

## Acts 1-5 CFM Ep 209



In this outline are a few links to some of my favorite books that have really helped me understand the context and content of the scriptures. [Click here to see all of my favorite books on Amazon](#). As an Amazon Affiliate, I do earn a small commission from qualifying purchases (at no extra cost to you).

1. Introduction (Acts 1.1-8).
2. The Ascension of Jesus Christ (Acts 1.9-11).
3. The Upper Room (Acts 1.12-26).
4. The Day of Pentecost (Acts 2.1-13).
5. Peter's Sermon (Acts 2.14-36).
6. The Church Grows by 3,000 (Acts 2.37-47).
7. Healing the Lame Beggar (Acts 3.1-10).
8. Peter's Second Sermon (Acts 3.11-26).
9. Peter and John are arrested (Acts 4.1-12).
10. Peter and John are threatened and released (Acts 4.13-31).
11. Consecration among the Saints (Acts 4.32-37).
12. Ananias and Sapphira hold back part (Acts 5.1-16).
13. The apostles put in prison and released by an angel (Acts 5.17-32).
14. Gamaliel's wise counsel (Acts 5.33-42).

## The Acts of the Apostles

### Overview

The book of Acts is one of the longest books in the New Testament, containing 1,003 verses, as compared to 1,151 in Luke and 1,071 in Matthew. The work covers eighty-eight pages of the [Nestle-Aland text](#),<sup>1</sup> in comparison to Luke's ninety-six pages and Matthew's eighty-seven pages. The book also

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<sup>1</sup> The Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament is an eclectic text edited by the German biblical scholar Eberhard Nestle (1851—1913) and further updated by German scholar Kurt Aland (1915—1994). The official title is *Novum Testamentum Graece*, which is Latin for "New Testament in Greek." Having been regularly updated by the Institute for New Testament Textual Research and published by the German Bible Society, the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament is currently in its 28th edition. It is often referred to as the NA28.

The Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament is the Greek text often preferred by Bible scholars and researchers because of the extensive notes and cross references, including reasons a particular reading was chosen over an alternative reading. (This is known as the critical apparatus or the textual apparatus.) The NA28 runs about 1,000 pages. You can start reading the Greek of Acts 1 [here](#).

contains 18,374 words, as compared with Luke's 19,404 words. Of the 5,436 hapax terms in the New Testament, 2,038 occur in Acts.<sup>2</sup>

Acts serves as a sequel to Luke's Gospel and highlights God's plan of salvation and how God established the new era that resulted from Jesus's ministry, death, and resurrection. The book explains how a seemingly new movement is actually rooted in ancient promises associated with Judaism and yet includes Gentiles.

Another significant theme in Acts is how what began as an extension and realization of Judaism developed its own structure, the church. Key to this is Jesus's role and function, where the book of Acts shows how the risen Lord continued to be active, and the new community preached Jesus as central to God's plan.

The book is filled with stories of various faithful witnesses who respond to Jesus in the face of opposition, serving as examples for those who carry out the mission of God. The center of the book, however, is God, as at key junctures, God enables, directs, protects his early Saints as they work to preach the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Most of the book is told from the perspective of certain locales and key figures, where Acts 1.8 suggests that it proceeds from Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. Peter dominates early as the new movement gathers and grows in Jerusalem, while Stephen gives his life by testifying in Jerusalem, and Philip takes the gospel to Samaria in a prelude to the spread of the gospel to all people.

The book of Acts also introduces more detail about an important community in Antioch and the issue of how Gentiles should be included, which brings all the key players to Jerusalem for a council to decide the matter. More missionary travel for Paul follows, beginning from Antioch, with several famous churches being established or strengthened during this time.

The rest of the book is taken up with Paul's journey to Rome, where the major elements of this unit are Paul's defense speeches, in which the position of the church relative to God's promise again shows forth. The theme of divine protection closes the book, as Paul experiences a shipwreck on the way to Rome, but he arrives safely and awaits his trial, eagerly sharing Jesus as Lord with all who will visit him.<sup>3</sup>

### **Who wrote Acts?**

The authorship of the Gospel of Luke and Acts has been a subject of scholarly interest for many years. Upon closer examination of the literary style and themes of both works, it is evident that they share the same author. Luke employs a writing style that alternates between contemporary Greek prose and a Jewish style of Greek that shows significant influence from the Septuagint.

The author of Luke-Acts asserts that he was an eyewitness to some secondary incidents, and therefore had direct sources for much of his information, while also possessing comprehensive knowledge of the

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<sup>2</sup> *Hapax legomena*; sometimes abbreviated to *hapax*, plural *hapaxes*) is a word or an expression that occurs only once within a context: either in the written record of an entire language, in the works of an author, or in a single text. Bock is emphasizing here that Acts contains nearly half of all occurrences of *hapaxes* in the New Testament.

<sup>3</sup> Darrell L. Bock, [Acts \(Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament\)](#), Baker Academic, 2013.

rest. This statement suggests that the author had first-hand access to relevant information and was able to relay it accurately to his audience.

Some modern scholars have argued that Luke's use of the pronoun "we" in Acts indicates something other than his actual presence. However, historical works from antiquity very rarely used "we" in a fictitious sense, and so the suggestion that Luke used the pronoun fictitiously is not supported by the evidence.

The idea that a traveling companion of Paul authored Luke-Acts is plausible, and the tradition that Luke was the author of these works (Luke was referred to as a physician in Colossians 4:14) is consistent with what we know about him. Although some medical terms used in Luke-Acts are frequent in medical literature, the presence of such terminology alone is not sufficient evidence to prove Lukan authorship.

In ancient times, physicians could come from lower-class backgrounds or even be slaves, yet they were generally well-educated. Additionally, the presence of women in the medical field, particularly in midwifery, may have made some physicians more attentive to women's concerns, which is evident in the content of Luke-Acts. Overall, the evidence indicates that Luke-Acts was authored by an educated individual with access to first-hand information, potentially a traveling companion of Paul with a medical background.

### **When was it written?**

Most scholars agree that Luke-Acts was likely written between 70 and 90, with some suggesting a date in the 60's or later.<sup>4</sup> The fact that Acts ends before Paul's death has led some scholars to propose that it was written before 64 CE. However, others argue that Luke 21 indicates a date after 70 CE, positing that Acts ends in 62 for literary reasons or because Luke only needed to provide positive legal precedents. As Acts is not intended to be a biography of Paul, Luke may have ended the narrative with the climactic note of the gospel reaching Rome.

While the evidence is inconclusive, it is clear that Luke relied on the Gospel of Mark as a source. Therefore, dating Luke-Acts to 62 CE would raise questions about the usual dating of Mark to 64 CE. Additionally, some scholars argue that allusions to the temple's destruction suggest a later date for Luke-Acts, possibly after 70 CE. F.F. Bruce argues, "It is best to date Acts not very long after the completion of Luke, and to place the publication of both in the period following AD. 70."<sup>5</sup>

Based on these factors, it seems probable that Luke-Acts was written in the early to mid-seventies. However, it is difficult to establish a secure date for either Mark or Luke-Acts. In any case, Acts includes detailed descriptions of riots that would have been counterproductive to narrate unless they actually happened. Therefore, it is likely that Acts reflects recent memories that the author felt compelled to address, especially given the charge that Paul was guilty of stirring up riots. This charge would have been troubling for those loyal to Roman order, and the riots would have needed to be explained during Paul's custody and after his execution.

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<sup>4</sup> The *terminus a quo* for the dating of Acts is the latest event alluded to in the book itself, the completion of the two years which Paul spent in Rome (28:30f.). Those two years were probably A.O. 60 and 61. Luke supplies hardly any hint of what happened at the end of them. F.F. Bruce, [\*The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek text with introduction and commentary\*](#), Eerdmans, 1965, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Bruce, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 17.

### **Why was this book written?**

The purpose of the book of Acts is to establish consistent legal precedents in support of the early Christian movement. In Acts, every Roman court declares Christians innocent, and some scholars have proposed that Luke wrote Acts as a court brief on Paul's behalf. However, Acts is a narrative rather than a list of precedents. It is more likely that Luke references various legal precedents from different local courts, which are helpful but not binding, in order to argue that Christianity should be legally protected in the Roman Empire. By doing so, Luke provides Christians with legal ammunition and sets the stage for later Christian lawyers and philosophers like Tertullian and Justin Martyr, who would argue for the toleration of Christianity. The fact that Paul's custody and several speeches occupy the final quarter of Acts underscores the importance of Luke's desire to refute false accusations against Paul.

### **Purpose: Defend the Christian Community**

The book of Acts has a broader purpose beyond defending Paul in Roman law courts. Historical writing has always been influenced by rhetoric, literary and dramatic conventions, and moral principles. Josephus used history to justify God and Israel after the war of A.D. 70; Plutarch and Livy used it to teach morals, and Tacitus wrote as an aristocrat longing for the grandeur of old Rome. Even history with a specific theme or focal point is still considered history, even if it has an editorial perspective. In Acts, Luke's apologetic purpose is mainly evident in the book's speeches.

Acts addresses different audiences such as Roman law courts, Greek philosophers, and rural Asian farmers. Christianity's relationship with Judaism is a significant theme, and Luke tries to demonstrate that Christianity is the authentic voice of Judaism by showing the fulfillment of Old Testament motifs. This claim is despite much of the Jewish community of Luke's day opposing it. Ancient religions were respected based on their age, and Christians had to show that the Old Testament was their book. The gospel message of Acts is unstoppable, and Luke's writing shows that Christianity will overcome any obstacle.

### **Who was Theophilus?**

The prologue of Acts is addressed to Theophilus, who was likely a member of the middle class in Roman society. In certain sections of society, there was a growing interest in the Christian faith, which was beginning to appear in unexpected places. The importance of Christianity was becoming more apparent and it was necessary to provide a reliable account of its origins and character for individuals like Theophilus who desired to know the truth about its rise and progress. Various accounts of Christianity were circulating at the time, and it was crucial to offer an accurate and trustworthy record.

### **Acts is seen as historical**

Most scholars consider Acts as a type of historical monograph that focuses on a specific subject, rather than a broad topic as many ancient historians did. Historians in ancient times had more freedom in portraying details, as long as the bulk of the story was accurate according to their sources. In comparison to other historical writers of his time, Luke is notably diligent with his sources in the Gospel (Luke 1.1-4), and we can assume he is similarly reliable in Acts. Additionally, several sections of Acts contain eyewitness accounts from someone who traveled with Paul. It is important to note that the use of the first-person pronoun "we" in ancient narratives generally meant "we" and not just the author. Luke's careful editing suggests that if he did not mean to include himself in Paul's company, he would not have

included the earlier source's "we." While first-person pronouns are used in both historical and fictional writing, historical works were the only ones to have historical prologues like Luke's in both the Gospel and Acts (Luke 1.1-4; Acts 1.1-2).<sup>6</sup>

### 1. Introduction (Acts 1.1-8)

**The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God (Acts 1.1-3).**

"Passion" = παθεῖν (aorist infinitive of πάσχω = "to have been affected." This denotes experience, undergoing a difficulty, or suffering. See: Alma 7.11).

**When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? (Acts 1.6)**

This question was the most natural one for the disciples to ask Jesus. He had been talking about the kingdom (1:3), and the references to the outpouring of the Spirit in the Old Testament were all in the context of Israel's restoration (Is 32:15; 44:3; Ezek 36:25-28; 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:28–3:1).<sup>7</sup>

**But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1.8)**

This verse can be read as an outline for the entire book of Acts: the apostles preach in Jerusalem, then in all Judea and Samaria, and eventually they take the message to the known world.

President Kimball taught:

"Our work is to preach the gospel to the world. It is not self-imposed. We are under divine commandment. The Prophet Joseph Smith preached, 'After all has been said, the greatest and most important duty is to preach the gospel.' All the other programs are extremely important but, of course, we cannot influence people much by those programs until we get them in the Church. After his resurrection the Lord took his eleven apostles to the top of the Mount of Olives and said: 'And ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.' (Acts 1:8.)

These were his last words on earth before he ascended to his heavenly home. What is the significance of the phrase 'uttermost part of the earth'? He had already covered the area known to the apostles. Was it only the people in Judea? Or those in Samaria? Or the few millions in the Near East? Where were the 'uttermost parts of the earth'? Did he include the hundreds of thousands or even millions in Greece, Italy, around the Mediterranean, the inhabitants of Central Europe? Did he mean the millions in what is

<sup>6</sup> See: F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, Eerdmans, 1965. See also: Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Publishing, 2007. See also: Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Background Commentary: New Testament*, IVP Academic, 2014. See also: Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, Baker Academic, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 319.

now America? Or did he mean all the living people of all the world and those spirits assigned to this world to come in future centuries? Have we underestimated his language or its meaning? How can we be satisfied with 100,000 converts out of 4 billion people in the world who need the gospel?"<sup>8</sup>

Note that the apostles still see the earthly kingdom coming here. Jesus has a different plan for his apostles!

## **2. The Ascension of Jesus Christ (Acts 1.9-11).**

**"He was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight" (Acts 1.9).**

In Greek mythology, heroes often became gods and ascended to heaven after their deaths, such as Heracles on his funeral pyre. However, for Luke, the ascension of Jesus after his resurrection is not a transformation into a god, but a confirmation of his divine status as the king who was always both human and divine. Jewish accounts of Elijah's ascension to heaven in the Old Testament and later traditions provide a cultural context for understanding the ascension, but the difference is between the exaltation of a righteous prophet, yet a man - and the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ, who calls all of Heavenly Father's children to have faith in him, repent of their sins, and come unto him in the waters of baptism, following the counsel of his representatives, the 12 Apostles.

Although angels are often depicted ascending and descending in Jewish literature, these movements are not seen as unique events in Luke's contemporary culture. The most well-known ascension in Jewish scripture is Elijah's, where Elisha received a double portion of Elijah's spirit to continue his work. Similarly, Jesus' ascension prepares his small church for the coming endowment of the Holy Ghost that they will receive on the Day of Pentecost.

In the Jewish tradition, teachers often passed on their work to their disciples, creating occasional "succession narratives" that described the passing on of the teacher's call. Jesus' ascension immediately after commissioning his disciples leaves them as his authorized successors, responsible for the challenging work of taking the gospel message to the entire world until his return as king of kings. Clouds and white robes are often used as symbols of divine glory in ascension narratives, such as in Ezekiel and Daniel, and angels are often depicted wearing white robes in Jewish literature.<sup>9</sup>

## **3. The Upper Room (Acts 1.12-26).**

**The early church had 120 followers (Acts 1.15).**

According to a Jewish tradition of uncertain date, 120 elders first passed on the law in the time of Ezra. Then again, the Dead Sea Scrolls required one priest for every ten men, so 120 may be the number of people a team of twelve leaders could best accommodate; other disciples may not have all been present

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<sup>8</sup> *President Kimball Speaks Out*, Deseret Book, 1981, p. 33-34.

<sup>9</sup> See: [1 Enoch 71.1](#); [2 Maccabees 11.8](#). Joseph Smith's experience here is noteworthy: "He had on a loose robe of most exquisite whiteness. It was a whiteness beyond anything earthly I had ever seen; nor do I believe that any earthly thing could be made to appear so exceedingly white and brilliant. His hands were naked, and his arms also, a little above the wrist; so, also, were his feet naked, as were his legs, a little above the ankles. His head and neck were also bare. I could discover that he had no other clothing on but this robe, as it was open, so that I could see into his bosom. Not only was his robe exceedingly white, but his whole person was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightning. The room was exceedingly light, but not so very bright as immediately around his person. When I first looked upon him, I was afraid; but the fear soon left me" (JSH 1.31-32).

at one time. But Luke may simply record the number to emphasize that many more than the Twelve gathered.<sup>10</sup>

### **The death of Judas (Acts 1.17-19).**

Two different accounts of Judas' death are presented in the King James Version. According to Matthew (Matt. 27:5), Judas hanged himself, while Peter stated that Judas "fell headlong, burst open in the middle and all his intestines spilled out" (Acts 1:18).

In the JST of Matthew's account we read: "He went, and hanged himself on a tree. And straightway he fell down, and his bowels gushed out, and he died." (Matt. 27:6) This addition in the Joseph Smith Translation works to harmonize these two apparently contradictory accounts of the death of Judas.

### **Judas is replaced in the Quorum of the Twelve (Acts 1.15-26).**

"In the early years after the resurrection of Jesus, the apostles added members to their number as vacancies required. It appears that the first item of apostolic business after Jesus' ascension was the selection of one to take the place of Judas (Acts 1:21-26). This action establishes the principle, which is confirmed by the practice today of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, that apostolic succession was to be continued and that the ancient apostles intended to replace members of the Twelve each time one died. In addition to Matthias, three others we are aware of became apostles after Jesus' ascension: James (Acts 12:17; Gal. 1:19), Barnabas (Acts 14:14), and Paul (Acts 14:14). These three were called early in the Church's history-before A.D. 50. But neither scripture nor other historical evidence gives us any indication of the calling of others. It thus seems reasonable to suggest that near the middle of the first century, the calling of apostles came to an end and the apostleship died out. As far as we know, by the 90s only John remained. When he left his public ministry around A.D. 100, apostleship ceased, and the keys of the kingdom were taken."<sup>11</sup>

### **"Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men..." (Acts 1.24).**

Greeks and Romans often claimed that particular deities knew or saw matters, and Judaism regularly emphasized the true God's omniscience. Judaism affirmed that God knew people's hearts (Ps 7:9; Jer 17:10), and some called God "Searcher of hearts."<sup>12</sup>

## **4. The Day of Pentecost (Acts 2.1-13).**

### **What was the Day of Pentecost?**

Those that study the Hebrew Bible find that Pentecost was one of the Jewish feast days. Only the Jews in this time didn't call it Pentecost. That's the Greek name (τὴν ἡμέραν τῆς πεντηκοστῆς). The Jews called it the Feast of Harvest or the Feast of Weeks – *Shavuot* (שבועות). The day of Pentecost was therefore known also as "the day of the firstfruits" (Num. 28:26). (Cf. Ex. 23:16a; 34:22a; Dt. 16:10). The "morrow after the sabbath" was variously interpreted in NT times... At a later date the day of Pentecost was regarded as the anniversary of the giving of the law on Sinai; this dating may have originated in Jewish

<sup>10</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 321.

<sup>11</sup> Kent P. Jackson, *From Apostasy to Restoration*, Deseret Book., 1996, 20.

<sup>12</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 321.

nonconformity (cf. Jub. 1: 1 with 6:17), and is first attested for rabbinical Judaism by Jose ben Halafta, c. AD. 150 (*Seder 'Olam R.* 5), and Eleazar ben Pedath, c. 270 (*bPes.* 68b).<sup>13</sup>

At the heart of the Feast of Shavuot in the Bible is the season of the grain harvest, specifically the wheat harvest, in the Land of Israel. This harvest, which took place over seven weeks, was a time of joy and celebration in ancient times, as indicated in various biblical passages such as Jeremiah 5.24,<sup>14</sup> Deuteronomy 16.9-11,<sup>15</sup> and Isaiah 9.2.<sup>16</sup> The harvest season began with the reaping of baley during Passover and concluded with the wheat harvest during Shavuot. Shavuot, therefore, marked the end of the grain harvest festival, much as the eighth day of Sukkot (Tabernacles) signaled the end of the fruit harvest festival. When the Temple in Jerusalem existed, an offering of two loaves of bread made from the wheat harvest was presented during Shavuot in accordance with the commandment specified in Leviticus 23:17.

### Symbolism

Shavuot, also known as the Festival of Weeks or Pentecost, holds significant symbolism in Jewish tradition. Here are some key symbolic meanings associated with Shavuot:

1. **Giving of the Torah:** The holiday marks the giving of the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai.<sup>17</sup> It represents the culmination of the Jewish people's journey from slavery in Egypt to becoming a nation with a unique relationship with God. Shavuot is, therefore, a celebration of the spiritual and intellectual growth of the Jewish people.
2. **Harvest Festival:** Shavuot also marks the conclusion of the grain harvest season in ancient Israel. As such, it is a celebration of the blessings of nature and the agricultural bounty that sustains life.
3. **Renewal:** Shavuot represents an opportunity for spiritual renewal and rededication. It is a time to reflect on one's relationship with God and to recommit to living a righteous and ethical life in accordance with the values of the Torah.
4. **Unity:** According to Jewish tradition, all Jews were present at Mount Sinai when the Torah was given, regardless of their individual differences. Shavuot, therefore, represents a celebration of Jewish unity and the common heritage that binds all Jews together.

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<sup>13</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 113-114.

<sup>14</sup> Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the Lord our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest (Jer. 5.24).

<sup>15</sup> Seven weeks shalt thou number unto thee: begin to number the seven weeks from such time as thou beginnest to put the sickle to the corn. And thou shalt keep the feast of weeks unto the Lord thy God with a tribute of a freewill offering of thine hand, which thou shalt give unto the Lord thy God, according as the Lord thy God hath blessed thee: And thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gates, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are among you, in the place which the Lord thy God hath chosen to place his name there (Deu. 16.9-11). In a way, this was a yearly accountability to the Lord: to go to the House of the Lord and remember him. All three yearly festivals seem to have fit this purpose.

<sup>16</sup> The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined (Isa. 9.2).

<sup>17</sup> This is not attributed in the Hebrew Bible, but is Jewish tradition. *Z'man matan toratenu* ("the time of the giving of our Torah [Law]") is a frequent liturgical cognomen for Shavuot. See, for example, "[The Standard Prayer Book: Kiddush for Festivals](#)."



On the whole, Shavuot represents a time of joy, thanksgiving, and renewal, as well as a reminder of the important role that the Torah plays in Jewish tradition and identity. To me, I see this all in connection with the promises made in the sacramental ordinance in the Latter-day Saint tradition, especially as I read their description in the Doctrine and Covenants.<sup>18</sup> The Saints gather, remember Jesus and his Atoning sacrifice, are promised the spirit, and are unified in a meal setting. All this points our hearts and minds to the future day discussed in D&C 27 and Revelation 19.

**“And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven” (Acts 2.5).**

Many Jewish people from throughout the Roman and Parthian worlds would gather for the three main feasts (Tabernacles, Passover and Pentecost). Because Pentecost was only fifty days after Passover, some Diaspora visitors who had spent much to make a rare pilgrimage to Jerusalem stayed the seven weeks between the two feasts. Pentecost was probably the least popular of the three pilgrimage festivals, but \*Josephus attests that it was nevertheless crowded. Besides those who stayed between the festivals, some other Diaspora Jews settled in their people’s “mother” city.<sup>19</sup>

**Jews from all over in Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks (Acts 2.9-11).**

Parthians, and Medes,<sup>20</sup> and Elamites,<sup>21</sup> and the dwellers in Mesopotamia,<sup>22</sup> and in Judaea, and Cappadocia,<sup>23</sup> in Pontus,<sup>24</sup> and Asia,<sup>25</sup> Phrygia,<sup>26</sup> and Pamphylia,<sup>27</sup> in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene,<sup>28</sup> and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes<sup>29</sup> and Arabians<sup>30</sup>... (Acts 2.9-11).

Many Jews had never returned from exile in Mesopotamia, and most of these lived in Parthia. Many Jews also lived in some of the provinces of Asia Minor, in Syria, and in Alexandria and Cyrene in north Africa; “Arabians” applies especially to the Nabateans, a kingdom headquartered in Petra, though Nabateans were widespread, including many in Herod Antipas’s territory of Perea. Jerusalem had much trade with Nabatea. Although the Nabateans were mostly pagan, Jews succeeded in converting some to Judaism.<sup>31</sup>

**“We do hear... in our tongues... they were all amazed” (Acts 2.11-12).**

Joseph Smith taught:

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<sup>18</sup> See D&C 20 and 27 for example.

<sup>19</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 322.

<sup>20</sup> Parthians and Medes were from what is Iran today.

<sup>21</sup> Southwestern Iran.

<sup>22</sup> Modern day Iraq.

<sup>23</sup> Central Anatolia, or Turkey today.

<sup>24</sup> [Pontus](#) was a region on the southern coast of the Black Sea, which is now part of Turkey.

<sup>25</sup> Asia referred to the Roman province of Asia, which was located in western Anatolia, which is now part of Turkey.

<sup>26</sup> Phrygia was an ancient region in central Anatolia, which is now part of Turkey.

<sup>27</sup> Pamphylia was a region on the southern coast of Anatolia, which is now part of Turkey.

<sup>28</sup> Cyrene was a city in northern Africa, located in what is now modern-day Libya.

<sup>29</sup> Crete is an island in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, which is now part of Greece.

<sup>30</sup> Arabia refers to the Arabian Peninsula, which includes modern-day Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait.

<sup>31</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 323.

“The ultimate design of tongues is to speak to foreigners, and if persons are very anxious to display their intelligence, let them speak to such in their own tongues [that is in the tongues of the foreigners].”<sup>32</sup>

### “Others mocking” (Acts 2.13).

Hecklers were common and speakers had to learn to deflect their ridicule. This scene occurs in April, and the grape vintage ended by early fall; in speaking of (literally) “sweet wine,” the speakers are mocking, not trying to make a factual statement. Ancient writers sometimes described inspiration in terms of drunkenness; Greeks believed in frenzied inspiration by the gods, and in particular \*Philo, a Jewish writer thoroughly in touch with Greek ideas, wrote of divine intoxication. Thus experiences of the transcendent (whether God-inspired or moved by base spirit possession) sometimes appeared to outsiders as ecstasy similar to drunkenness. Some denounced particular ideologies as madness. (Although drunkenness was common in Greek parties, it would viewed negatively in Jewish Palestine.)<sup>33</sup>

### 5. Peter’s Sermon (Acts 2.14-36).

**The prophet Joel...I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh...old men dream dreams... sings... sun... into darkness... moon into blood... that great and notable day of the Lord come (Acts 2.16-20).**

"The words of the prophets are rapidly being fulfilled, but it is done on such natural principles that most of us fail to see it. Joel promised that the Lord would pour out his spirit upon all flesh; the sons and daughters should prophesy; old men should dream dreams and young men should see visions. Wonders in heaven and in the earth should be seen, and there should be fire, blood and pillars of smoke. Eventually the sun is to be turned into darkness and the moon as blood, and then shall come the great and dreadful day of the Lord. Some of these signs have been given; some are yet to come. The sun has not yet been darkened. We are informed that this will be one of the last acts just preceding the coming of the Lord."<sup>34</sup>

### Peter’s commentary regarding King David (Acts 2.25-32).

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<sup>32</sup> *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 247-48.

<sup>33</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 323.

<sup>34</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Way to Perfection*, Deseret Book, 1984. See also: Joseph Fielding Smith, *Take Heed to Yourselves*, chapter 46 “The Signs of the Lord’s Coming.” Deseret Book, 1966. He continues, “One wonders if we are not now seeing some of the signs in heaven? Not all, for undoubtedly some of them will be among the heavenly bodies, such as the moon and the sun, the meteors and comets, but in speaking of the heavens, reference is made to that part which surrounds the earth and which belongs to it. It is in the atmosphere where many of the signs are to be given. Do we not see airships of various kinds traveling through the heavens daily? Have we not had signs in the earth and through the earth with the radio, railroad trains, automobiles, submarines and satellites, and many other ways? There are yet to be great signs; the heavens are to be shaken, the sign of the Son of Man is to be given; and then shall the tribes of the earth mourn... Have you ever tried to associate the outpouring of knowledge, the great discoveries and inventions during the past one hundred and thirty-six years with the restoration of the gospel? Do you not think there is some connection? It is not because we are more intelligent than our fathers that we have received this knowledge, but because God has willed it so in our generation! Yet men take the honor unto themselves and fail to recognize the hand of the Almighty in these things. America was discovered because the Lord willed it. The gospel was restored in America, rather than in some other land, because the Lord willed it. This is the land shadowing with wings spoken of by Isaiah, 5 which today is sending ambassadors by the sea to a nation scattered and peeled, which at one time was terrible in the beginning. Now that nation is being gathered, and once again they shall be in favor with the Lord.”

Peter quotes Psalm 16 to establish his point (developed in Acts 2:29-32): God would raise the Messiah from the dead. Jesus' resurrection without corruption fulfills the psalm's highest aspiration. Peter argues that the psalm cannot refer to David, because David did see corruption (rot). (A tomb in David's honor had been dedicated outside Jerusalem, along with one of Huldah the prophetess.) Rather, the psalm refers to David's ultimate descendant, who was widely agreed to be the Messiah (the anointed king), by definition (Acts 2:30; Is 9:6-7; Jer 23:5-6; cf. Ps 89:3-4; Ps 132:11).<sup>35</sup>

President Kimball took the position that this applies to David's spirit remaining in hell, and that he is "still paying for his sin." He wrote:

Another scriptural character responsible for murder-and this in conjunction with adultery-was the great King David. For his dreadful crime, all his life afterward he sought forgiveness. Some of the Psalms portray the anguish of his soul, yet David is still paying for his sin. He did not receive the resurrection at the time of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Peter declared that his body was still in the tomb. (See Acts 2:29-34.)

President Joseph F. Smith made this comment on David's position:

But even David, though guilty of adultery and murder of Uriah, obtained the promise that his soul should not be left in hell, which means, as I understand it, that even he shall escape the second death.<sup>36</sup>

The Prophet Joseph Smith underlined the seriousness of the sin of murder for David as for all men, and the fact that there is no forgiveness for it.

A murderer, for instance, one that sheds innocent blood, cannot have forgiveness. David sought repentance at the hand of God carefully with tears, for the murder of Uriah; but he could only get it through hell: he got a promise that his soul should not be left in hell.

Although David was a king, he never did obtain the spirit and power of Elijah and the fullness of the Priesthood; and the Priesthood that he received, and the throne and kingdom of David is to be taken from him and given to another by the name of David in the last days, raised up out of his lineage.<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps one reason murder is so heinous is that man cannot restore life. Man's mortal life is given him in which to repent and prepare himself for eternity, and should one of his fellowmen terminate his life and thus limit his progress by making his repentance impossible, it would be a ghastly deed, a tremendous responsibility for which the murderer might not be able to atone in his lifetime.<sup>38</sup>

## **6. The Church Grows by 3,000 (Acts 2.37-47).**

**What shall we do? ... Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized..." (Acts 2.37-38).**

Joseph Smith taught:

By this we learn that the promise of the Holy Ghost is made unto as many as those to whom the doctrine of repentance was to be preached, which was unto all nations...We discover here that we are blending

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<sup>35</sup> Keener, p. 324.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, p. 434.

<sup>37</sup> *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 339.

<sup>38</sup> Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, p. 128

two principles together in these quotations. The first is the principle of repentance, and the second is the principle of the remission of sins; and we learn from Peter that remission of sins is to be obtained by baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; and the gift of the Holy Ghost follows inevitably, for, says Peter, 'you shall receive the Holy Ghost.'

"Therefore we believe in preaching the doctrine of repentance in all the world, both to old and young, rich and poor, bond and free...But we discover, in order to be benefitted by the doctrine of repentance, we must believe in obtaining the remission of sins. And in order to obtain the remission of sins, we must believe in the doctrine of baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And if we believe in baptism for the remission of sins, we may expect a fulfillment of the promise of the Holy Ghost, for the promise extends to all whom the Lord our God shall call; and hath He not surely said, as you will find in the last chapter of Revelation-'And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely' (Rev. 22:17)."<sup>39</sup>

**“They that gladly received his word were baptized... there were added ... about three thousand souls” (Acts 2.41).**

Considering \*Josephus’s estimate of six thousand Pharisees in all Palestine, three thousand conversions to the new Jesus movement in Jerusalem is no small start! Still, it is a limited percentage; even without festal pilgrims, Jerusalem’s population in this period was probably seventy thousand or higher (some estimate eighty-five thousand; in contrast to lower earlier estimates). The temple mount had many immersion pools that worshipers used to purify themselves ritually; mass baptisms could thus be conducted quickly under the \*apostles’ general supervision.<sup>40</sup>

**“They sold their possessions... and parted them to all, as every man had need” (Acts 2.45).**

This is a fragmentary bit here in my opinion, but it seems to be the beginnings of consecration.

Keener adds this keen insight:

The Greek language Luke uses here resembles language that Pythagoreans and others used for the ideal, utopian community; others also compare the ancient ideal of “friends” sharing things in common. Luke clearly portrays this radical lifestyle positively, as the result of the outpouring of the Spirit. Some Jewish groups, such as the group that lived at Qumran, followed a model similar to that attributed to the Pythagoreans and turned all their possessions over to the leaders of the community so they could all withdraw from society. Differences also remain clear: the Christians do not withdraw from society, and they apparently sell off property to meet needs as they arise (4:34-35), continuing to use their homes (though often as meeting places for fellow Christians, 2:46). These actions do not reflect an ascetic ideal, as in some Greek and Jewish sects, but instead the practice of radically valuing people over possessions, acknowledging that Jesus owns both them and their property (cf. 4:32). Such behavior reportedly continued among Christians well into the second century, and it was long ridiculed by elite pagans (poor pagans were more appreciative and sometimes converted through it) until pagan values finally overwhelmed the church.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *History of The Church*, 2: 256-257.

<sup>40</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 325.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 325-326.

## 7. Healing the Lame Beggar (Acts 3.1-10).

"Peter and John were about to enter the temple to worship and seek strength for the tasks that lay before them. A forty-year-old man, 'lame from his mother's womb,' asked alms of them as they passed. There was nothing unique about his plea; the man had been begging every day for years in this same place. But Peter did not brush by. What would his petition mean, offered up in this holy house at the hour of prayer, if he suffered this man to offer up a similar petition in vain?

He turned to the invalid, 'fastening his eyes on him' with a gaze that probed the deepest recesses of his soul. Finding faith there, Peter said deliberately and clear: 'Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.' (Acts 3:1-6.) Peter had no money but he had riches. 'Such as he had' included every key of the kingdom of God on earth, priesthood power to raise the dead, faith to strengthen bones and sinews, a strong right hand of Christian fellowship. He could not give silver or gold, but he could give that which is always purchased 'without money and without price' (Isaiah 55:1)-and he gave it ...Who was this man among men, admired by modern prophets and anointed of God? What manner of man is chosen from among the host of heaven to become the first ordained apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ and lead His church in perilous times? How high was the ground he stood on? How bright was the fire in his soul? For answers, we open the scriptures and find 'a man who had grown perfect through his experiences and sufferings-a man with vision, a man of revelations, a man fully trusted by his Lord Jesus Christ.' (Kimball, op. cit.) We find there a mighty stone in Israel."<sup>42</sup>

## 8. Peter's Second Sermon (Acts 3.11-26).

### Solomon's Porch (Acts 3.11).

From the steps of the Beautiful Gate Peter, John and the beggar pass through the temple courts to the eastern colonnade, which supposedly remained from Solomon's temple.

### "Christ should suffer" (Acts 3.18).

Later Jewish teachers sometimes said hyperbolically that the entire message of the prophets dealt with the messianic era or Jerusalem's restoration, or with other favorite topics. Some later rabbis said that a \*Messiah would suffer and spoke of two Messiahs, one who would suffer and one who would reign, but the Christians seem to have been the first to proclaim the concept of a suffering Messiah.<sup>43</sup>

**Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord (Acts 3.19).**

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<sup>42</sup> Jeffrey R. Holland, [However Long and Hard the Road](#), Deseret Book, 1985, p. 90-91.

<sup>43</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 327.

### **Time of refreshing<sup>44</sup> ... and the time of restitution of all things<sup>45</sup> (Acts 3.19-21).**

LeGrand Richards taught (see also his comments below):

"If we believe the Holy Scriptures, as we are admonished to do, and the words of the prophets, we cannot look for the second coming of Christ in power until there is a restitution of all things spoken by the mouths of all the holy prophets since the world began. I want to say unto you that that is what this Church is...the restoration of the Holy Priesthood, the re-establishment of the Church of Christ in the earth, founded upon the foundation of apostles and prophets, with Christ our Lord as the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20)."<sup>46</sup>

### **Peter quotes Deut. 18.15 in his speech (Acts 3.22-23).**

Numerous parallels have been drawn by scholars of the Gospel between the missions of Moses and the earthly mission of Christ. However, the fundamental impetus behind Peter's citation of Deuteronomy

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<sup>44</sup> καιροί ἀναψύξεως translated as "times of refreshing," (Acts 3.19) can refer to a time of Messianic fulfilment. To an audience of Christians, it could refer to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Elder McConkie rendered this explanation of this phrase: Peter spoke of the times of refreshing which should come from the presence of the Lord at the Second Coming of Christ. (Acts 3:19-21.) His statement has the same meaning as the one in the Tenth Article of Faith which records that "the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory." This occurrence is "the regeneration" which shall take place "when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory." (Matt. 19:28.) It is also "the day of transfiguration ... When the earth shall be transfigured." (D. & C. 63:20-21.) This earth was created in a new or paradisiacal state; then, incident to Adam's transgression, it fell to its present telestial state. At the Second Coming of our Lord, it will be renewed, regenerated, refreshed, transfigured, become again a new earth, a paradisiacal earth. Its millennial status will be a return to its pristine state of beauty and glory, the state that existed before the fall. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, "Time of Refreshing."

<sup>45</sup> χρόνων ἀποκαταστάσεως πάντων "the time of restitution of everything," (Acts 3.21) can refer to a time when the Savior rules on the earth. This could be directly related to the "times of refreshing" (Acts 3.19), at least in Elder McConkie's view. He wrote, "Peter taught that the Second Coming of the Son of Man cannot take place "until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3: 19-21.) The phrase times of restitution means the age or era of restoration; it is that period in the earth's history known as the dispensation of the fulness of times, for in that era all things are to be restored. (Eph. 1:10.) It should be noted that Peter does not say that all things must be restored before Christ comes, but that the age, era, period, or times in the earth's history in which restoration is to take place must itself commence. That era did begin in the spring of 1820, but all things will not be revealed until after Christ comes. (D. & C. 101:32-34.)" *Mormon Doctrine*, "Time of Restitution." LeGrand Richards seemed to have specified this time period specifically to the time before the Millennium when he said, after quoting Ephesians 1.9-10 and Acts 3.19-21, "These statements of Peter and Paul are very comprehensive. They seem to include all that would be done to establish the Kingdom of God upon the earth to prepare the way for the second coming of the Messiah. What they beheld and foretold seems to be nothing less than "the marvellous work and a wonder," which Isaiah saw that the Lord would establish upon the earth. Many of the prophets seemed to have been given a vision of this "marvellous work and a wonder" the Lord would accomplish in the latter days to prepare for the glorious second coming of His Son in power and great glory, as King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:16); when all men shall know Him in His true character; when "the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6.)" See: LeGrand Richards, Chapter 8 "events to transpire before Christ's Second Coming," *Israel! Do You Know?* Deseret Book, 1990. The current Come, Follow Me material gives this explanation: "The times of refreshing" refers to the Millennium, when Jesus Christ will return to the earth. "The times of restitution of all things" refers to the Restoration of the gospel, which prepares the world for the Millennium. See: [New Testament 2023 July 3-9, Come, Follow Me](#). Accessed 3.10.23.

<sup>46</sup> *Conference Report, October 1958.*

18:15 was not Christ's earthly ministry, but rather his anticipated Second Coming. Additionally, in the Book of Mormon, whenever the Deuteronomy passage is invoked, it consistently pertains to Christ's Second Coming (cf. 1 Nephi 22:19-20; 3 Nephi 20:22-23). It is therefore reasonable to infer that the majority of the similarities between Moses and Christ are not in reference to Christ's mortal ministry, but rather to his reign during the Millennial period.

### **9. Peter and John are arrested (Acts 4.1-12).**

#### **“The captain of the temple” (Acts 4.1).**

The Sadducees controlled the temple hierarchy and most of the resident priesthood. The *sagan*, or captain of the temple guard (a local police force permitted by the Romans and made up of Levites; cf. Neh 13:22), is known from other sources and is probably the same official called “the king’s captain” in Herod the Great’s day. Later tradition reports that he was a Sadducean aristocrat of very high rank and also that he could be very harsh, even with his own guards.<sup>47</sup>

#### **“Annas the high priest” (Acts 4.6).**

These officials were widely known. Like other writers of his day (especially Josephus), Luke uses “high priest” loosely for any officials of the high priestly household; Caiaphas was officially high priest at this time. The rabbis and Dead Sea Scrolls (as well as other sources like *2 Baruch*) offer an unflattering picture of the final generations of the temple aristocracy, with whom they did not get along. Even Josephus, a first-century Jerusalem aristocrat himself, depicts abuses, plots and even violence among the leading priests.<sup>48</sup>

#### **“Salvation... in his name” (Acts 4.9-12).**

Salvation “in the name” (Acts 4.12) alludes to Peter’s earlier exposition of Joel 2:32 (Acts 2.21); the term translated “saved” includes making whole (i.e., healing the man— so v. 9, literally)... In ancient legal debate, a person who could argue that it was actually a praiseworthy act for which they were on trial cast the accusers in a negative light. It was common to charge one’s accusers with a crime, and that reversal is simple enough here: Jerusalem’s elite instigated Jesus’ execution (cf. also possibly Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.64).<sup>49</sup>

King Benjamin similarly taught:

I say unto you, that there shall be no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent (Mosiah 3.17).

I say, that this is the man who receiveth salvation, through the atonement which was prepared from the foundation of the world for all mankind, which ever were since the fall of Adam, or who are, or who ever shall be, even unto the end of the world. And this is the means whereby salvation cometh. And there is none other salvation save this which hath been spoken of; neither are there any conditions whereby man can be saved except the conditions which I have told you (Mosiah 4.7-8).

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<sup>47</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 328.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

## 10. Peter and John are threatened and released (Acts 4.13-31).

**“For we cannot but speak of the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4.20).**

### Resisting Secular Powers

Elder McConkie, speaking on the topic of resisting evil governmental forces, wrote:

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, Jewish captives in Babylon, defied Nebuchadnezzar and did not worship his image of gold; thereupon they were thrown into a fiery furnace from which they were saved by divine power. (Daniel 3.) Daniel was cast into a den of lions when he defied the decree of Darius by praying to the true God. (Daniel 6.) Peter and John, being commanded by the Great Sanhedrin "not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus," defied these Jewish overlords. Their inspired decision: "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:18-20.)

***To these few illustrations might be added a host of others, all leading to the conclusion that there are times under which the Lord does not require submission to evil secular power. Obviously there is no sure way of knowing the course we should pursue in each instance except by revelation.***

All scripture should be studied in context. Any concepts taught will have application in principle whenever the same circumstances prevail, and perhaps above all other verses of holy writ, these principles of interpretation and application have reference to our Twelfth Article of Faith. Certainly this inspired statement relative to obedience to law and subjection to secular authority had total application to the conditions in which the saints found themselves in 1842, when the Prophet penned the Wentworth Letter, of which the Articles of Faith are a part. At that time the Church was dominantly an American church with roots in Western Europe. Strictly speaking, and having in mind the historical context in which the inspired declarations on secular authority were made, they had specific application to the areas where the saints then dwelt. But they apply, in principle, to other areas in which church and state are separated and when like conditions prevail.

There are certain guidelines in the New Testament—differing from those in the Old Testament—that let us know how to operate in subjection to secular authority. These concepts apply to us because the primitive saints faced social and governmental conditions similar to the ones that confront us. Theocracies had ceased long before the days of Jesus and Peter. They and all men were subject to secular powers that used religion for their own purposes, or looked upon it as a necessary evil, or viewed it as pious nonsense not worthy of serious consideration. Thus Jesus, fully aware of Roman domination and Jewish political subservience, when taunted with the Pharisaical question, "Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?" said, "Shew me the tribute money." Thereupon he asked, "Whose is this image and superscription?" Their answer, "Caesar's," brought forth the decree: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:17-21.)

In harmony with this concept, Peter counseled the meridian saints in these words: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well." Such a course, Peter said, "is the will of God." How could it have been otherwise? Had these early saints rebelled against Caesar and claimed Christ alone as their king, they would have been guilty of sedition and the sword of Caesar would have denied them the opportunity to worship as they desired. Hence



these words of counsel: "Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king." (1 Peter 2:13-17.)

Subjection to secular power does not constitute a divine approval of the system of government involved. However evil and autocratic the Roman empire may have been; regardless of the depravity and degeneracy in high places; notwithstanding the fact that human rights meant nothing to the Caesars—yet Rome was there, Rome ruled, Rome wielded the sword, and all who opposed her did so at the peril of their lives. Peter's next words—"Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear" (1 Peter 2:1-18)—carry the implicit meaning that subjection to government is not an endorsement and approval of the governmental system involved. Slavery is contrary to gospel principles. According to the order of heaven, it is not right that one man should be in bondage to another, and yet where this lesser standard exists, the Lord's counsel, as with reference to governments, is obedience and subjection. Here again, rebellion would bring civil penalties that well might preclude true worship itself.

Paul is of one mind with his fellow apostle in counseling the saints "to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men." (Titus 3:1-2.) In this connection he exhorts that "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority." Why? "That we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." That is, so that we may be free to live our religion and work out our salvation. "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour." (1 Timothy 2:1-3.)

In a hard and difficult passage, which as it stands in the King James Version of the Bible is subject to unfortunate interpretations, Paul counseled the Roman saints to be in subjection to both civil and ecclesiastical authorities... Until He rules whose right it is and subdues all enemies under his feet; until he makes a full end of all nations in the day of his coming; until the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ—there will be conflicts between church and state that defy solution. Neither the saints nor Lucifer will yield on the issues involved, and a resolution will be found only after the wicked are destroyed by the brightness of His coming. In every nation the saints will use their influence in the Cause of Righteousness, in the cause of truth, the cause of freedom, the gospel cause. In those same nations, Lucifer will seek to enforce his will. Whenever and wherever he can use either a church or a state as an instrument of damnation, he will do it. We may expect greater opposition and a more definite polarization of the people as the great and dreadful day of the Lord draws nearer. Religious influences will cause political kingdoms to engage in the battle of Armageddon, and there will be martyrdom and destruction on all sides as the gospel is preached in those concluding days of the earth's temporal continuance.

From time to time the Church has made and yet will make formal declarations relative to the problems confronting church and state as they exist at any given time and in any specific area... In 1899 Elder James E. Talmage, having in mind an American church and writing of conditions as they then existed, gave this wise counsel: "In the case of a conflict between the requirements made by the revealed word of God, and those imposed by the secular law, which of these authorities would the members of the Church be bound to obey? In answer, the words of Christ may be applied—it is the duty of the people to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's. At the present time the kingdom of heaven as an earthly power, with a reigning King exercising direct and personal authority in temporal matters, has not been established upon the earth. The branches of the Church as

such, and the members composing the same, are subjects of the several governments within whose separate realms the Church organizations exist.<sup>50</sup>

### **The whole world was against the Christians (Acts 4.26-27).**

In Acts 4.2 the believers recognize the fulfillment of that opposition in Jesus' opponents (even Jewish "peoples," though the psalm focused on Gentile ones). Others also employed "Herod" as a title for Herod Antipas (e.g., Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.104-6, 243- 255). The rejection of the servant might evoke Isaiah, especially in view of his anointing here (Isa 61:1; cf. Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38). This is a recognition that the opposition to Jesus (and to themselves) is according to God's will. God acting "by his hand" reflects Old Testament language.

### **11. Consecration among the Saints (Acts 4.32-37).**

Hyrum Andrus writes:

"Though the political organ of the kingdom was not developed significantly among the disciples of Christ at Jerusalem, they did institute the divine economic law, and they enjoyed many of the spiritual gifts of the kingdom. On the day of Pentecost, there "came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them." Of the system which was established among the disciples, the record says" (he then quotes Acts 4.32-37) and then continues "The kingdom of God was a system of new and more perfect human relationships in the religious, social, economic, and political spheres of life, founded upon principles of mutual covenant and sustained by the blessings of the Holy Spirit in the life of man. It therefore must be analyzed on its own merits. Within the kingdom the priesthood was the basis of both a church and a state. But the perfected kingdom was a divine patriarchal order into which all elements of the kingdom would be integrated.

Zion was the heart of the kingdom—the perfected spiritual, social, and economic family order patterned after the law of Mount Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem where exalted beings dwell in the presence of God. Purity was Zion's distinguishing mark, but man's heart was made pure as he established his life upon the law of God. ***Regenerated individuals would then be of one heart and one mind; there would be no poor among them. That divine system was to be an ensign and a standard to the world which secured to its members many benefits.*** The new order was designed to perfect the Saints; to establish spiritual, social, and economic justice; to endow the faithful with glory; to prepare the obedient for the coming of Christ; and to give the Saints an eternal inheritance."<sup>51</sup>

### **12. Ananias and Sapphira hold back part (Acts 5.1-16).**

In Acts 5.1-16, Ananias and Sapphira, a married couple who were part of the earliest followers of Jesus, sold some property but kept back part of the proceeds for themselves, while pretending to have given the full amount to the apostles. When Peter confronts Ananias about his deception, Ananias drops dead. A few hours later, Sapphira arrives, and Peter similarly confronts her about their deception, after which she also drops dead.

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<sup>50</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, "Article 12, chapter 68: The Church and Civil Power," [A New Witness for the Articles of Faith](#), Deseret Book, 1985, emphasis added.

<sup>51</sup> Hyrum Andrus, Chapter 2 "The Nature of the Kingdom," [Doctrines of the Kingdom](#), Deseret Book, 2010.

The significance of this story lies in the fact that it illustrates the seriousness with which the early followers of Jesus regarded honesty and integrity. The couple's deceitful actions were not merely a matter of failing to donate the full proceeds of their property sale; rather, they were seen as lying to the Holy Spirit and attempting to deceive the entire community. The swift and severe consequences of their actions demonstrate the high value placed on integrity and honesty in the early Church.

Furthermore, this event serves as a warning against hypocrisy and the dangers of putting on a false appearance of piety. Ananias and Sapphira wanted to appear generous and selfless like other members of the community who were selling their possessions to help those in need, but their hearts were not truly in it. As a result, they suffered the ultimate consequence of their deception.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught:

"Illustrations involving economic consecration are relevant. When Ananias and Sapphira sold their possessions, they 'kept back part of the price' (see Acts 5:1-11). So many of us cling tenaciously to a particular 'part,' even treating our obsessions like possessions. Thus, whatever else we may have already given, the last portion is the hardest to yield. Granted, partial surrender is still commendable, but it resembles, more than faintly, the excuse, 'I gave at the office' (see James 1:7-8). **We may, for instance, have a specific set of skills which we mistakenly come to think we somehow own.** If we continue to cling to those more than to God, we are flinching in the face of the consecrating first commandment. Since God lends us "breath ... from one moment to another," hyperventilating over these distractions is not recommended! (Mosiah 2:21).

**A stumbling block appears when we serve God generously with time and checkbooks but still withhold portions of our inner selves, signifying that we are not yet fully His!** Some have difficulty when particular tasks enter their sunset phase. John the Baptist is a model, however, saying of Jesus' growing flock, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). Mistakenly regarding our present assignments as the only indicator of how much God loves us only adds to our reluctance to let go. Brothers and sisters, our individual worth is already divinely established as "great"; it does not fluctuate like the stock market."<sup>52</sup>

**"The shadow of Peter" (Acts 5.15).**

"Healings come by the power of faith; there is no healing virtue or power in any item of clothing, or other object, whether owned by Paul or Jesus or anyone. But rites and objects may be used to help increase faith. 'When a man works by faith,' the Prophet said, 'he works by mental exertion instead of physical force.' (*Lectures on Faith*, p. 61.) ... In this connection there are occasions when ordinances or performances or objects may be used to help center the mental faculties of a person on those things which will cause faith to increase. Thus Jesus used spittle and clay to anoint the eyes of a blind man, **not that there was any healing power in the mud paste spread on the sightless eyes**, but the physical act aided the mental labor out of which faith grew. The same principle is seen in the healing of the woman who touched Jesus' garments, in the dead being raised by touching the bones of Elisha (2 Kings 13:20-21), and in the very ordinance of administering to the sick through the formalities of anointing with oil and laying on of hands. Similar miracles to those wrought through Paul have occurred in this

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<sup>52</sup> Elder Neal A. Maxwell, "[Consecrate Thy Performance](#)," *Ensign*, May 2002, emphasis added.

dispensation. On that memorable July 22, 1839, at Montrose, Iowa, for instance, when the Prophet healed the sick in great numbers, he took a silk handkerchief from his pocket, gave it to Wilford Woodruff, and told him to go and use it in the healing of two children of a nonmember of the Church. Elder Woodruff, as instructed, used the handkerchief in wiping the faces of the sick children and they were healed. (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History*, pp. 270-271.).<sup>53</sup>

### **13. The apostles put in prison and released by an angel (Acts 5.17-32).**

#### **“The common prison” (Acts 5.18).**

Jails were normally used for detention until trial, not for imprisonment as a punishment. The Roman garrison in this period controlled the Fortress Antonia on the temple mount; the Levite temple police thus jail the apostles in a different location, though it might also be near the temple. The elite had accommodated the apostles’ popularity so far, but now risked losing face if they continued to fail to act.<sup>54</sup>

#### **The angel opens the prison doors (Acts 5.19).**

Stories of miraculous escapes from prison appear occasionally in Greek tradition (e.g., the Greek deity Dionysus, imprisoned by King Pentheus, in Euripides’s *Bacchae* and subsequent writers) and in one pre-Christian story about Moses in the Diaspora Jewish writer Artapanus. Of course, even the exodus from Egypt was a miraculous deliverance from captivity (cf. also Lev 26:13; Ps 107:10-16).<sup>55</sup>

#### **The prison is empty (Acts 5.22-23).**

These guards are fortunate that they are Levites policing for the Jewish temple aristocracy rather than recruits under the Romans or Herod Agrippa I, who might have executed them.<sup>56</sup>

#### **“They feared the people” (Acts 3.26).**

Jewish tradition suggests that the Levite temple guards were known for violence during the corrupt administrations of these \*high priests; but political sensitivity determines their actions here. Once out of control, ancient mobs often stoned those who acted contrary to their sentiments.<sup>57</sup>

#### **“Whom ye slew and hanged on a tree” (Acts 5.30).**

"The New Testament also alludes to the cross of Jesus as a tree. (See Acts 5:30; Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 2:24.) Some have noticed that the Greek word used in these passages is the same as that used for the tree of life in the Septuagint, different from the usual New Testament word for tree. According to a number of sources, some early Christians thought of the cross as a tree of life. Later sources likewise relate the cross to the tree of life, as in some hymns attributed to St. Ephraem the Syrian:

'The tree of life is the cross which gave a radiant life to our race. On the top of Golgotha Christ distributed life to men. And henceforth he further promised us the pledge of eternal life.

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<sup>53</sup> Elder Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 2:169.

<sup>54</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 331.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 332.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

'Our Savior typified his body in the tree, the one from which Adam did not taste because he sinned.'

"Even a spare sampling of writings from the early Church Fathers shows their awareness of the power of the symbol of the tree of life in ancient Christianity. The *Instructions of Commodianus*, for example, states in chapter 35 that 'by this tree of death we are born to the life to come; ... therefore, pluck believingly the fruits of life.'"<sup>58</sup>

The food from the tree is nourishing, as Griggs relates from an ancient source:

In the *Secrets of Enoch* 9:1, the seer is shown the heavenly dwelling place of the righteous, where stands the tree of life. In the *Testament of Levi* 18:9–11, Enoch prophesies that in the last days the Lord "shall open the gates of paradise, and shall remove the threatening sword against Adam. And he shall give to the saints to eat from the tree of life, and the spirit of holiness shall be on them."<sup>59</sup>

#### **14. Gamaliel's wise counsel (Acts 5.33-42).**

Gamaliel, a prominent scholar of Jewish law, was the grandson of the renowned rabbi Hillel and a respected member of the Sanhedrin during the nascent stages of the Christian movement. He is lauded as an esteemed figure in his own right, and is cited by Paul as his mentor, stating that he was "brought up at the feet" of Gamaliel (Acts 22.3), an idiomatic expression indicating that he was instructed by the venerable master of the law. Gamaliel was known for his reputation of being benevolent and tolerant, with a strong emphasis on the humanitarian aspects of the law. He displayed a willingness to relax the strict demands of Sabbath observance and encouraged a more compassionate treatment of women in divorce cases.

#### **Theudas... Judas of Galilee... it will come to nought (Acts 5.36-38).**

Gamaliel compares the Jesus movement with some populist revolutionary movements, revealing a misunderstanding perhaps widely shared in the Sanhedrin. If Josephus is accurate, Theudas arose about A.D. 44—some ten years after Gamaliel's speech... Theudas was a Jewish "magician" (he probably viewed himself as a prophet) who gathered followers to the river Jordan, promising to part it. The Roman governor Fadus sent troops who killed and captured members of the crowd; Theudas was beheaded (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.97-98). Judas the Galilean led the tax revolt of A.D. 6 (Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.56, 118; *Jewish Antiquities* 18.23). The Romans retaliated by destroying Sepphoris; Judas's model led to the revolutionaries who later came to be called the Zealots. Judas's sons also revolted in the war of 66-70; they were crucified (*Jewish Antiquities* 20.102; cf. *Jewish War* 2.433-34). Judas was helped by a certain Saddok—a Pharisee. Gamaliel would naturally view such revolutionaries more favorably than the Sadducees would, since the Sadducees had more vested interests in Roman rule.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> C. Wilfred Griggs, "[The Tree of Life in Ancient Cultures](#)," *Ensign*, June 1988. He also relates this about the Menorah: "In general it may be said that most scholars now seem to suppose that the menorah originated from a sacred tree, more specifically the Tree of Life of mythology—a primal image which can be glimpsed as early as the third millennium B.C. ... and which played a decisive role in the tree cult of the ancient world."

<sup>59</sup> Griggs, "Tree."

<sup>60</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 333.