed emperor. Tiberius' reign was generally marked by restraint, fiscal thrift, and capable administrators.

### C. Gaius Caligula (A.D. 37–41)

Caligula's reign was too short, and the surviving ancient accounts too sensationalized, for any serious study of his policies. Son of the popular Germanicus, he spent much of his youth living in army camps, from which he got the nickname Caligula ("little boots"). During his reign, Mauretania was annexed and reorganized into two provinces; Herod Agrippa was appointed to a kingdom in Palestine; and severe riots took place in Alexandria between Jews and Greeks. Caligula went north and discovered there the beginnings of a conspiracy under the commander of the Upper German legions, Lentulus Gaetulicus. The subsequent events are shrouded in uncertainty, but it is known that Gaetulicus and Caligula's brother-in-law, M. Aemilius Lepidus, were executed and Caligula's two surviving sisters, implicated in the plot, suffered exile. Caligula's enthusiasm for divine honors for himself and his favorite sister, Drusilla (who died suddenly in A.D. 38 and was deified) are often presented as a clear sign of his madness. But it may have been no more than his tendency to tactlessly push the limits of the imperial cult, already established under Augustus. Caligula's excess in this regard is best illustrated by his order that a statue of himself be erected in the temple at Jerusalem. Only the delaying tactics of the Syrian governor, P. Petronius, and the intervention of Herod Agrippa prevented riots and a potential uprising in Palestine. In January 41, Caligula was assassinated by some of his own praetorian guard while on his way to lunch from the theater.

### D. Claudius (A.D. 41–54)

Claudius was a most unlikely candidate for emperor. The uncle of Caligula, he had been pointedly kept out of public office and affairs by both Augustus and Tiberius. Where Claudius was both strongest and most controversial was in his development of the administrative structure. His motive seems chiefly to have been a concern with efficiency, but the result was a considerable step toward centralization, as well as the embryonic stage of a later bureaucracy. Under Claudius are attributed the first issues of standing orders (mandata) from emperor to governor. In the organization of the provinces, Claudius appears to have preferred direct administration over client kingship. Under him the kingdoms of Mauretania, Lycia, Noricum, and Thrace were converted into provinces. Stable kingdoms, such as Bosphorus and Cilicia, were left untouched. When Claudius died suddenly in 54, the story was that his second wife, his niece Agrippina, had given him a dish of poison mushrooms. Her son, Nero, became the next emperor over Claudius' own son Britannicus.

### E. Nero (A.D. 54–68)

Nero, last of the Julio-Claudians, had been placed in the difficult position of absolute authority at a young age coupled with the often contradictory efforts of those in a position to manipulate him. Nero's reign was not without military operations (for example, the campaigns of Corbulo

against the Parthians, the suppression of the revolt of Boudicca in Britain), but his neglect of the armies was a critical error. He was also blamed for the great fire of Rome in the summer of 64, although this is probably slander provoked by his evident enthusiasm for rebuilding the city according to his own plans. The suspicion, which surrounded him after his reintroduction of treason trials and the outbreak of several real or imagined conspiracies, set the stage for a series of civil upheavals. Nero was proclaimed an enemy by the senate and took his own life in June 68, at the age of 30.

## VII. New Testament Kings

Kings were the highest local rulers of territories in the Roman Empire, subject to the central authority of the emperor at Rome. The king's office was approved by the Roman senate. During New Testament times Palestine, in whole or in part, was ruled by kings of the Herodian dynasty (technically, however, only the emperor was king).

### A. Herod the Great (37–4 B.C.)

Herod the Great was the son of Antipater, an Idumean, and Cypros, an Arabian of noble descent. In the year 47 B.C. Julius Caesar made Antipater procurator of Judea, who divided his territories between his four sons. Galilee fell to the lot of Herod, who was afterward appointed tetrarch of Judea by Mark Antony (40 B.C.), and also king of Judea by the Roman senate. Alarmed by the tidings of one “born king of the Jews,” he sent out soldiers who were to “kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under” (Mt 2:16). Herod was fond of splendor and lavished great sums on rebuilding and adorning the cities of his empire. He rebuilt the city of Caesarea on the coast, and also the city of Samaria, which he called Sebaste, the Greek equivalent of “Augustus.” He also restored the ruined temple of Jerusalem, a work that was begun in 20 B.C., but was not finished until after his death.

### B. Herod Antipas (4 B.C.–A.D. 39)

Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the Great and his Samaritan wife, Malthace. He was tetrarch of Galilee and Perea during the time of Jesus' earthly life (Lk 23:7). He had John the Baptist beheaded at the instigation of Herodias, the wife of his half-brother Herod Philip, whom he had married (Mt 14:1-12). Pilate sent Christ to him when he was at Jerusalem at the Passover celebration (Lk 23:7).

### C. Archelaus (4 B.C.–A.D. 6)

Archelaus was also the son of Herod the Great and Malthace. He was educated along with his brother Antipas at Rome. He inherited from his father a third part of the kingdom: Idumea, Judea, and Samaria, and hence is called king (Mt 2:22). It was for fear of him that Joseph and Mary turned aside on their way back from Egypt and did not settle in Bethlehem as they seem to have intended.



#### D. Herod Philip II (4 B.C.–A.D. 34)

Herod Philip II was the son of Herod the Great and Cleopatra of Jerusalem. As tetrarch of Batanea, Iturea, Traconitis, and Auranitis (Lk 3:1), he rebuilt the city of Caesarea Philippi (Mt 16:13; Mk 8:27), calling it by his own name to distinguish it from the Caesarea on the coast, which was the seat of the Roman government. He married Salome, the daughter of Herodias.

#### E. Herod Agrippa I (37–44)

Herod Agrippa was the son of Aristobulus (son of Herod the Great) and Bernice. He was educated in Rome and lived there many years. While there he became friends with Caligula, who turned over Philip's tetrarchy to him, granting him the title "king." He soon took over Herod Antipas' territory as well, ultimately possessing the entire kingdom of his grandfather, Herod the Great. According to Acts 12:1-19, he had James, the brother of John, killed and Peter imprisoned. After Agrippa's death the kingdom came under the control of the prefect of Syria, and Palestine was fully incorporated into the empire.

#### F. Herod Agrippa II (53–70)

Herod Agrippa II was the son of Herod Agrippa I and Cypros. He was only 17 years old when his father died in A.D. 44. Because he had been educated in Rome he was well known to Claudius, but it was not until A.D. 48 when Herod of Chalcis died, that Claudius presented the kingdom to Agrippa II (Ac 25:13; 26:2). His privileges included appointing the high priests, and he was given authority over the temple, even though he did not rule over any Judean territory. In 53, Claudius assigned a new kingdom to the Jewish king, that of his great-uncle Philip (Traconitis, Batanea, Gaulanitis) plus Abila, the former kingdom of Lysanias, and the former tetrarchy of Varus; however, rulership of Chalcis was taken away. When Nero came to office, he gave Agrippa the Galilean cities of Tiberias and Tarcheae, as well as Julias in Perea. It was before him and his sister, Bernice, that Paul made his defense at Caesarea (Ac 25:12-27).

### VIII. New Testament Procurators

Prefects (governors) were rulers of designated territories, appointed by the emperor and directly responsible to him. Much of their work involved finances, such as taxes. They also had supreme judicial authority, such as Pilate used regarding Jesus. The official residence of the Judean procurators was located in Caesarea Maritima. The area of their responsibility was usually that area not ruled by a contemporary king. For example, Herod Antipas was a tetrarch of Galilee, while Pilate was governor of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea. Most of the New Testament references to procurators are to Pilate, Felix, and Festus.

#### A. Pontius Pilate (26–36)

Pontius Pilate's reign extended over the period of the ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. He was sent out in 26 when Tiberius' advisor Sejanus, militantly anti-Jewish, was at the peak of his power. Inadvertently or on purpose, he seems to have often angered the Jewish populace by his blasphemous activities. He brought Roman standards bearing images into the



city of Jerusalem and placed Roman votive shields in the old palace of Herod, and he compelled the priests to contribute money to the sacred Corban, trust funds belonging to the temple, for the construction of an aqueduct into Jerusalem. In A.D. 36, Vitellius, the governor of Syria, brought serious charges against Pilate about his treatment of a large group of Samaritans on Mount Gerizim, and he was banished to Vienne in Gaul, where, according to tradition, he committed suicide.

#### B. M. Antonius Felix (52–59?)

The high priest Jonathan, on embassy to Rome, appealed for the influential freedman M. Antonius Felix as procurator. Formerly married to the granddaughter of Mark Antony and Cleopatra, Felix tried to consolidate his power in Judea by marrying the young daughter of Agrippa I—even though she was already wife of the king of Emesa. His administration, however, was not a success. His period in office was troubled by religious-minded rebels who led crowds into the desert, promising them “wonders and signs” or “signs of freedom.” A prophet from Egypt led a crowd to the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem, promising them that at his command the city walls would fall and they could enter. Cavalry and infantry sent by Felix killed 400 and captured 200 of them. This is why a Roman tribune, who later arrested the apostle Paul, supposed that he might have caught “the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the desert” (Ac 21:38).

#### C. Porcius Festus (59?–62)

Felix’s successor, Porcius Festus, also attempted to deal with the major threat to Roman order: the numerous brigand groups and the Sicarii. The cavalry and infantry once more proceeded against these troublemakers, capturing and killing many, although to what extent he was able to achieve success in clearing the country of the menace is difficult to say. It was Festus who sent Paul to Rome because he was a Roman citizen (Ac 25:12). He is the only known Judean procurator to die in office.

### IX. Gentile Religious Setting

#### A. Greek-Roman Gods

Greeks supplied the Romans from very early times with many of the myths and ideas about their own gods, so that it is difficult to speak about “Roman” religion as a separate phenomenon. Roman religion was essentially the result of the fusion of primitive Latin and Greek elements. The chief feature of Roman religion was the belief that all the important processes in the world were divinely activated and, conversely, that different gods had charge of particular functions and spheres of activity. In this way, most of the things that were vital for the well-being of society were thought of as functions of a god or as gods functioning.

Also, many natural objects in themselves provoked the kind of wonder that led people to think of them as more than natural. In the hot, sunny climate of Italy, a spring of fresh water or a copse of trees inspired grateful respect. The Romans thought of them as sacred places in which a spirit dwelt. In a famous passage of *Fasti* (III, 295–6), Ovid writes, “There was a grove below

the Aventine, dark with the shade of oaks, and when you saw it you would say ‘there is a deity there.’”

Roman religion was concerned with success, not with sin. “Jupiter is called Best and Greatest,” Cicero comments (*On the Nature of the Gods III*, 87), “because he does not make us just or sober or wise, but healthy and rich and prosperous.” Happiness was the aim of life and happiness depended upon the successful outcome of all one’s day-to-day activities, in private life, in business or agriculture, and in the wider sphere of national affairs, and not upon one’s moral condition. The object of religion was to discover the correct procedure for securing the good will of the gods in making these activities successful.

## B. Emperor Worship

Augustus tried to breathe new life into Roman worship. He aimed at an imperial and popular religion similar to what had long prevailed in the East, where kings were often regarded as divine by their subjects. When Augustus brought peace to the world, the Orient was ready to hail him as a god. Out of this evolved the cult of the reigning emperor and of Rome personified. This worship may have given a semblance of religious unity to the empire, and it magnified the emperor, but it became a deadly engine of persecution when Christians refused to worship the emperor and were treated as traitors. Eventually, emperor worship died out. In the third and fourth centuries, oriental worship became supreme, and the religion of the empire soon became cosmopolitan and eclectic, according to the spirit of the new era.

## C. Occult

The late Roman republic and the Roman Empire were characterized by a widespread, almost universal, belief in the influence of the sun, moon, planets, and stars upon events on earth. Astrology had spread from Babylonia and Egypt to Italy in the second century B.C. and soon gained a stronghold over unwary minds. Most people, including the emperors, firmly believed that by studying the stars astrologers could predict the future, and they paid special attention to their horoscopes. According to R. M. Ogilvie, “To learn what the stars had in store was only to discover what the gods intended” (*The Romans and Their Gods in the Age of Augustus*, p. 55).

Belief in magic flourished at the same time. Examples of magic in the New Testament are provided by the Samaritan magician Simon (Ac 8:9-11) and the magical books, worth 50,000 drachmas, burned at Ephesus (Ac 19:19). Many magical papyri, still extant, reflect the use of nonsense syllables (for example, “abracadabra”) and words taken from Jewish and Christian sources in order to work the magician’s will by demonic aid. Much magic was directed against other people, as we learn from curses still preserved on stone or metal. Excavations in Italy have unearthed hundreds of astrological amulets, charms, and such like.

## D. Philosophical Speculation

Many pagan intellectuals had become thoroughly disenchanted with their religious heritage and had moved into philosophical speculation. Paul encountered such at Mars Hill in Athens. Luke reports, “All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing

nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas” (Ac 17:21). These philosophies did influence some Christian thinking and some converts brought into their new faith faulty mental concepts framed by these pagan ideas. False teachers had wedded misinterpreted scriptural concepts with Greek philosophy and had penetrated the churches with their intellectual messages. Several epistles were written to warn believers about the errors of this syncretism—for example, Colossians, 1 John, and Jude.

# Discussion Questions

How does understanding the political, cultural, and geographical context of 1st century Israel help us better understand New Testament scriptures?

In this lesson, what did you learn about life during Jesus' time and place that interested you most? Why did this interest you? How was life in Jesus' time and place different from yours? How was it similar?

How does understanding the Roman political structure help you better understand what life was like for Jesus and for early Christianity?

# Further Study

## **Suggested reading for this lesson:**

Stedman, Ray C. *Adventuring Through the Bible: A Comprehensive Guide to the Entire Bible*.

Discovery House Publishers: 1997.

Read Chapter 71: “Living Stones” (1 Peter)

## **Philip Yancey Devotional**

### **Detour - Acts 16:6-40**

During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” (Acts 16:9)

The book of Acts follows Paul on three distinct missionary journeys. It was a good time in history to travel, for by Paul’s lifetime Rome had established absolute mastery over a vast territory. Language was unified, and a rare empire-wide peace, the Pax Romana, prevailed. Moreover, Roman engineers had crisscrossed the empire with a network of roads (built so well that many still survive), and as a Roman citizen, Paul held a passport valid anywhere.

In his travels, Paul concentrated on the chief trade towns and capital cities of Roman colonies. From them, the gospel message could radiate out across the globe. If a young church showed promise, Paul would stay on, sometimes as long as three years, to direct its spiritual growth. His letters glow with affection for the friends he developed in this way. On his second and third journeys, Paul revisited many of the churches he had founded.

This chapter shows how one of Paul’s favorite churches came into existence. Philippi was a leading city in the region of Macedonia, where a divine vision had directed him. Following his normal procedure, Paul had arranged his missionary trip strategically, linking together major towns and cities in sequence. But this one time he ran into a roadblock and received an alternative itinerary. A casual conversation with a woman by a river opened the way for Paul (women played a crucial role in many of the early churches). What took place in Philippi stands almost as a pattern for Paul’s never-dull missionary visits: early acceptance, violent opposition, and providential deliverance from danger.

As this account reveals, Paul did not hesitate to use the prestige and status that came with his Roman citizenship. He was escorted from the city with proper respect, but he left behind two transformed households: one led by a woman cloth merchant, one, by a city jailer. From that unlikely combination would grow the lively church at Philippi.

Life Question: How have you sensed God’s guidance in your life?

# Glossary

**Palestine** — The land of Palestine took its name from the Philistines (the Pelishtim in Hebrew) who settled along the Mediterranean Coast from Joppa to Gaza about 1300 - 1200 B.C. The land area measures approximately 150 miles from Dan to Beersheba (north-south) and 100 miles from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River (east-west) or roughly the size of New Jersey.

# Quiz

1. All Roman provinces were subject to the emperor and Roman armies, and they were ruled by:
  - A. Proconsuls
  - B. Procurators
  - C. Both A and B
  - D. None of the above
2. Herod the Great ruled from:
  - A. 37-4 B.C.
  - B. 4 B.C.-A.D. 39
  - C. 4 B.C.-A.D. 6
  - D. 37-44
3. In the Roman Empire, kings were:
  - A. The highest local rulers of territories
  - B. Not subject to the central authority of the emperor
  - C. Never approved by the senate
  - D. All of the above
4. Palestine has \_\_\_\_ distinct season(s).
  - A. One
  - B. Two
  - C. Three
  - D. Four
5. The chief feature of Roman religion was the belief:
  - A. That different gods did not have charge of particular functions and spheres of activity
  - B. In a single supreme god
  - C. That spirits did not dwell near water sources
  - D. That all important processes in the world were divinely activated
6. The coastal plain of ancient Palestine extended:
  - A. Northward from Sinai along the Mediterranean coast to Mount Carmel
  - B. Northward from the Sinai along the Mediterranean coast to the border of modern Lebanon
  - C. Southward from the border of modern Lebanon to Joppa
  - D. Southward from Mount Carmel to Alexandria

7. The Dead Sea, the lowest place on earth apart from the ocean depths, is:
  - A. 1,000 feet below sea level
  - B. 1,290 feet below sea level
  - C. 2,000 feet below sea level
  - D. 2,290 feet below sea level
8. The Roman emperor on the throne when Jesus was born was:
  - A. Julius Caesar
  - B. Augustus
  - C. Tiberius
  - D. Nero
9. This river provides a natural boundary between the present states of Syria and Jordan:
  - A. Yarmuk
  - B. Brook Zered
  - C. Jordan
  - D. Jabbok
10. Which of the following is **not** part of the topography of ancient Palestine?
  - A. Galilee and the central hill country
  - B. Jordan rift valley
  - C. Nile delta
  - D. Transjordanian highlands

Answers: 1. C 2. A 3. A 4. B 5. D 6. B 7. B 8. B 9. A 10. C



# Lesson 3 Study Guide

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NT222

## *Acts: Crucifixion, Resurrection & Proclamation*

The Early Church Explodes on the Scene

Updated 2014

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Our Daily Bread  
Christian University

# Objectives

Jesus' final commission, in Acts 1:8, to His disciples, was to spread His gospel to Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. In this lesson you will survey Acts 1-12 where Luke explains and illustrates the Church's explosion into Jerusalem and then its expansion to Judea and the rest of Palestine.

When you complete this lesson, "The Early Church Explodes on the Scene," you should be able to:

- Discuss the date, authorship, audience, purpose, and structure of Acts.
- Discuss the world-changing events of Pentecost.
- Explain the relationship between Luke's gospel and Acts.
- Identify the theme of Acts and explain how it serves as an outline for the book.
- Describe God's process of spreading the Gospel throughout Jerusalem, Judea, and the surrounding regions.
- Grow in your appreciation for the tremendous heritage of the Christian Church.

# Scripture Reading

Read Acts 1-12.

# Transcript

## Course Title: Acts: Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Proclamation

### Lesson Three: The Early Church Explodes on the Scene

#### I. Introduction to Part One of the Book of Acts

Thus far in our survey of the New Testament we have focused exclusively on the four gospels. With this lesson we are ready to proceed to the fifth book of the New Testament, the Acts of the Apostles.

##### A. Authorship, Date, and Audience

We have already mentioned in previous lessons that tradition ascribes the authorship of this book to Luke, Paul's beloved physician, who also authored the first volume of this two-volume sequence—namely, the gospel of Luke. We refer our listeners and viewers to our introductory comments surrounding the gospel of Luke for a review of the details of that background. To summarize briefly, Luke is probably both the author of the gospel attributed to him and the Acts of the Apostles in approximately the year 62 A.D., right after the events with which the Acts of the Apostles ends.

He is writing as a Greek, the only non-Jewish writer of any book of the New Testament, to a primarily Greek Christian audience, with the concerns that emerged as Christianity had grown, become somewhat more urbanized, perhaps somewhat more well-to-do, and spread throughout a wide variety of places in the Roman Empire.

##### B. Purposes of Luke's Second Volume

The purposes of Luke's second volume, more specifically, may be summarized under three headings. Here Luke charts the progress of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome, or another way of saying that is the unfolding of Christianity from what initially was an exclusively Jewish sect to that which within approximately thirty years became a major empire-wide religion—predominantly, within that generation more Gentile than Jewish.

Secondly, Luke highlights the ministry of key figures in the early church. Although the church came to entitle the book the Acts of the Apostles, it might better have been called the “Acts of Peter and Paul,” for these are the two central characters of the two main halves of Luke's Acts respectively. Others have said that because Luke's concern to show God's sovereign guidance through the Holy Spirit of all of these initial events that an even better title still might have been the “Acts of the Holy Spirit.”

Thirdly, Luke consistently defends Christians against charges of lawbreaking, both the Jewish and the Roman law. He is putting forward an apologetic for legitimacy and the harmlessness

of Christianity, even while it is clear that those who become Christians will have their lives radically transformed. As we mentioned, the book of Acts falls neatly into two main sections: the first twelve chapters predominantly focusing on the Jewish Christian phase of the earliest two decades of Christian existence, and from chapters 13-28, the second half focusing predominantly on the expansion of Gentile Christianity. And again the two main characters, the two most prominent Christian preachers and witnesses in these two halves or segments of the expansion of Christianity in the book of Acts, are Peter and Paul respectively.

### C. Outline of Acts

Acts 1:8 has often been seen as a thumbnail outline of Luke's understanding of his second volume, as Jesus promises and commands His followers that they shall be His witnesses, first in Jerusalem, then in Judea and Samaria, and eventually to the outermost parts of the earth. We may make that outline perhaps a bit more precise by noticing the six times when Luke brings a section of his Acts to a close, to a temporary pause, with a summary statement—something along the lines of “the Word of God grew and spread” or “many people were added to the faith.” These summary sentences appear in 6:7, 9:31, 12:24, 16:5, 19:20, and 28:31. These summary statements seem to divide the book of Acts into segments of the expansion of the first Christian movement, primarily geographically.

## II. Church in Jerusalem (Ac 1:1-6:7)

We may begin, then, in our survey of the contents of the book of Acts by focusing on the first half, which will occupy the rest of this lesson. The first third of this first half, the first subsection of the section dealing with Jewish Christianity, focuses on the church as it began exclusively as an entity within the wholly Jewish city of Jerusalem.

### A. Resurrection Appearances and Ascension of Jesus

The first events that are narrated recapitulate Jesus' resurrection appearances in and around Jerusalem and then narrate Jesus' ascension; here Jesus is returning forty days after His resurrection to His heavenly Father. The significance of the ascension is on the one hand to indicate to the disciples that the resurrection appearances in which Jesus has come and gone at will, vanishing and appearing in their midst, have ended, but more theologically to point out that Jesus is now exalted, returning to that heavenly position that had occupied his role in eternity past. As the angelic witnesses testify to the disciples in the opening verses of Acts 1, particularly verses 9-11, He will return in the same fashion as He has vanished or disappeared: coming from heaven—what Christians have subsequently believed will be a visible public, even worldwide, return of Christ at the end of the age.

### B. Judas' Successor

Following Christ's ascension, the disciples return to Jerusalem and fulfilling Jesus' command wait for the promise of the coming of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. In that period which is described in the remaining verses of Acts 1, the major event or business item on their agenda, as it were, is to pray for and eventually cast lots to determine who will be Judas'

successor—Judas, the disciple who betrayed Jesus and then subsequently hanged himself. It is interesting that they feel the necessity to complete the number twelve, indicating, as we saw during the life of Christ, that it is important to symbolize the church as the new Israel, the fulfillment of the twelve tribes of Israel. It is also interesting to see how later in the book of Acts, however, when James the apostle is martyred he is not replaced, so that there does not seem to be grounds here for any doctrine of apostolic succession or for an eternal mandate to keep the number of church leaders at twelve.

### C. Pentecost and the First Christian Sermon

With chapter 2 of the book of Acts comes the famous and lengthy story of Pentecost—the Jewish harvest festival which tradition said was the time of the giving of the Law to Moses at Mount Sinai. It is appropriate, then, the Holy Spirit should descend at this point and empower and fill the fledgling church and its leadership to inaugurate the new covenant just at the very time when the Jews were celebrating the inauguration of what would soon be called in Christian circles the “old covenant” or the “first testament” between God and His people. At this point the believers are filled with the Spirit and speak in tongues, the first of three such references to speaking in tongues in the book of Acts.

Although it is more debated what went on in the later occurrences of tongues, here Luke makes it clear that these were known foreign languages enabling the Jewish disciples to communicate in their native tongues with Jewish pilgrims to Pentecost, to Jerusalem, from all over the empire. It is also important to remember that all of the Jews in the first century spoke some level of Hebrew or Aramaic and probably were even more fluent in Greek, so that this was not a necessary means to communicate the Gospel. Rather it seems more that the signs acted as a confirmation of the divinely ordained nature of the events and the testimony on this occasion.

Peter uses, therefore, this miraculous sign as an opportunity to preach the first Christian sermon, in which he very clearly lays out the events that Jerusalem has recently experienced with the ministry and death and resurrection of Jesus, culminating in the statement that the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus proves that God has made Him both Lord and Christ. The bystanders are cut to the quick and ask, “What shall we do?” And Peter’s climactic word in this first Christian sermon then comes in Acts 2:38, in which he itemizes four elements that with only a handful of exceptions remain held together throughout Acts and throughout the rest of New Testament teaching, as what we might call a “salvation package”—those events that happen more or less simultaneously, at least under ordinary circumstances, when a person comes to Christ.

These four elements are (1) repentance, a turning from sin and a turning to God in Jesus; (2) baptism by water (in this context in the name of Jesus, but in other contexts in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—showing us that this is no mechanical ritual or formula); (3) thirdly, as a result of these actions, receiving forgiveness of sins; and (4) fourthly, the empowerment, the filling, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. There are those who have tried to separate “baptism” and “filling” of the Spirit; indeed, Luke does seem to use filling repeatedly as experiences that believers can have more than once when they are empowered for bold testimony or witness in one fashion or another. The term “baptism of the Spirit” throughout

the New Testament seems to be reserved, however, for the initiation experience that people have—their first experience with the Spirit at the coming of Christ. It is also interesting that the book of Acts seems, with a few possible exceptions, consistently to place baptism in water as the event which closely follows the coming to faith, the profession of faith, by someone old enough and mature enough to make that decision.

#### D. First Christian Healing and Second Sermon

After this first Christian sermon, Acts 3 describes another miracle, this time a healing miracle in which Peter is enabled by God to have the same power to heal a lame man as Jesus did more than once in His ministry. And again the sign in the temple precincts, visible to a large crowd, becomes the occasion that enables Peter to preach another sermon, the second existing Christian sermon. The main point of this sermon is to stress again the repentance that must follow, but the sequel shows how early Christianity is brought into conflict with the Jewish authorities, not surprisingly since many who undoubtedly heard Peter on these original occasions were among the same who had only a few weeks or months earlier called for and perhaps even been instrumental in instigating the crucifixion of Jesus.

The ringleaders of this Nazarene sect are arrested and are commanded not to speak in the name of Jesus. Acts 4:19-20 is an important testimony, however, to the early Christian conviction that when God's will contravenes human will, or vice versa, people must obey God rather than human leaders. Interestingly, this same sequence of events (1) preaching, (2) arrest, (3) threats on the part of the Jewish leadership, (4) a claim that we must obey God rather than humans, (5) and subsequent release—repeats itself throughout chapters 4 and 5, thus showing on the one hand both the hostility (a fulfillment of the predictions of Jesus that His disciples would be dragged before leaders and forced to testify before them) but also the empowerment of the Spirit and God's sovereignty that allows the disciples to continue to speak boldly despite this hostility. What a striking contrast from their cowardice prior to Jesus' death, and another key pointer to the reality of the supernatural resurrection of Jesus and the empowerment of the Spirit at Pentecost. It seems little else, perhaps nothing else, could have accounted for such a direct and striking about-face on the part of Jesus' followers.

#### E. Early Church Structure

There are two little bits that we have intentionally skipped over to deal with together at this point. The closing verses of chapter 2:42-47 and the closing verses of chapter 4, moving into chapter 5, deal with the initial organization of the fledgling Christian community in Jerusalem. Here we are introduced to a model of communal sharing of possessions. A close reading of the text allows us to avoid some misconceptions that might appear superficially. It does not say that all the believers sold everything all at once and formed what today might be called pure communism. No, while different ones gave up varying amounts of their income, sold various portions of their material possessions to meet those needs as they arose.

Some of these would have been very ad hoc needs, not least the need for some of the Jewish pilgrims who became Christians after that first Pentecost and perhaps wanted to stay in Jerusalem rather than to return home needing to have some form of livelihood and some way

of being taken care of. Those who are already dependent on the various systems of Jewish welfare and caring for the poor may well have been cut off from those systems if they became Christians, and they too would have needed caring for. But even though the model is not replicated throughout the book of Acts or early Christianity, and therefore does not seem to be mandatory in all of its details, there is an exemplary concern for the poor and a generosity and sacrificial giving on the part of those Christians of some means which remains consistent throughout all Scripture and clearly is mandatory for Christians of all times and all places.

By the time we reach Acts 6 we see that theme of concern for the poor already beginning to take shape in a slightly different form. As this multicultural community of first Christians, albeit all Jewish, begins to grow, it is understandable that a rift took place between what Luke describes as the Hebraic Jewish Christians and the Hellenistic Jewish Christians, that is, those whose native tongue was Hebrew or Aramaic (probably predominantly those Christians from Jerusalem and its immediate environs) and those who came from the Diaspora, from other parts of the Greco-Roman Empire. Jews though they were, Greek would have been their first language, and even in their cultural practices at times there would have been differences from the local native Israelites. It is understandable when there are ethnic and cultural divisions that often tensions emerge, and in this case what we might call the first Christian conflict emerges over the neglect of the Hellenistic Christian widows.

All of the first apostles were Hebraic, and therefore it would have been easy for the Hellenistic widows to be overlooked. The apostles demonstrate great wisdom in delegating this responsibility so as not to spread themselves too thin, but also to call upon the Hellenistic Christian community to select leaders from its own midst—leaders who are called “those who serve.” The Greek word is the root (*dekoneo*) from which we get the noun “deacon” and it is this passage which perhaps inspired the later, more formal Christian office of a deacon—one who serves to meet the very practical, even material, needs of the Christian community. With Acts 6:7 we reach the first summary statement, and the first major phase of the church in Jerusalem comes to an end.

### III. Church in Judea, Galilee and Samaria (Ac 6:8-9:31)

Acts 6:8-9:31 proceeds to the next subsection of this first half of the book of Acts, which we may label the church in Judea, Galilee and Samaria. Here we are introduced to three main characters about whom we are given vignettes of their ministry: Stephen and Philip, two of those initial “deacons” that the Hellenistic Jewish Christian community had just chosen, and Saul, a very zealous Jew from Tarsus, student of the rabbi Gamaliel in Jerusalem, who will eventually become the most famous early Christian missionary.

#### A. Ministry of Stephen

Acts 7, framed by the closing verses of chapter 6 and the opening verses of chapter 8, describes the ministry of Stephen, who apparently comes to an understanding of how Christianity will be freed from its attachments to the Jewish institutions of temple law and land more clearly than any Christian thus far. Therefore, in his preaching, he becomes the first Christian to be arrested, not released, but martyred. Stephen gives a long speech in his defense that



occupies the majority of chapter 7, which reads like a survey of Old Testament history. But its primary purpose seems to be to point out that Christianity need not be tied to land, law, or temple, precisely because God's people at times throughout its history, already under the old dispensation, were not tied to these institutions.

The patriarchs sojourned regularly, being forced to flee—eventually into slavery into Egypt without inheriting the promise of the land. The law given to Moses itself points ahead to another prophet who will come, greater than Moses, who will change the order and the way in which the law is applied and fulfilled. And the temple is not even God's perfect ideal initially, but a kind of compromise to the wishes of the Israelites. This is all radical enough to get Stephen stoned to death—the first Christian martyr—and for a persecution to spread, presumably among these more Hellenistic and radical first Jewish Christians, leaving only the more Hebraic and presumably more conservative Jewish Christians, perhaps even only their leaders, the twelve apostles, in Jerusalem.

## B. Ministry of Philip the Evangelist

As part of the persecution and the flight of the Hellenistic leaders, nevertheless the Gospel spreads. Philip finds himself in Samaria, preaching to Samaritans there, and finds a welcome response, so striking that Peter and John are summoned from Jerusalem to confirm that the Samaritans have in fact received the Gospel. There are many theological controversies that have split the church at this point. How do you account for the apparent delay in the arrival of the Holy Spirit?

Some would see this as a precedent for confirmation separated from the Christian practice of baptism. Others have seen this as justification for a baptism of the Spirit subsequent to initial salvation. Perhaps the most common Protestant understanding of this text has been that an exceptional situation took place under exceptional conditions. So strong was the animosity between Jews and Samaritans that until the very Hebraic Jewish Christians and their leaders confirmed the reality of the Samaritans' conversions this break could not be overcome. Still others have suggested that the apparent experience of salvation by the Samaritans, particularly based on the experience of their ringleader Simon the Magician who would shortly demonstrate that his faith was not true faith at all, may have been superficial in the lives of all of the initial believers.

Whichever way you solve this problem surely the important point that Luke wants us to understand is that the Gospel is moving out and is no longer an exclusively Jewish sect. That point is reinforced by the other vignette, describing the ministry of Philip in Acts 8: his leading of the Ethiopian eunuch on the road in Gaza to Christ through his reading of Isaiah 53 and the testimony of the prophet there to the coming suffering servant, the ministry of Jesus. Whatever else we say about this passage, what is striking is that this is a foreigner, Jew though he may well have been, but one who was a eunuch, one who was physically castrated so he could take care of the royal harem with impunity, who was considered forever unclean by Jewish ritual standards. Philip does not treat him thus, but treats him as an equal partner and candidate for God's grace.



### C. Conversion of Saul/Paul

The final person to whom we are introduced in this short vignette is Saul of Tarsus and his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus. Although he has already begun to be a ringleader in seeking out Christians to try to martyr them, God in Christ dramatically turns him around—convincing him through a supernatural revelation of the risen Lord that the one whom he has been persecuting is in fact the Lord and His followers should now become his companions. After this dramatic conversion he is temporarily blinded, led by hand to meet Ananias in the city of Damascus, and is baptized there, and becomes—instead of the primary persecutor of the first Christians—their primary spokesman, immediately and surprisingly going back to his fellow Hellenistic Jewish countrymen and speaking boldly and convincingly about Jesus as the Messiah.

### IV. Advances in Palestine and Syria (Ac 9:32-12:24)

The final third of this first half of the book of Acts is the shortest, and has the fewest distinct stories within it (Ac 9:32-12:24), which we may describe as advances in Palestine and Syria. The most prominent event that dominates these chapters is the long story of the conversion of Cornelius, occupying all of chapter 10 and a good part of chapter 11. Here Peter, the Jewish, the Hebraic Christian, now understands clearly through a threefold vision of unclean food descending in a blanket from heaven that God is declaring all foods clean and therefore He was declaring all people clean. There can be no obstacle to going to this Gentile centurion—a commanding officer in the foreign army forces, who himself is a God-fearer who has been worshiping and praying to the God of Israel while not being a full convert to Judaism—and accepting him on equal terms, having table fellowship with him, preaching the Gospel to him. It is interesting to see here that after Peter's lengthy sermon, indeed before Peter can wrap it up and bring it to a formal conclusion, we have the second experience of speaking in tongues in the book of Acts—again to confirm the reality of a dramatic conversion with a group of people, this time full-fledged Gentiles that might otherwise have remained somewhat suspect.

In Acts 11 and 12, this first half then draws to a close with a description of the first entirely Gentile Christian church in the Syrian city of Antioch and with the juxtaposition of the persecution, arrest, and martyrdom of James the apostle. The persecution, arrest, and miraculous release of the apostle Peter all by Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great, followed by Herod's own presumptuous and blasphemous acclamation of himself and reception of worship as a god, which leads to him being supernaturally struck dead. With these events we are now prepared for the second and even more lengthy phase of the book of Acts, the predominantly Gentile mission of early Christianity.

# Discussion Questions

Read Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37; 6:1-7. What ideals and practical challenges can be drawn from these passages for the church today?

Explain, in your own words, the rift that developed between the Hebraic Jewish Christians and the Hellenistic Jewish Christians (particularly recall the neglect of the Hellenistic Christian widows). How did the twelve handle this matter? What lessons can we learn from this?

In his first Christian sermon, Peter identifies four elements as events that happen when a person comes to Christ. Dr. Blomberg calls these a “salvation package.” Describe your own “salvation package.” In other words, describe how these four events took place in your life.

# Further Study

## Suggested reading for this lesson:

Stedman, Ray C. *Adventuring Through the Bible: A Comprehensive Guide to the Entire Bible*.

Discovery House Publishers: 1997.

Read Chapter 64: “How to Build a Church” (1 Timothy)

## Philip Yancey Devotional

### Explosion - Acts 2:1-41

Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. . . . All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:2, 4)

On the feast day of Pentecost, the disciples got what they had been waiting for. Perhaps half a million pilgrims were milling about in Jerusalem on that Jewish holiday. The believers, in accord with Jesus’ instructions, had gathered in a small group indoors, where they patiently awaited what had been promised. Then, with a sound like a violent wind and a sight like tongues of fire, it happened. The Holy Spirit, the Presence of God himself, took up residence inside ordinary bodies—their bodies.

The disciples hit the streets with a bold new style that the world has never recovered from. Soon everyone in Jerusalem was talking about the Jesus-followers. Clearly, something was afoot. To their amazement, pilgrims from all over the world heard the Galileans’ message in their own native languages.

There was Peter, coward apostle who had denied Christ three times to save his own neck, brazenly taking on both Jewish and Roman authorities. Quoting from King David and the prophet Joel, he proclaimed that they had just lived through the most important event of all history. “God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of this fact,” he said, and went on to declare Jesus as the very Messiah, the fulfillment of the Jews’ long-awaited dream. Three thousand people responded to Peter’s powerful message on that first day. And thus the Christian church was born.

Beginning with that boisterous scene in Jerusalem, Luke weaves a historical adventure tale. The group of new believers, at first a mere annoyance to the Jews and the Romans, would not stop growing. Just as Jesus had predicted, the message spread throughout Judea, and Samaria, and in less than one generation had penetrated into Rome, the center of civilization. In an era when new religions were a dime a dozen, the Christian faith became a worldwide phenomenon. It all began with this scene on the day of Pentecost.

**Life Question:** In this chapter, search for all the positive qualities that helped attract others to the new group of believers.

# Glossary

**Antioch** — (Syrian) - A city in ancient Syria (now Antakya, Turkey), founded by Seleucus I Nicator (300 B.C.) and named for his father Antiochus. It is located on the river Orontes, about 16 miles from the Mediterranean and some 300 miles north of Jerusalem. Under the Romans it became the capital of the new province of Syria and ranked third, after Rome and Alexandria, in point of importance of the cities of the Roman Empire.

**Deacon** — (Greek *diakonos*, “servant,” “minister”) - Anglicized form of the Greek word *diakonos*, which has the meaning of “servant.” The institution of the diaconate is traditionally seen in the ordination of the Seven, among them Stephen and Philip (Acts 6:1-6).

**Gamaliel** — (Hebrew “reward of God”) - Rabbi Gamaliel I, son of Simon and grandson of Rabbi Hillel. He was a Pharisee and president of the Sanhedrin during the reigns of Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius. It is said that he died about eighteen years before the destruction of Jerusalem. He was a teacher of the law (Ac 5:34), and was known in rabbinical writings as Gamaliel the Elder to distinguish him from his grandson, Gamaliel II. The apostle Paul was trained in the Jewish law by Gamaliel (Ac 22:3).

**Hebraic Christians** — These were Jewish Christians who spoke Aramaic (or Mishnaic Hebrew) and attended synagogues where the service was conducted in Hebrew. The Hebrews were Palestinian Jews.

**Hellenistic Christians** — These were Jews whose habitual language was Greek and who attended Greek-speaking synagogues. Many of the Hellenists had affinities with the lands of the Jewish dispersion around the Mediterranean shores.

**Herod Agrippa I** — (reigned A.D. 37-44) - The son of Aristobulus (son of Herod the Great and Mariamne I) and Bernice (daughter of Herod’s sister Salome and Costobarus), was born in 10 B.C. He was made tetrarch of the provinces formerly held by Lysanias II, and ultimately possessed the entire kingdom of his grandfather with the title of king. He put the apostle James the elder to death and cast Peter into prison (Ac 12:1-5).

**Tarsus** — The capital city of Cilicia in southeast Asia Minor. The modern Tarsus is a town of over 60,000 people on the navigable river Cydnus. Tarsus stands ten miles from the Mediterranean coast on a level plain. The first importance of Tarsus was that the city commanded the approach to the famous pass of the Cilician Gates. In addition, it was distinguished for its wealth and schools of learning.

# Quiz

1. Gamaliel the Elder was:
  - A. A Pharisee
  - B. President of the Sanhedrin
  - C. Paul's teacher
  - D. All of the above
2. Of all the writers in the Bible, this one was probably the only Gentile:
  - A. John, the beloved disciple
  - B. Paul, the apostle
  - C. James, the half-brother of Jesus
  - D. Luke, the physician
3. Who preached the first Christian sermon?
  - A. John
  - B. James
  - C. Peter
  - D. Paul
4. What did God teach through a vision he gave Peter before he met with Cornelius?
  - A. God declared all foods and all people clean.
  - B. Pigs, along with a few other animals, were now included in the list of permissible foods for Jews.
  - C. God commended the Jewish people and eating customs as most holy, but commanded Peter to accept Christians who ate unclean foods and were not Jewish.
  - D. God commanded unity between Jews and Gentiles, despite the command that Jews must eat only clean foods, while Gentiles are allowed to eat all foods.
5. What did Stephen say in his defense before he became the first Christian martyr?
  - A. That the people must not give up following the Law
  - B. That the temple was a holy place that must be preserved for the worship of God
  - C. That Christians no longer are tied to the Jewish land, law, or temple in their worship of God
  - D. That any who desecrated the temple building would be judged by God
6. What message did angels give the disciples just after Jesus ascended?
  - A. Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit.
  - B. You will receive power to be witnesses when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.
  - C. Jesus will return in the same way He has disappeared.
  - D. It is not for you to know the times or dates of the coming of the future kingdom.

7. Where was the first known Gentile church located?
  - A. Ephesus
  - B. Rome
  - C. Athens
  - D. Antioch
8. Which apostle was martyred just before Herod Agrippa's death?
  - A. John
  - B. James
  - C. Peter
  - D. Andrew
9. Which of the following did **not** happen on the Day of Pentecost, as recorded in the book of Acts?
  - A. The believers spoke in tongues for the first time.
  - B. The first deacons were chosen.
  - C. The first Christian sermon was preached.
  - D. The Holy Spirit empowered the new church to inaugurate the new covenant.
10. Who became responsible for making sure that the Hellenistic Christian widows were not neglected?
  - A. The twelve apostles
  - B. Representatives of the Hebraic Christian community
  - C. Representatives of the Hellenistic Christian community
  - D. The first members of the formal Christian office of "deacons"

Answers: 1. D 2. D 3. C 4. A 5. C 6. C 7. D 8. B 9. B 10. D

# Lesson 4 Study Guide

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NT222

## *Acts: Crucifixion, Resurrection & Proclamation*

The Church That Refused  
to Stop Growing

Updated 2014

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Our Daily Bread  
Christian University

# Objectives

This lesson focuses on Acts 13-28 where Luke tells us how God used Paul to pursue the third step in the Acts 1:8 commission: “You will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth.”

When you complete this lesson, “The Church That Refused to Stop Growing,” you should be able to:

- Trace Paul’s progress through his three missionary journeys and his trip to Rome.
- Name and briefly describe the locations where Paul planted churches.
- Link Paul’s church planting ministry with his letters (New Testament epistles).
- Discuss four crucial theological issues found in the book of Acts.
- Develop greater appreciation for God’s commitment to evangelize the whole world.

# Scripture Reading

Read Acts 13-28.



# Transcript

## Course Title: Acts: Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Proclamation

### Lesson Four: The Church That Refused to Stop Growing

#### I. Introduction to the Book of Acts - Part Two: Christian Mission to the Gentiles

In this lesson we survey the second half of the Acts of the Apostles, that section which runs from the closing verses of Acts 12 through the end of the book and focuses primarily on the ministry of the apostle Paul, whom God in Christ had commissioned to be the apostle, par excellence, we might say, to the Gentiles. Acts 13-28 may be subdivided into three sections, just as in our last lesson we saw we could subdivide the first half of it into three main sections, each ending with one of Luke's summary statements that reflects a certain geographical progression in the ministry of the first Christians.

#### II. Paul's First Journey and the Apostolic Council

The first of these spans Acts 12:25-16:5, and deals with Paul's first missionary journey and the apostolic council in Jerusalem that ensued in a large measure as a result of Paul's teaching and the controversy that it generated. Paul sets out with Barnabas, the older Christian in the faith who had first encouraged him and nurtured him in the Lord, as well as Mark (John Mark), the author of the gospel which bears his name. They begin from their home base (for their missionary work) of Antioch in Syria, the first Christian missionary headquarters we might think of it as. Antioch was the place where believers were first called Christians and, as we saw very briefly at the end of our last lesson, the first recorded example, at least, of a church which was predominantly Gentile in background. It is very appropriate, therefore, that the expansion of Christianity into all the Gentile world, into the far-flung parts of the Roman Empire—what Jesus Himself called the “uttermost parts of the earth”—should proceed from this location.

##### A. Island of Cyprus

As Paul and Barnabas and Mark set out, their first major port of call is the island of Cyprus, the location from which Barnabas himself had come. The primary incident that we are told about in this portion of Acts 13 is Paul's encounter with the Jewish magician known alternately as Elymas or Bar-Jesus. Much like Jesus' exorcism of the Gadarene demoniac, an instance in which a certain measure of destruction or evil had to take place to overcome stronger occult powers; namely Elymas is blinded for a time. The governor, the proconsul of the island of Cyprus (Sergius Paulus), is so impressed by this miraculous display of power combined with the preaching of the Christian missionaries there that he comes to faith. This illustrates the principle that we will see elsewhere throughout the book of Acts in the New Testament: namely, that the leaders of households or even of entire cities or nations are often targeted, particularly in a patriarchal culture where there would have been a great spin-off of evangelistic success with those who respected and looked up to these particular leaders—an

approach that is perhaps emulated in cultures that have similar dynamics as well today.

## B. Province of Galatia

From Cyprus the little band of Christian missionaries traveled to the mainland of what today we would call Turkey, and then head northward and up into the mountainous plateau of the southern part of the Roman province of Galatia, stopping at such cities as Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Presumably these cities are in view when Paul will later pen his epistle to the Galatians. When Paul finds a significant Jewish community, as in the city of Pisidian Antioch, he preaches a sermon that is very reminiscent of the type of first Christian preaching we heard from Peter in the early chapters of Acts. When he comes, in chapter 14, to a city like Lystra, which apparently has no significant Jewish presence but a very superstitious pagan people thinking that Paul and Barnabas are the Greek or Roman gods Zeus and Hermes (head of the pantheon and messenger-god), then the undoubtedly abbreviated form or digest of Paul's message that Luke records takes a very different perspective. Gone are quotations of Old Testament passages or apologetics showing how Jesus is the long-awaited Jewish Messiah.

But still followed are the principles of establishing common ground with the people, speaking to their felt needs, appealing to revelation (general revelation in nature in this case rather than the special revelation of the Hebrew Scriptures), in order to lead up to a testimony about the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is interesting to watch the strong sway of opinion in several of these towns in southern Galatia, where initial reception—even almost worship—of these individuals as gods turns, in part due to Jewish provocation, to attempts to kill Paul—in one instance, stoning him and leaving him for dead, even though it turns out he was able to recover and to continue on. The first missionary journey of Paul is the shortest of his missionary journeys.

## C. Apostolic Council in Jerusalem

Undoubtedly after the physical as well as emotional rigors of this enterprise, he returns to the home base of Antioch and also goes up to Jerusalem. Even what little evangelism he has done thus far has gotten back to the leaders of the church in Jerusalem and others, including non-Christian Jews in the area who are increasingly disturbed about the reports they hear that Paul is preaching to the Gentiles a law-free Gospel. Specifically, the charge that is brought in the opening verses of Acts 15 is that he is not requiring Gentiles who come to Christ to undergo the Jewish ritual of circumcision (a practice which law-abiding Jews regularly believed was a necessary part of God's covenant with His people). It is not surprising then that these "Judaizers," as Paul would call them in his letter to the Galatians, were insisting that one must be circumcised to be saved, even if one was a Gentile and therefore not circumcised as a child, according to Gentile traditions.

This required no small congress, but has often been called an apostolic council or the Jerusalem council, with which the majority of Acts 15 is occupied. Here representatives of the Jerusalem church, with James as its chief elder, the initial twelve apostles with Peter as the spokesman, and Paul and Barnabas themselves each take turns reporting their understanding of what God has been doing in their midst. Fortunately for the sake of the survival of the

fledgling Christian church, they come to an agreed-upon conclusion that what Paul has been doing is basically correct. One need not impose circumcision or any other part of the Jewish law as a mandated, necessary requirement for salvation.

The letter that is penned and sent to the churches where these controversies first developed nevertheless concludes with four commands, although that term may be a bit strong because Luke simply says that they said, “If you do these things you will do well.” But there are four issues in which Christians, particularly Gentile Christians, are strongly encouraged not to offend fellow Jews—Christian or otherwise. These issues are eating meat with its blood still in it, eating the meat that comes from strangled animals, eating food that has been sacrificed to idols, and fornication or sexual immorality. This seems to be a strange cluster of commands, although all seem to be tied in somehow with the commands to Noah in Genesis 9 and the later Jewish traditions that developed from those commands about a basic code of morality that God planned for Gentiles as well as for Jews, and therefore is bigger than or larger than simply the Mosaic law. If these things that are particularly offensive to the Jews are refrained from, Paul can continue to preach his law-free Gospel.

### III. Paul’s Second and Third Journeys

The second missionary journey and the beginning of Paul’s subsequent travels then occupy the next panel or subsection of the second half of the Acts of the Apostles, spanning Acts 16:6-19:20. This time Paul’s traveling companions include Silas and Timothy (in part because of a dispute with Mark and Barnabas over Mark’s previous flight from their missionary journey). And if we are correct in interpreting those places where Luke changes from third person singular narrative to first person plural as autobiographical, where he speaks of “we” rather than “he,” “Paul,” or “they”, presumably Luke, too, comes and goes during part of Paul’s second missionary journey, and indeed the subsequent travels. Paul and company begin by revisiting and following up several of the cities they previously evangelized in Galatia, but then continue further afield to the west.

#### A. Philippi

We see in the first part of Acts 16 Paul wrestling with the decision-making process as to where to go next and receiving guidance through the Holy Spirit’s prompting as to places to go or not to go. Eventually he receives a more dramatic vision, and a direct call from a man from Macedonia (that is, the northern half of what today we would call Greece). This prompted Paul to leave the Asian continent for the European continent and to move his ministry significantly further afield, both geographically as well as ethnically. His first major port of call for ministry in Macedonia (the northern part of Greece) described in Acts 16 is the community of Philippi, to whom he will later write a letter.

Here we read of the story of the first Christian convert in the continent of Europe, the woman Lydia. Philippi was largely a Roman colony and had a very small Jewish presence, apparently not even the ten male heads of households that were necessary to form a quorum and to create a Jewish synagogue. All that Paul found as he followed his principles of preaching first to the Jew and then to the Greek was a small community of Jewish women praying outdoors near the river that flowed through the town of Philippi. Lydia responds to Paul’s message and, with her

household, becomes the first European Christian that is on record in the Acts of the Apostles. It is significant that Paul preached to this group, baptized the new followers nevertheless, even though they were all women. Most Jewish leaders, and not a few Greeks or Romans, would have found this small gathering of women too inconsequential by the standards of the day to pay any attention to. Christianity clearly was breaking new ground in terms of attitudes toward women.

The second vignette while Paul is in Philippi involves his arrest, as the pattern consistently recurs which we see throughout the book of Acts; sooner or later he runs into local authorities, local Jewish leaders, or a combination thereof. He is put in prison, but while he and his companions are singing hymns at midnight an earthquake enables them miraculously to escape. But instead of fleeing and allowing the Philippian jailer to kill himself because of the shame that such an escape would call upon himself in the Roman viewpoint, he consoled the jailer that they are all still present—so impacting the jailer that he says, “What must I do to be saved?” Acts 16:31 records the famous verse, the so-called John 3:16 of Acts, in which Paul replies, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—and all your household.” This is also one passage of several, including the recent description of Lydia’s conversion, in which household baptism or salvation is referred to. This has spawned controversy over the history of the church: whether it is appropriate to baptize infants, for example, or not. No specific mention of small children ever appears in any of these passages, and at least in the context of the conversion of the Philippian jailer and his household (Acts 16:32-34) it specifically says that those who were baptized had faith or believed—presumably, therefore, old enough to exercise such faith.

## B. Thessalonica and Berea

From Philippi, Paul traveled a little farther along the Greek coastline and arrived at the city of Thessalonica, another community to which he will later write, in this case, two apostolic epistles. One way of reading the description of Paul’s time in Thessalonica in Acts 17 suggests that he may have been present barely a month before some of those Jewish leaders who objected to his message run him out of town. Therefore, it is significant to note as we see again when we survey the epistles to the Thessalonians that the letter of 1 Thessalonians praises this fledgling church lavishly for how it has responded to God’s Word and grown in it. Those who are open to the Spirit’s leading need not have a long period of time before they themselves can turn around and be active in serving Christ and evangelizing others.

From Thessalonica, Paul continues to proceed along the coastal route to the nearby town of Berea. The most famous phrase that has made the Berean Christians well-known throughout church history comes in Acts 17:11, where it describes the Jewish people there as more noble than those in Thessalonica because they searched the Scriptures daily to see if the things Paul was teaching were true.

## C. Athens

From Berea, Paul proceeds to the province of Achaia, the southern half of modern-day Greece, and to the center of so much Greek culture and history, the former capital when the empire was in Greek hands rather than in Roman—the city of Athens. Here, too, it is significant to notice

yet again a different response by the townspeople. In Athens, the local council, the Areopagus, convenes to hear Paul's preaching, which sounds to them as though he is preaching foreign deities. He gives his famous Mars Hill speech, again appropriately contextualized for yet another very different audience; this time the common ground is established by pointing to a statue or a shrine in town to an unknown god, an unknown god whom Paul wants to reveal as the God over all the universe, rather than the smaller gods and goddesses so well-known from the Greek lore.

As a result of Paul's preaching on Mars Hill, we read at the end of Acts 17:32-34 that some mocked, a few believed, others said, "We will hear you again on this"; but it seems that the majority of the people were not prompted to respond with faith in Jesus Christ. This is every bit as understandable a reaction to the preaching of the Gospel as the great outpouring of faith of the thousands of Pentecostal pilgrims a number of years earlier in Jerusalem. We must be careful not to assume either model is necessarily normative in Christian evangelism today, but in those centers of particularly strong non-Christian culture and religion of our world, it may not surprise us if the response turns out to be more like that at Athens than in Jerusalem.

#### D. Corinth

From Athens, Paul proceeds to the nearby port town of Corinth, described in Acts 18, yet again a city with a very different character. Corinth, as a seaport and a center of many immoral vices, was legendary in the ancient world. To "Corinthianize" was a slang slogan that developed in the Greek language to refer to somebody who committed prostitution. And in the great temple to Aphrodite on the large stone outcropping of rock that looked over the town, that hovered over it, was a temple with at one point, at least in pre-Christian times, up to 2,000 priests and priestesses with whom the Corinthian temple-goers could have sexual relations, in the belief that they were achieving unity with the gods or the goddesses in the process.

Not surprisingly, Paul has to spend nearly a year and a half preaching here, and his letters that he writes later to the church of Corinth show that even after that period of time they had matured very little. Also, in Corinth Paul is dragged before the local magistrate Gallio, who is significant because he occupied that post for only a one-year period in Roman history, between A.D. 50 and A.D. 51, or depending on the system of interpreting the evidence possibly A.D. 51-52. That enables us to date Paul's time in Corinth relatively precisely and understand about how far along we are in this sequence of events. It enables us to move backwards and determine that the apostolic council took place at about the year 49, and move forward and understand his coming ministry, up to a three-year period in the city of Ephesus to span approximately to A.D. 52-55.

#### E. Ephesus

With Paul's ministry in Ephesus we have arrived at the beginning of Paul's third missionary journey. He stops there briefly as he is returning home to Antioch from his journeys into Greece, but promises to come back and spend more detailed time, which he does at the beginning of his third missionary journey. This is now the longest stay of any of Paul's throughout his missionary travels in one particular community.



There are three particular episodes that Luke discloses to us dealing with Paul's time in Ephesus. One involves the conversion of some former disciples of John the Baptist, even as he had previously converted Apollos at the end of Acts 18. These stories remind us of the hit-or-miss nature of communication in the ancient world, people who could have learned a certain degree about John, or a certain degree even about Jesus, and not yet heard the full story of the gospel message. So once again, even though it seems that belief and baptism are separated in these contexts, we probably are to understand that full-fledged Christian belief does not take place until Paul's preaching is completed. Then the disciples of John in Ephesus, like Apollos, are baptized.

The second episode involves the seven sons of a Jewish priest by the name of Sceva, who are practicing exorcism and try to invoke Paul's name and Jesus, the one whom Paul preaches. Here, if ever, we clearly see that Christian exorcism, or indeed Christian behavior more generally, is not that of applying a mechanistic formula. Without true faith in Jesus, the demons turn on the would-be exorcists instead. Paul also succeeds in exorcising a slave girl who has been bringing much money to her owners because of her prophesying spirit. Combining this story with the final details of Acts 19 show us how Paul is arraigned before the authorities again on the charges of hurting the cause of the patron goddess of Ephesus, Artemis, the goddess of fertility or of the harvest and the hunt. Again, it is clear that Paul's preaching has a significant impact on the idolatry of the Roman Empire, so much so that it threatens the pocketbook of those who are making money on false religion. Would that our Christian witness in preaching had a similar impact on the idolatry of the pagan, immoral practices of our communities and cultures today.

#### F. Troas

After Ephesus, we are not given any more narratives in the book of Acts, of a prolonged stay of Paul at any place. He returns to the city of Troas in northwest Turkey, where he has visited before— containing the almost amusing story of the death and resurrection of Eutychus, falling out of an upper room window because Paul preached so long, but significantly a reminder that Paul had the same resurrection power that Jesus and Peter previously had exhibited.

#### IV. Paul's Final Travels to Jerusalem and Rome

Paul's farewell speech to the Ephesian elders at Miletus reminds them that hard times await both him and them, and from this point onward the final panel of the book of Acts, 19:21-28:31, narrates Paul's travels to Jerusalem, his arrest, imprisonment, various hearings there, ultimately leading him to appeal to Caesar, the Emperor Nero, and his trip there on the slave and criminal ship that finds him in Rome, under house arrest, preaching the Gospel freely and unhindered—that is, except for the chains that bound him to the soldier and kept him on his rented property until he could await the outcome of his fate there.

The themes that recur throughout these many different hearings are that Paul is not a law-breaker, but in fact he is a loyal Pharisee and he is on trial for his belief in the Resurrection, that it is the other Jews who have transgressed the will of God and not he or his fellow Christians. Before Felix, before Festus, both Roman governors, and then before Herod Agrippa II, the great-grandson

of Herod the Great, Paul makes these and similar defenses. When it is clear that he will not be freed by them, he makes his appeal to Rome, experiences that ill-fated ship voyage that occupies all of Acts 27, yet ultimately arrives in Rome and with his preaching there the book of Acts abruptly ends. We have earlier commented on several possible explanations for that abrupt end.

#### V. Four Theological Themes Found in Acts

If we recapitulate, then, some of the most important theological emphases that emerge from the Acts of the Apostles, we note at least four: (1) First, God oversees the development of the church and the progress of the Gospel; nothing happens accidentally. (2) Second, the message of Christianity centers on the resurrection of Jesus, making Him the author of salvation for everyone, Jew and Gentile alike, on the same grounds: faith in Christ apart from the law. (3) Thirdly, that offer involves a “salvation package” of repentance, baptism, forgiveness of sins, and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. (4) And fourthly, the church will progress and flourish despite and sometimes even because of persecution.

Clearly as we seek to apply the Acts of the Apostles today, we must take sight of this strong evangelistic focus: those who are not Christians are called to come to grips with the claims of Jesus and His first followers, and those who are already believers are challenged to be bold witnesses, trusting the power of the Spirit to spread His good news widely to all people.

# Discussion Questions

The Jerusalem Council, described in Acts 15, dealt with what primary issue? How might this council provide a pattern for resolving conflict in churches today?

What does Dr. Blomberg say we can learn from the result of Paul's preaching in Athens? How is this example useful to Christian witnesses today?

Dr. Blomberg says that "Paul's preaching [had] a significant impact on the idolatry of the Roman Empire. . ." How do you see examples of idolatry and immorality in your culture today? How might the church impact this?



# Further Study

## **Suggested reading for this lesson:**

Stedman, Ray C. *Adventuring Through the Bible: A Comprehensive Guide to the Entire Bible*.

Discovery House Publishers: 1997.

Read Chapter 65: “Sturdy Christians in a Collapsing World” (2 Timothy)

## **Philip Yancey Devotional**

### **Departed, But Not Gone - Acts 1**

Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. (Acts 1:4)

The disciples’ obsession with Israel’s restored kingdom did not fade even after Jesus had died and come back to life. For forty days after the Resurrection He appeared and disappeared seemingly at will. When He came, His followers listened eagerly to His explanations of all that had happened. When He left, they plotted the structure of the new kingdom that He would surely inaugurate. Think of it: Jerusalem free at last from Roman domination.

Jesus gave some mystifying orders, however. He told His followers to return to Jerusalem and simply wait. Something more was needed. Do not leave the city, He said, until the Holy Spirit comes. At last, one of the disciples put to Jesus the question they had all been debating together, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

No one was prepared for Jesus’ reaction. He seemed to brush the question aside, deflecting attention away from Israel toward neighboring countries, all the way to the ends of the earth. He mentioned the Holy Spirit again, and then, to everyone’s utter amazement, His body lifted off the ground, suspended there for a moment, then disappeared into a cloud. And they never saw Him again.

Christians believe that all of history revolves around the life of Jesus the Christ. But the plain fact is that Jesus left earth after thirty-three years. Furthermore, He declared it a good thing: “You are filled with grief. But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you” (John 16).

The book of Acts, written by the same author as the gospel of Luke, tells what happened after Jesus’ departure when the Counselor came at last. First, though, the disciples began adjusting to new realities: They selected a replacement for Judas, made plans to follow Jesus’ final instructions, and returned to Jerusalem to await the Holy Spirit.

**Life Question:** Project yourself back to the forty-day period after Jesus’ resurrection. What would you have been expecting Jesus to do?

# Glossary

**Achaia** — The name originally of a narrow strip of territory in Greece, on the northwest of the Peloponnesus, lying along the southern shore of the Corinthian Gulf. Subsequently it was applied by the Romans to the whole Peloponnesus, now called the Morea, and the south of Greece.

**Areopagus** — The Latin form of this Greek word is “Mars hill,” which was northwest of the Acropolis in Athens. The name of the hill was given later to the council whose meetings were held upon it. The Council of the Areopagus retained this name even after it changed its meeting place. The Council of the Areopagus was similar to a council of elders and was subject to the king of Athens.

**Bar** — Aramaic for the Hebrew ben, “son.” In the New Testament “Bar” is frequently employed as prefix to names of persons, e.g., Barabbas, Bar-Jesus, Bar-Jonah.

**Cyprus** — An island situated near the northeast corner of the Mediterranean Sea, in an angle formed by the coasts of Cilicia (modern Turkey) and Syria. In the Old Testament, it may be in view when the name Kittim appears. The island is the third largest in the Mediterranean after Sardinia and Sicily, with an area of about 3,580 square miles. (Various scholars take this term to be a reference to islands west of the known world, which go much further afield than Cyprus or to islands in the Mediterranean.)

**Galatia** — Galatia was a name used in two different senses during the first century A.D.: (1) geographically, to designate a country in the northern part of the central plateau of Asia Minor; (2) politically, to designate a large province of the Roman Empire, including not merely the country Galatia but parts of Pontus, Phrygia, Pisidia, and Lycaonia.

# Quiz

1. In the books of Acts, there is no record of Paul appearing before this magistrate:
  - A. Festus
  - B. Felix
  - C. Herod Agrippa II
  - D. Nero
2. Paul stays longer at this city than at any other in his missionary travels:
  - A. Philippi
  - B. Ephesus
  - C. Thessalonica
  - D. Corinth
3. The citizens of Lystra were primarily:
  - A. Jewish
  - B. Superstitious pagan people
  - C. A sexually immoral people
  - D. Concerned with how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies
4. This key issue resulted in the apostolic council in Jerusalem in Acts 15:
  - A. Paul's decision to minister to Gentiles
  - B. Jewish dietary laws
  - C. Circumcision
  - D. All of the above
5. What restriction was **not** given by the apostolic council of Jerusalem to Gentiles, as an act of respect to Jewish consciences?
  - A. They were asked to refrain from eating the blood of animals.
  - B. They were asked to refrain from eating food sacrificed to idols.
  - C. They were asked to refrain from eating the meat of unclean animals in front of the Jews.
  - D. They were asked to refrain from sexual immorality.
6. What teaching **cannot** be taken from Paul's example in his sermon in Athens?
  - A. We should understand our culture so that we can speak the language of the people around us as we share the Gospel.
  - B. We must be faithful in sharing the Gospel in a way people will understand, but the results may not always be great numbers of conversions.
  - C. When we speak to people with their own language, addressing needs from their perspective, we can expect many people to put their faith in Christ.
  - D. If we are going to share with people of a new culture, we are wise to learn about the culture before beginning to share.

7. What was the significance of Paul's ministry to Lydia?
  - A. Paul preached to a group of women, even though apparently no men were present.
  - B. Paul preached to a woman who made her living selling purple dye.
  - C. Lydia was the first Jewish woman to bring the Gospel to her city.
  - D. Paul was willing to minister to an unofficial, informal group of Jews.
8. Which feature was **not** true of the province of Achaia?
  - A. It was where believers were first called Christians.
  - B. It was where the former capital of the Greek empire was located.
  - C. It was located in the southern half of modern-day Greece.
  - D. It was a designation for the whole Peloponnesus under the Romans.
9. Which theological focus is **not** given major emphasis in Acts?
  - A. God oversees the development of the church and the progress of the Gospel.
  - B. The resurrection of Jesus makes forgiveness of sins available to all who repent.
  - C. The church will progress and flourish despite persecution.
  - D. Good works are important in identifying true Christianity.
10. What prompted Paul to leave Asia for Europe?
  - A. The urgings of his companions
  - B. A letter from a friend in Macedonia
  - C. A vision of a man from Macedonia
  - D. An order from the church in Jerusalem

Answers: 1. D 2. B 3. B 4. C 5. C 6. C 7. A 8. A 9. D 10. C