

## Acts 10-15 CFM Ep 211



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. Cornelius' Vision (Acts 10.1-23).
2. Peter comes to Caesarea (Acts 10.24-33).
3. The Gentiles hear the Gospel (Acts 10.34-48).
4. Peter comes to Jerusalem and gives his report (Acts 11.1-18).
5. The Church at Antioch (Acts 11.19-30).
6. Peter is arrested and delivered (Acts 12.1-19).
7. The death of Herod (Acts 12.20-25).
8. Paul's First Missionary Journey (Acts 13-14).
9. Paul turns to the Gentiles (Acts 13.44-52).
10. Acceptance and Opposition (Acts 14.1-28).
11. The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15.1-22).
12. Letters are sent out to the churches of the decision of the Council (Acts 15.23-35).
13. Paul's Second Missionary Journey Begins (Acts 15.36-41).

### 1. Cornelius' Vision (Acts 10.1-23).

**"Now send men to Joppa, and call for Simon... he shall tell you what you should do" (Acts 10.6).**

#### Revelation comes when we are on the move

Going forward with our service and work is an important way to qualify for revelation. In my study of the scriptures I have noted that most revelation to the children of God comes when they are on the move, not when they are sitting back in their habitations waiting for the Lord to tell them the first step to take.

For example, it is significant to note that the revelation known as "the Word and Will of the Lord concerning the Camp of Israel" ([D&C 136.1](#)) was not given in Nauvoo as the Quorum of the Twelve planned the exodus from Nauvoo in those sorrowful days following the Martyrdom of the Prophet in 1844; nor was it given on the west bank of the Mississippi River. It was given at Winter Quarters, Nebraska, after the Saints had spent a punishing year moving from Nauvoo westward across Iowa to temporary camps on the Missouri River. The revelation to guide the movement of the Saints across the plains was given on January 14, 1847, when the Saints had already gone about a third of the way to the valleys of the mountains.

*We will get promptings of the Spirit when we have done everything we can, when we are out in the sun working rather than sitting back in the shade praying for direction on the first step to take. Revelation comes when the children of God are on the move.*

So we do all we can. Then we wait upon the Lord for His revelation. He has his own timetable.<sup>1</sup>

#### **“The ninth hour of the day” (Acts 10.3).**

Cornelius seems to be keeping with the Jewish hour of prayer here, as observant Jews would pray in the morning, in the afternoon, and in the evening.<sup>2</sup>

#### **The “Household” of Cornelius (Acts 10.7).**

Cornelius’s “household” or “family” is of interest. Luke would certainly know that military personnel were not officially permitted to marry. Cornelius might be retired, but otherwise he would not be married officially. Soldiers, often recruited from the local areas where they served, commonly had illegal concubines whom superiors ignored, but centurions were moved around somewhat more often and thus could maintain long-term informal marriages with local concubines less often than other soldiers might. Thus while Cornelius may have unofficially married a concubine, it is also possible that he did not. It was considered proper for a wife to share her husband’s religion, so if he was married, her shared devotion here would be natural. But the term translated “household” could include servants or freed persons; although a cheap slave would cost about one-third of a regular soldier’s annual pay, centurions received fifteen times the pay of rank-and-file soldiers. “Household” here might mean simply “servants” (v. 7).<sup>3</sup>

#### **Peter’s Vision (Acts 10.9-16).**

##### **“On the morrow” (Acts 10.9).**

Caesarea was about thirty miles north of Joppa. If Cornelius’s messengers left even immediately after 3 p.m. (Acts 10.3) on the same day (some commentators believe they left the next day), they must have traveled part of the night on foot, or (less likely) Cornelius must have found horses for them to ride, because here they approach Joppa by noon (“the sixth hour”). Thus their task must be urgent.<sup>4</sup>

##### **“What God hath cleansed, call not common” (Acts 10.15)**

“The prejudices were deep rooted in Peter, and it took a vision from heaven to help him cast off his bias. The voice had commanded: ‘Rise, Peter; kill, and eat,’ when the vessel descended from the heaven containing all manner of beasts, reptiles, and fowls. Punctilious Peter expressed his lifelong prejudices and habits in saying, ‘Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.’ Then the heavenly voice made clear that the program was for *all*. ‘What God hath cleansed,’ it said, ‘that call not thou common.’ Peter’s long sustained prejudices finally gave way under the power of the thrice-repeated command. When the devout gentile Cornelius immediately thereafter appealed to him for the

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<sup>1</sup> Dallin H. Oaks, “[In His Own Time, In His Own Way](#),” *Ensign*, Aug. 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Keener, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament](#), IVP Academic, 2014, p. 350.

<sup>3</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 350.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

gospel, the full meaning of the vision burst upon Peter and he exclaimed, ' . . . God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.' (Acts 10:13-15, 28.)"<sup>5</sup>

#### **Cornelius' servants find Peter at Simon the Tanner's House (Acts 10.17).**

Joppa was a large town, but knowing Simon's profession and that his house was near the sea would make it easy to find him. In many cities of the Roman world, people of the same trade would live in the same district; most people in Joppa would know the right district. Moreover, tanners normally lived outside or near the edge of a city, preferably near a water source. Asking directions was common. That Simon has an outer gate indicates that he is a man of some means.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Peter thinks on the vision and hears the Spirit (Acts 10.19).**

This narrative depicts two individuals who received divine guidance. One of them, a Gentile, had not yet received the gift of the Holy Ghost, while the other was a presiding authority of the Church of Jesus Christ, a prominent spiritual leader who was well-versed in matters of the Spirit. Consequently, both men received instructions from God in distinct ways. Cornelius was visited by an angel who conveyed specific directives, while Peter's spiritual awareness was so acute that he was able to discern the voice of the Spirit without requiring an angelic intermediary.

The contrast between the modes of divine instruction is noteworthy as many believers may anticipate dramatic angelic interventions as a means of affirming their faithfulness. However, it is important to note that if the Lord can communicate with us in a simpler manner, He will choose to do so. Therefore, if an individual primarily receives personal revelation through the quiet promptings of the Holy Spirit, it may be viewed as a testament to their spiritual sensitivity rather than a reflection of their unimportance to the Lord or the work he needs them to do.

As Oscar McConkie taught, "Angels do not attend men unless there is need. It is not their errand to satisfy idle curiosity. We have no scriptural accounts of any angels doing any service for man that man could have done without the help of the angel. With the ample precedents available for examination, we can establish this principle as the order of heaven."<sup>7</sup>

#### **Cornelius' men lodge at Simon's Place (Acts 10.22-23).**

Pharisees and other pietists were concerned about impure table fellowship; lodging Gentiles overnight, no matter how exhausted the guests may have been, contradicted strict Jewish piety (though it was understood that in some regions one could not avoid Gentiles altogether). Although some allowed eating with Gentiles, so long as the food was "pure," others opposed eating with Gentiles altogether. Many forbade eating with them on the principle that they were evil company (*Jubilees* 22:16). Perhaps Simon, being a tanner, is less concerned with strict rules; although most of his customers were probably Jewish, Joppa was a mixed town and his was a profession despised by strict pietists anyway. (Even later rabbis allowed some short-term business contacts with Gentiles and recognized that some shops

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<sup>5</sup> Spencer W. Kimball, [Faith Precedes the Miracle](#), Deseret Book, 2001, 294.

<sup>6</sup> Keener, [Background](#), p. 351.

<sup>7</sup> Oscar W. McConkie, [Angels](#), p. 109.

employed both Gentile and Jewish workers.) But Peter’s vision probably has something to do with the treatment the guests receive.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Peter comes to Caesarea (Acts 10.24-33).

### Cornelius relates his vision of “a man... before me in bright clothing” (Acts 10.30).<sup>9</sup>

Jewish visions sometimes included the angels and the righteous shining like the sun or stars (1 Enoch; Sirach; 4 Ezra; Dan 12:3). The righteous shining and also ruling in the future are combined in Wisdom of Solomon 3.7-8. 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>10</sup>

## 3. The Gentiles hear the Gospel (Acts 10.34-48).

### Peter’s response: “God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10.34).

For none of these iniquities come of the Lord; for he doeth that which is good among the children of men; and he doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men; and he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile ([2 Nephi 26.33](#)).

“The Lord would have eliminated bigotry and class distinction. He talked to the Samaritan woman at the well, healed the centurion's kin, and blessed the child of the Canaanitish woman. And though he personally came to the 'lost sheep of the House of Israel' and sent his apostles first to them rather than to the Samaritans and other gentiles, yet he later sent Paul to bring the gospel to the gentiles and revealed to Peter that the gospel was for all.”<sup>11</sup>

### “We are all witnesses... whom they slew and hanged on a tree” (Acts 10.39 – see also Acts 5.30 and Acts 13.29).

#### The tree symbol

Based on an ancient tradition, upon his departure from the Garden of Eden, Adam retained two significant items. Firstly, the garment of light, which symbolized his priestly duties, was replaced by a garment of skins that would shield him from the adversities of the material world. Secondly, he carried a

<sup>8</sup> Keener, p. 351.

<sup>9</sup> ἀνὴρ ἕστη ἐνώπιόν μου ἐν ἐσθῆτι λαμπρᾷ “A man stood before me in brilliant raiment” (Acts 10.30b, my translation).

<sup>10</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, emphasis added).

<sup>11</sup> Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle*, p. 294.

branch of the tree of life, which he utilized as his regal scepter. These two artifacts established Adam as the world's inaugural high priest and king.

Wilfred Griggs writes,

“The tree of life was an enduring symbol in the ancient world, possibly spreading through intercultural contacts. It appeared in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Palestine, Greece, and elsewhere with virtually the same significant characteristics. This symbol of eternal life, however, could accurately point only to Jesus Christ, as the New Testament writers and early Christians realized.

The tree of life is mentioned specifically in the Revelation of John (Rev. 2:7; Rev. 22:2, 14), with the promise that its fruit will be given to the righteous. Other passages refer to or fulfill Old Testament symbols and prophecies. The olive tree, for example, becomes Paul's symbol of eternal life for the Saints, both Jew and Gentile. (See Rom. 11:16–27.)

Olive oil—a product of the sacred tree—was not only used in the Old Testament for the ritual anointing of priests and kings, but was also used in the New Testament for anointing the sick for God's blessing. (See Ex. 30:23–33; James 5:14–15.) The name *Christ* (Greek) or *Messiah* (Hebrew) also means “the anointed one,” and anointing for divine kingship or for God's blessing is especially significant for Jesus.”<sup>12</sup>

### **A Symbol of Kingship**

The association between the Tree of Life and kingship in antiquity is evident in various ancient cultural and religious traditions. The Tree of Life is often regarded as a symbol of immortality, abundance, and wisdom, attributes that are closely associated with the authority and power of kings.

In ancient Near Eastern cultures such as Assyria and Babylon, the Tree of Life was depicted in royal art and iconography as a symbol of divine protection and kingship. In the Hebrew Bible, the Tree of Life appears as a prominent motif in the Book of Proverbs and is associated with wisdom, understanding, and righteousness.

In ancient Egyptian religion, the Tree of Life was referred to as the "persea tree," and was associated with the god Horus, who was considered the first divine king of Egypt.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, in Hindu mythology, the Tree of Life is represented as the "kalpataru" or "wish-fulfilling tree," and is often depicted in the courts of kings and deities, symbolizing their power to fulfill the desires of their subjects.<sup>14</sup> In Indonesia, legend comes to us of the king of Majapait who anointed and consecrated Maharaja Sultan of Kutai as cosmic ruler at the base of “The Nagasari Tree.” This tree was understood to be the center of the

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<sup>12</sup> Griggs, C. Wilfred. "The Tree of Life in Ancient Cultures." *Ensign* 18, no. 6 (1988): 26-31.

<sup>13</sup> “As in other Egyptian cultic contexts, the perseas dedicated (S)paris and his cult companions were probably meant to stand on a sacred hillock and to play a role in the rituals related to Osiris' tomb.” Stefano G. Caneva, *The Persea Tree from Alexander to Late Antiquity: A Contribution to the Cultural and Social History of Greco-Roman Egypt*, *Ancient Society*, Vol. 46 (206, p. 54. Caneva outlines how the cutting down of this tree was prohibited, and that “the religious initiative of individuals appears to have played an important role in the preservation of this tree” (p. 58). The author continues (p. 59), “The commitment shown by individuals associated with temples and by institutions towards the protection of perseas kept alive the Egyptian tradition of “protected” plants as sacred trees were often defined in sources from the Hellenistic period onwards.”

<sup>14</sup> [Kalpavriksha, Wikipedia](#), accessed 3.15.23.

universe.<sup>15</sup> This tree was a symbol of their gods,<sup>16</sup> was associated with finding the dead,<sup>17</sup> and was the mysterious mountain that was in the center, even the holy center of heaven.<sup>18</sup> The author concludes that this coronation ceremony, depicted the king under the tree, represented the king sitting under or leaning against the Tree of Life.<sup>19</sup>

In this way, modern readers can see some of the connections between the Tree of Life and kingship, at least as much as we have recorded information on this topic. This association between the Tree of Life and the ideal model of kings in antiquity, representing his divine authority, wisdom, and protection was a powerful tool to communicate these ideas. As such, the cosmic world tree, or Tree of Life was considered a powerful symbol of kingship, used to reinforce the legitimacy and authority of rulers in various cultural and religious contexts.

**“While Peter spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word” (Acts 10.44).**

**“And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 10.45).**

Most Jewish teachers felt that the Spirit inspired only the most pious with divine utterances, or that the Spirit would mark God’s people in the future age. That Gentiles would receive the gift was unthinkable. Most importantly, the Spirit was an \*eschatological promise only for the people of the covenant (e.g., Is 44:3; Ezek 39:29). Gentiles obviously could not receive the gift if God had not accepted them, so he clearly had accepted them— even without circumcision.<sup>20</sup>

**Cornelius is baptized (Acts 10.45-48).**

**For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days (Acts 10.46-48).**

"There is a difference between the Holy Ghost and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Cornelius received the Holy Ghost before he was baptized, which was the convincing power of God unto him of the truth of the gospel. But he could not receive the gift of the Holy Ghost until after he was baptized. And had he not taken this sign [or] ordinances upon him, the Holy Ghost, which convinced him of the truth of God, would have left him until he obeyed those ordinances and received the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands, according to the order of God."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> “The Nagasari-tree stands in the centre of the Universe. This centre' is known in Javano-Balinese religion to belong to Siwa, and to his spouse Urna, and 'every kind of flowers' and 'all colours' mean that they are the gods of totality, containing all other gods, colours etc. in themselves. 'Bathing' in this water imparts the highest form of purification.” Jacoba Hooykaas, *Upon A White Stone Under a Nagasari Tree,*” *Bijdragen tot de Tall-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, Deel 113, 4de Afl. 1957, p. 326.

<sup>16</sup> Hooykaas, p. 328.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 340.

<sup>20</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 353.

<sup>21</sup> Kent P. Jackson, comp. and ed., *Joseph Smith's Commentary on the Bible*, p. 150.

#### 4. Peter comes to Jerusalem and gives his report (Acts 11.1-18).

**“When Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them” (Acts 11.2-3).**

Not all Jews were this strict, but some were, especially in Judea, and the Jerusalem leaders here are as strict about eating as were the Pharisees in Luke’s Gospel. Table fellowship created a covenant between host and guests. Most Jews welcomed God-fearers (10:2), but Gentiles had to be circumcised to convert fully to Judaism. (This requirement is a natural inference from the law and continues to be an issue as late as Acts 15:1, 5.) No one objected to Peter preaching Christ to Gentiles; the issue is that he ate with them even though as Gentiles they were ritually unclean (Acts 10:28; cf. Gal 2:12).<sup>22</sup>

#### **Traditions and Dispositions can be a challenge for the Saints of God**

Elder Spencer Condie taught:

“Many people’s dispositions mirror the cultural traditions that they internalized while growing up. The widespread consumption of alcohol, immodesty of dress and behavior, and cohabitation without marriage are but a few examples of cultural traditions alien to the spirit of the gospel. So it is that the “wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth, through disobedience, from the children of men, and because of the tradition of their fathers” (D&C 93:39). These traditions seem natural because most people in a given society engage in such behaviors, but the commandments of God are based upon revealed truth, not popular preferences. Thus, King Benjamin warned his people that “the natural man is an enemy to God,” and he exhorted them to put off the natural man, or in other words to reject unholy traditions and to undergo a mighty change in their natural dispositions by yielding “to the enticings of the Holy Spirit” (Mosiah 3:19).

Sometimes members become so fond of certain traditions within the Church that a change in a given policy or procedure becomes a test of their faith. ***They believe in continuous revelation as long as it does not involve change.*** Describing the Saints in his day, the Prophet Joseph Smith once exclaimed, ‘I have tried for a number of years to get the minds of the Saints prepared to receive the things of God; but we frequently see some of them ... will fly to pieces like glass as soon as anything comes that is contrary to their traditions’ (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 331)<sup>23</sup>

“What was I, that I could withstand God?” (Acts 11.17).

#### 5. The Church at Antioch (Acts 11.19-30).

The Jesus movement shifts from a predominantly rural movement in Galilee to an urban movement in Jerusalem to a cosmopolitan movement in Antioch. Such a rapid transition is virtually unparalleled in antiquity and indicates considerable social flexibility. That Judaism had already adapted to these various settings over the centuries provided a conduit for these rapid transitions within the Jewish Christian community.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 353.

<sup>23</sup> Spencer Condie, [“A Disposition to Do Good Continually”](#) *Ensign*, Aug. 2001, emphasis added.

<sup>24</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 354.



## Antioch



Antioch, Turkish Antakya, populous city of ancient Syria and now a major town of south-central Turkey. It lies near the mouth of the Orontes River, about 12 miles (19 km) northwest of the Syrian border.<sup>25</sup> Antioch on the Orontes in Syria was the third (or possibly fourth) largest urban center of the Roman empire (after Rome and Alexandria), though population estimates range from one hundred thousand to six hundred thousand. As the seat of Syria's Roman governor, it was the headquarters of Rome's Syrian legion. Rome granted it the privilege of being a "free city," mostly governing itself. With a famous cult center of Apollo within walking distance and Seleucia, its port city off the Mediterranean coast, only a brief river journey, it boasted numerous mystery cults and was known for its pagan religious diversity.

Because of its cultural pluralism, it included an upwardly mobile and generally accepted Jewish element with many "Godfearers" (see 10:2) and was far less segregated than Alexandria. The Jewish community here was large; some guess roughly twenty thousand, perhaps around ten percent of the city's population. Antioch, in contrast to most predominantly Gentile cities in the region, spared its Jewish inhabitants in the war of 66–70, though they did not fully trust them. Some more liberal non-Palestinian Jewish people saw their witness to the God of Israel among the Gentiles as making monotheism reasonable and contacting the best in pagan philosophy; circumcision was to them a lesser issue. Antioch's cosmopolitan nature allowed for much interchange of different cultural ideas. Many proselytes and Godfearers attended Antioch's synagogues. Thus Antioch was a more natural place for Gentiles (here, perhaps "Hellenizing" Syrians) to hear the gospel without circumcision than Judea was (15:1).<sup>26</sup>

### **"The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (Acts 11.26).**

"Christians" occurs in the New Testament only here, as a nickname given by outsiders, and in 1 Peter 4:16, as something like a legal charge. The title is formed on the analogy of adherents to a political party: the "Caesarians," the "Herodians," the "Pompeians" and so forth. Had it been interpreted politically ("partisans of the executed Judean king") it could have stirred persecution, but here it apparently functions merely as derision. At least by a later period, Antiochans were known for making fun of people. By the early second century, however, Jesus' followers had welcomed the title.<sup>27</sup>

### **Defining who is Christian**

Elder McConkie wrote:

"Christians is an obvious name for the followers of Christ, for those who believe he is the Son of God and that salvation of all degrees comes because of him and his atoning sacrifice. Since there have been followers of Christ in successive gospel dispensations from Adam to the present, these all would have been known as Christians or some equivalent, synonymous term. By saying the saints were called Christians first in Antioch means that for the first time in the meridian dispensation there was a sufficient

<sup>25</sup> Antioch, [Brittanica.com](http://Brittanica.com), accessed 3.15.23.

<sup>26</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 354.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 354.



church membership so that nonmembers recognized the saints as a separate and distinct organization, one severed and apart from the Jewish synagogue and community.

As far as the rejectors and detractors of Christ were concerned, the term Christian was probably first used in derision. Such was clearly the case among the Nephites. The Book of Mormon account, recording events in about the year 73 B. C. -well over a century before the Antioch congregation came into being- says: 'Christians . . . For thus were all the true believers of Christ, who belonged to the church of God, called by those who did not belong to the church.' (Alma 46:13-16.)

A somewhat analogous situation exists in this dispensation with reference to the term Mormons...Are Mormons Christians? The answer depends on what is meant by Christians. If Christians are people with the defined view that salvation comes only through the complete gospel of Christ, Mormons are truly Christians in the precise and full meaning of the term.

If Christians are people (and this is the standard definition of the clergy of the day) who believe in the holy trinity as defined and set forth in the Nicene, Athanasian, and Apostles creeds... (then we are not).

... But if by Christians is meant the saints of God in Antioch and elsewhere who believe and live as they did; if by Christians is meant those who accept Christ as the literal Son of God; who believe that miracles and signs follow true believers; who believe in kingdoms of glory, revelation, the gathering of Israel, and Melchizedek and Aaronic priesthoods; who believe there must be apostles and prophets in the Church; and who believe in all respects as did holy men of old- then Mormons are Christians... Indeed, Mormonism is pure, unadulterated Christianity, restored anew in all its grandeur and glory."<sup>28</sup>

#### **Agabus' prediction of the famine (Acts 11.27-29).**

During the reign of Emperor Claudius, the Mediterranean region was plagued by a series of famines that severely impacted agricultural production. This is evidenced by extant papyri that document the exorbitant prices of grain in the vicinity of 46 AD.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, the widespread scarcity of grain resulted in a crisis in Rome, which nearly culminated in an outburst of public violence and civil unrest against Claudius in 51 AD. In light of the circumstances, Queen Helena of Adiabene undertook the acquisition of Egyptian grain for Judea, an action which required the expenditure of considerable financial resources.<sup>30</sup> Ultimately, it is evident that the climatic conditions and agricultural policies of the period had significant implications for the economies of the Mediterranean world, as well as for the political stability of individual regions within that broader context.

#### **6. Peter is arrested and delivered (Acts 12.1-19).**

#### **Herod kills James the brother of John and the son of Zebedee (Acts 12.1-2).**

<sup>28</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 2:112-113.

<sup>29</sup> The Egyptian famine may be dated in the year 45 on the evidence of the recently published documents from the register of the Grapheion at Tebtunis. In August, September and November of this year the price of grain, as recorded in the papyri from Tebtunis, averaged about eight drachmas an artaba. Thus the cost of wheat at this time was more than twice as high as any other recorded price in the Roman period before the reign of Vespasian. Kenneth Gapp, The Universal Famine under Claudius, *The Harvard Theological Review*, Oct., 1935, No. 4 (Oct. 1935), p. 259.

<sup>30</sup> [Helena of Adiabene, Wikipedia](#). Accessed 3.15.23.

## Discuss traditional stories of the martyrdom of the Apostles

The Biblical record details the deaths of only two apostles, James and Judas Iscariot. The majority of information regarding the accounts of how the remaining apostles were killed is derived from various sources within early Christianity, including the writings of Church Fathers and ecclesiastical tradition. Notably, accounts of the death of each apostle can vary significantly between different sources, with discrepancies often present concerning both the location and manner of their deaths. As such, our understanding of the deaths of the apostles is heavily reliant on accounts that have been passed down through the generations, and as a result, must be approached with a degree of caution and skepticism.

### James

The account of James, the brother of John, is brief and to the point:

Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword (Acts 12.1-2).

In the fourth century, Eusebius of Caesarea quoted Clement of Alexandria about James' death:

"It appears that the guard who brought him into court was so moved when he saw him testify that he confessed that he, too, was a Christian. So they were both taken away together, and on the way he asked James to forgive him. James thought for a moment, then he said 'I wish you peace,' and kissed him. So both were beheaded at the same time."<sup>31</sup>

Although Clement of Alexandria was born more than a century after the death of James, it is feasible that he had access to accounts and records that have since been lost to history. While there are many myths and legends associated with prominent figures within Christianity, the possibility remains that Clement had access to reliable sources that have since been lost or destroyed. Indeed, given the importance of James as one of the central figures in the early Christian community, it is quite conceivable that accounts of his life and death were carefully preserved and passed down through the generations, and may have been accessible to Clement during his lifetime. While we cannot be certain of the sources that Clement drew upon in his writings, the possibility that he had access to valuable historical material should not be dismissed out of hand.

### Peter

Per church tradition, the Apostle Peter was put to death by Emperor Nero in 64 AD, shortly following the Great Fire of Rome. This devastating blaze was famously blamed by Nero on the Christian community, and its aftermath saw the Emperor embark on a brutal campaign of persecution against the followers of Jesus. The Acts of Peter, an apocryphal text dating from the second century, is the earliest known account of Peter's martyrdom, and presents the apostle as being crucified upside down, allegedly due to his own view that he was not worthy of dying in the same manner as Jesus.

Additionally, in the Gospel of John, Jesus foretells Peter's ultimate fate when he predicts that the apostle will be led where he does not wish to go, and will ultimately glorify God through his death. This prediction is later remarked upon by John, who states that Jesus had made this declaration to indicate the manner in which Peter would ultimately meet his end. In this way, the death of Peter became an

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<sup>31</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, [Church History, Book II](#), chapter 9: The Martyrdom of James the Apostle. Accessed 3.16.23.

enduring symbol of Christian martyrdom and faithfulness, and continues to inspire and resonate within Christian communities to this day.

Clement of Rome, an early church father who personally knew the apostles, wrote in his famous letter known as 1 Clement, “Let us take the noble examples of our own generation. Through jealousy and envy the greatest and most just pillars of the Church were persecuted, and came even unto death. . . . Peter, through unjust envy, endured not one or two but many labours, and at last, having delivered his testimony, departed unto the place of glory due to him.”<sup>32</sup>

Eusebius, the father of church history, quotes Origen (a second/third-century scholar) as saying, “Peter was crucified at Rome with his head downwards, as he himself had desired to suffer.”<sup>33</sup>

## John

There are different traditions regarding the death of the apostle John, which are mostly based on historical accounts and early Christian writings.

The apostle known as the "beloved disciple" was the brother of James the Great, and is credited with founding churches in Smyrna, Pergamos, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, and Thyatira. He was ordered to be sent from Ephesus to Rome, where he was said to have been thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil, but miraculously escaped unharmed. Later, he was banished by Domitian to the Isle of Patmos, where he wrote the Book of Revelation. Following the reign of Domitian, he was recalled by Nerva. Remarkably, he was the only apostle to avoid a violent death.<sup>34</sup>

## 3 Nephi 28

In 3 Nephi 28 we find a reference to John's condition, for three of the Nephite Twelve sought the same promise and privilege that Jesus had granted to John. From Mormon's statements we conclude that John and the three Nephite disciples entered a condition analogous to that experienced by Enoch and his city: they are no longer subjected to mortal conditions and restrictions known to us; they can disguise themselves; they have supernatural mobility; they can exercise tremendous priesthood powers; Satan no longer has power over them to tempt them; and they will undergo another change to their eternal condition when the Lord comes. Mormon himself, curious as to how they could be above death, asked and learned that when they were changed, pain, sorrow, and death could not affect them. (3 Nephi 28:37-38.) Therefore, 3 Nephi 28 is really our best description of what happened also to John.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> [The Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians](#), 5, translated by Kirsopp Lake.

<sup>33</sup> Concerning the manner of Peter's death, we possess a tradition—attested to by Tertullian at the end of the second century and by Origen (in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, II, i)—that he suffered crucifixion. Origen says: “Peter was crucified at Rome with his head downwards, as he himself had desired to suffer.” As the place of execution may be accepted with great probability the Neronian Gardens on the Vatican, since there, according to Tacitus, were enacted in general the gruesome scenes of the Neronian persecution; and in this district, in the vicinity of the Via Cornelia and at the foot of the Vatican Hills, the Prince of the Apostles found his burial place. See: [Peter, Apostle, Saint. Catholic Answers](#), Accessed 3.16.23.

<sup>34</sup> [Foxe's Book of Martyrs](#), Chapter 1 “History of Christian Martyrs to the First General Persecutions.” Accessed 3.18.23.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas W. Mackay, “The Resurrected Lord and his Apostles,” [Studies in Scripture, Vol. 5: The Gospels](#), edited by Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson, Deseret Book, 2004.

### James the Just, the brother of Jesus

According to tradition, James the Just,<sup>36</sup> who was a leader in the early Christian community in Jerusalem, was martyred by being pushed from the pinnacle of the Temple and then beaten with a fuller's club and stoned to death. This tradition is recounted in several early Christian texts, including the Acts of the Apostles and the writings of the Jewish historian Josephus.

The account of James' martyrdom in the Acts of the Apostles describes how he was brought before the Sanhedrin and accused of blasphemy, but he refused to renounce his faith in Jesus as the Messiah. As a result, he was taken to the pinnacle of the Temple and thrown off, but he survived the fall. He was then beaten with a fuller's club and stoned to death.

Josephus, who was a contemporary of James and an eyewitness to many of the events he describes, also recounts the story of James' martyrdom in his *Antiquities of the Jews*. According to Josephus, James was stoned to death for violating Jewish law, which he saw as a betrayal of his own people.<sup>37</sup> The Church historian Eusebius, quoting Hegesippus, who lived just after the apostles, gives us the following information: "James, the brother of the Lord, succeeded to the government of the Church in conjunction with the apostles. He has been called the Just by all from the time of our Saviour to the present day; for there were many that bore the name of James. He was holy from his mother's womb; and he drank no wine nor strong drink, nor did he eat flesh... many even of the rulers believed, there was a commotion among the Jews and Scribes and Pharisees, who said that there was danger that the whole people would be looking for Jesus as the Christ. Coming therefore in a body to James they said, 'We entreat thee, restrain the people; for they are gone astray in regard to Jesus, as if he were the Christ. We entreat thee to persuade all that have come to the feast of the Passover concerning Jesus; for we all have confidence in thee. For we bear thee witness, as do all the people, that thou art just, and dost not respect persons... And one of them, who was a fuller, took the club with which he beat out clothes and struck the just man on the head. And thus he suffered martyrdom. And they buried him on the spot, by the temple, and his monument still remains by the temple. He became a true witness, both to Jews and Greeks, that Jesus is the Christ. And immediately Vespasian besieged them.'"<sup>38</sup>

While there is no way to verify the accuracy of these accounts that come to us from these ancient sources, they provide important insights into the early Christian community and the persecution it faced.

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<sup>36</sup> According to Marius Victorinus (on Gal. 1: 19), the Symmachians (Ebionites) counted him as the twelfth apostle (*MPL* 8.11558). Josephus (*Ant.* 20.200) tells how, during the interval between the death of the procurator Festus and the arrival of his successor Albinus (c. A.D. 62), the high priest Ananus II "convened a judicial court and brought before them a man called James, brother of Jesus the so-called Christ, and some others, and having charged them as law-breakers, he delivered them over to be stoned." Hegesippus (*ap.* Euseb. *HE* 2.23) relates how he was held in high respect by the people of Jerusalem, and how he suffered martyrdom in a manner similar to Stephen. See: F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 339.

<sup>37</sup> Josephus (*Ant.*, XX, ix) tells us that Ananus the high priest had James stoned to death, and that the most equitable of the citizens immediately rose in revolt against such a lawless procedure, and Ananus was deposed after only three months' rule. This testimony of Josephus simply substantiates all that we know from other sources concerning the high standing of James in the whole community. Hegesippus says that James was first thrown from a pinnacle of the temple, and then they stoned him because he was not killed by the fall, and he was finally beaten over the head with a fuller's club; and then he adds significantly, "Immediately Vespasian besieged them" (Euseb., *HE*, II, 23). [James, Epistle of. International Standard Bible Encyclopedia](#). Accessed 3.16.23.

<sup>38</sup> Eusebius Pamphilus, [Church History, Life of Constantine, Oration in Praise of Constantine, Chapter XXIII](#).—The Martyrdom of James, who was called the Brother of the Lord. Accessed 3.16.23.

We can only go back so far, and as far as these accounts line up historically, they are oftentimes viewed as reliable. The account of James' martyrdom, if it is accurate, highlights the courage and steadfastness of the early Christian martyrs, many of whom were not only willing to sacrifice much in their desire to live for their belief in Jesus, they were also willing to die for it.

### **Paul**

Paul, although not one of the Twelve apostles, is widely recognized as an apostle in Christian tradition. He was specifically referred to as the apostle to the Gentiles in the book of Romans (11.13).<sup>39</sup> Despite the absence of his death in the New Testament record, his martyrdom is well-documented in the early Christian church. Several early church fathers wrote about his execution by beheading, which was believed to have occurred during the reign of Emperor Nero, prior to 68 AD.

Clement of Rome, in his letter to the Corinthians, provided the earliest surviving account of Paul's death, where he mentioned the martyrdom of both Paul and Peter. *The Acts of Paul*, an apocryphal work from the second century, also recounts that Nero had Paul decapitated.<sup>40</sup> Tertullian, in 200 AD, compared Paul's death to that of John the Baptist, who was also beheaded. Other early Christian writers corroborated these accounts and provided further details, including the location of his death in Rome and his burial along the Ostian Way in Rome.<sup>41</sup>

### **Matthew the Publican**

Some sources indicate that Matthew is traditionally thought to have died as a martyr while preaching the Gospel. The Roman Martyrology describes his death as occurring in a territory near present-day Egypt.<sup>42</sup> Legends disagree as to whether Matthew died a natural death or as a martyr.<sup>43</sup>

### **Jude and Simon**

The traditional belief regarding the martyrdom of the apostle Jude Thaddeus is that he was killed in Syria while on a missionary journey with Simon the Zealot. However, the reliability of this tradition is questionable, as it is based on an account found in the *Acts of Simon and Jude*, a text that is known for containing legendary stories.

One such story can be found in *The Golden Legend*, which tells of Simon and Jude staying in the region where they were preaching for a period of about 15 months. According to this legend, they baptized around 60,000 souls, which had caused a commotion among members of other religious traditions, thereby bringing about an intense opposition to their work. Both Jude and Simon worked to teach the gospel, even commanding demons to come out of idols and destroy the images of these people.<sup>44</sup> As a

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<sup>39</sup> "For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office" (Romans 11.13).

<sup>40</sup> "Then Paul stood with his face to the east and lifted up his hands unto heaven and prayed a long time, and in his prayer he conversed in the Hebrew tongue with the fathers, and then stretched forth his neck without speaking. And when the executioner (speculator) struck off his head, milk spurted upon the cloak of the soldier. And the soldier and all that were there present when they saw it marvelled and glorified God which had given such glory unto Paul: and they went and told Caesar what was done." *The Acts of Paul*, X, Vb. Accessed 3.15.23.

<sup>41</sup> [Via Ostiensis, Wikipedia](#). Accessed 3.15.23.

<sup>42</sup> [St Matthew the Apostle, Catholic News Agency](#). Accessed 3.15.23.

<sup>43</sup> [St. Matthew, Britannica](#). Accessed 3.15.23.

<sup>44</sup> "The apostles said: "So that you may know that these idols are full of demons, watch! We command the demons to come out and each one of them to shatter his own image!" And immediately, to the utter amazement of all, two

result of their actions, the religious leaders of the area reportedly became angry and had Simon and Jude killed.<sup>45</sup> According to Jacobus de Voragine, “numerous sources tell us that Simon was nailed to a gibbet in the shape of a cross.”<sup>46</sup>

It should be noted that while such accounts may be of interest to those studying the history of Christianity and the lives of the apostles, their accuracy and historical reliability are not well established. Ultimately, the details surrounding the deaths of Simon and Jude remain a matter of religious tradition and belief.

### **Matthias, Judas’ replacement in the Twelve**

Of whom less is known than of most of the other disciples, was elected to fill the vacant place of Judas. He was stoned at Jerusalem and then beheaded.<sup>47</sup>

### **Andrew the brother of Peter**

Was the brother of Peter. He preached the gospel to many Asiatic nations; but on his arrival at Edessa he was taken and crucified on a cross, the two ends of which were fixed transversely in the ground. Hence the derivation of the term, St. Andrew's Cross.<sup>48</sup>

### **Mark, Peter’s missionary companion**

Was born of Jewish parents of the tribe of Levi. He is supposed to have been converted to Christianity by Peter, whom he served as an amanuensis, and under whose inspection he wrote his Gospel in the Greek language. Mark was dragged to pieces by the people of Alexandria, at the great solemnity of Serapis their idol, ending his life under their merciless hands.<sup>49</sup>

### **Bartholomew**

Preached in several countries, and having translated the Gospel of Matthew into the language of India, he propagated it in that country. He was at length cruelly beaten and then crucified by the impatient idolaters.<sup>50</sup>

### **Thomas**

Called Didymus, preached the Gospel in Parthia and India, where exciting the rage of the pagan priests, he was martyred by being thrust through with a spear.<sup>51</sup>

### **Luke**

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black and naked figures came out of the idols, smashed them, and with wild cries departed. The pagan priests rushed upon the apostles and killed them.” Jacobus de Voragine, William Ryan (translator), *The Golden Legend*, Princeton University Press, 2012, p. 650.

<sup>45</sup> The legend states that an angel gave the two men the choice: either to choose martyrdom or to have their opponents slain by the power of God. The two missionaries chose martyrdom. See: *The Golden Legend*, p. 650.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 651.

<sup>47</sup> *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*, p. 2. Accessed 3.18.23.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

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

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

The evangelist, was the author of the Gospel which goes under his name. He travelled with Paul through various countries, and is supposed to have been hanged on an olive tree, by the idolatrous priests of Greece.<sup>52</sup>

### **Barnabas, Paul's missionary companion**

Was of Cyprus, but of Jewish descent, his death is supposed to have taken place about A.D. 73. And yet, notwithstanding all these continual persecutions and horrible punishments, the Church daily increased, deeply rooted in the doctrine of the apostles and of men apostolical, and watered plenteously with the blood of saints.<sup>53</sup>

### **Peter's Arrest (Acts 12.1-4).**

#### **"Herod the king" (Acts 12.1).**

This Herod is Agrippa I, brother-in-law, and son of a half-brother, of Antipas, the Herod of the Gospels whose attempt to gain as much power as Agrippa cost him his own kingdom.<sup>54</sup> (Antipas's fatal jealousy of Agrippa was instigated by his own consort Herodias— Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.7.1-2, 240-44, 250-54—although she had helped her brother Agrippa out after he had wasted all his money in Rome and returned to Palestine in debt— *Jewish Antiquities* 18.6.1-2, 143-49.) Herod Agrippa I had partied with Gaius Caligula in Rome; when Caligula became emperor, Agrippa I became the first official Jewish "king" since his grandfather Herod the Great. Although Caligula kept Agrippa in Rome, the following emperor Claudius sent him to Judea, where he reigned from 41 until his death in 44. Because his grandmother Mariamne was a Hasmonean princess, he was ethnically Jewish as well as Idumean (in contrast to Herod the Great). He was thus very popular with the people, on behalf of whom he used his influence. He was pro-Pharisee and frequented the temple.<sup>55</sup>

#### **"He... delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him" (Acts 12.4).**

Agrippa I resided in Jerusalem. Luke does not mention the specific place of Peter's imprisonment, but the fortress Antonia on the temple mount is one possibility. As a trusted client ruler of Rome, Agrippa could have his own army, so the soldiers mentioned here need not be Romans, although they are described in terms of Roman organization. The basic unit of the Roman army was the *contubernium*, composed of eight soldiers who shared a tent; half units were sometimes assigned to special tasks, as here (sixteen soldiers total). Perhaps these groups of four worked in four three-hour shifts during the night. Agrippa perhaps feared armed resistance. Luke may use "Passover" in its general sense in this period to refer to the entire Feast of Unleavened Bread. Following Roman custom, he was known to execute criminals for public entertainment. Executions during festivals provided optimum propaganda value, though Romans usually waited until afterward.<sup>56</sup>

### **An angel comes to loose Peter (Acts 12.7-10).**

### **Peter comes to the house of Mary the mother of John (Acts 12.11-17).**

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> See: Day, [Herod Family Tree](#). He is #9 on the chart.

<sup>55</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 355.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 355.



**“Go, show these things to James and to the brethren!” (Acts 12.17).<sup>57</sup>**

“James” (literally “Jacob,” as with every use of “James” in the New Testament) was a common Jewish name; this is not the James of 12:2, but the James of 15:13, 1 Corinthians 15:7 and Galatians 2:9. Jewish sources tell us that this James, Jesus’ younger brother, was highly reputed for his devoutness in Judaism (cf. Acts 21:18-20), and when he was later martyred some leading Jerusalemites protested his death (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.200-203). He would thus be more safe from Agrippa, who catered to the conservative Jewish masses (12:1-3).<sup>58</sup>

**Herod commands that guards be put to death (Acts 12.18-19).**

Given the soldiers’ precautions (chains, doors and different guards posted for each—12:6), it was humanly impossible for Peter to have escaped without all the guards having aided him. Agrippa examines them for information, perhaps under torture, but they have none. Under Roman law, a guard whose prisoner escaped would pay for it with the penalty due the prisoner—in this case, his own life (cf. 16:27; 27:42), a custom Agrippa, deprived of a favor for the masses, chooses to follow (at least with the final shift of guards). Since Agrippa cannot acknowledge divine intervention on Peter’s behalf, he executes the guards for their complicity or negligence.<sup>59</sup>

### **7. The Death of Herod (Acts 12.20-25).**

Agrippa I liked to flaunt his power; his self-display had unfortunately led to anti-Jewish riots in Alexandria earlier. His public meeting with these emissaries is in the theater of Caesarea, built by his grandfather Herod the Great; the foundations of this theater still remain today. (This was a mercantile port city easily accessible to Tyrian and Sidonian delegates.) According to Josephus this speech occurred on a festival day in honor of the emperor (*Jewish Antiquities* 19.343).

The first-century Jewish historian Josephus reports that on this occasion Agrippa flaunted his power, and his flatterers praised him as a god—the sort of flattery toward royal \*patrons common for centuries in the Greek East. But in the Roman period Caesar expected even pagans who were not emperors (such as the general Germanicus in Egypt) to humbly deflect such praise. Because Agrippa does not repudiate their praise, he collapses immediately. Josephus reports that he was carried to the palace, where he died at the age of fifty-four, after five days of stomach pains (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 19.344-50). Deaths from bowel diseases and worms were thought among the most horrible (e.g., 2 Chron 21:15-19; 2 Maccabees 9:5-9; Josephus, *Jewish War* 7.453).<sup>60</sup>

### **8. Paul’s First Missionary Journey (Acts 13-14).**

Paul’s first missionary journey, as recorded in the New Testament, took place in the mid-40s AD. The basic outline of the places he visited during this journey is as follows:

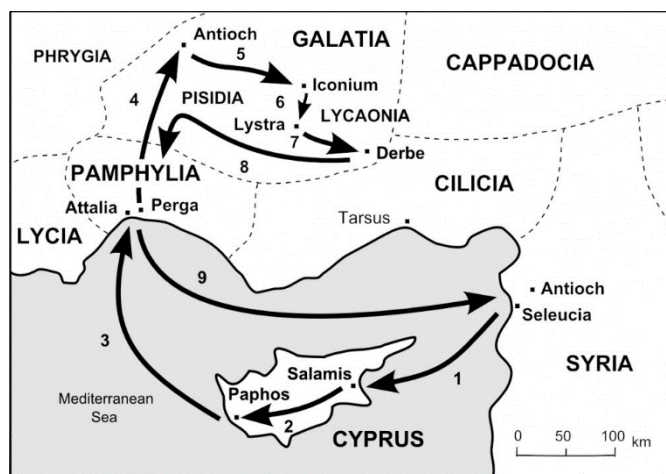
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<sup>57</sup> εἶπέν δὲ Ἀπαγγείλατε Ἰακώβῳ καὶ τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς ταῦτα καὶ ἐξελθὼν ἐπορεύθη εἰς ἕτερον τόπον “And he said, go and show these things to Jacob and to the brothers. And he left and went into another place” (Acts 12.17b, my translation).

<sup>58</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 356.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 356.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 356-7.



**Antioch:** Paul and his companions (Barnabas and John Mark) started their journey from Antioch, which was a major city in the Roman province of Syria.

**Seleucia:** From Antioch, they sailed to Seleucia, the port city of Antioch, from where they would begin their journey inland.

**Salamis:** They arrived in Salamis, the main port of the island of Cyprus, and started preaching in the synagogues of the Jews.

**Paphos:** From Salamis, they traveled west to Paphos, the capital of Cyprus, where they encountered a sorcerer named Elymas and converted the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, to Christianity.

**Perga:** From Paphos, they sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem.

**Pisidian Antioch:** From Perga, they traveled to Pisidian Antioch, where Paul delivered a sermon in the synagogue, and many Jews and Gentiles were converted to Christianity.

**Iconium:** From Pisidian Antioch, they went to Iconium, where they preached in the synagogue and made many disciples, but were also met with opposition from the Jews.

**Lystra:** From Iconium, they traveled to Lystra, where Paul healed a crippled man, and many people believed in Jesus. However, later, Paul was stoned and left for dead by the people of the city.

**Derbe:** From Lystra, they traveled to Derbe, where they preached the gospel and made many disciples.

**Return Journey:** Paul and Barnabas retraced their steps and revisited the cities where they had previously preached, strengthening the new converts and appointing elders in each church before returning to Antioch.

The Spirit dictates that Saul and Barnabas are to split up (Acts 13.2).

This is the first verse where the name “Paul” appears for Saul (Acts 13.9).

Paul’s first recorded speech, as recorded in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13.16-43).

### 9. Paul turns to the Gentiles (Acts 13.44-52).

“I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles” (Acts 13.47).

Here they quote the mission of the servant of Isaiah 49:6. The servant is clearly Israel in 49:3-4; in 49:5-7 it is the one who fully carries out the servant’s mission and suffers on behalf of Israel (as in 52:13–53:12), whom the early Christians recognized to be Jesus. As followers of Jesus, Paul and Barnabas take up the servant’s mission, part of which was revealing the way of salvation to the Gentiles.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 361.

“The word of the Lord was published throughout all the region” (Acts 13.49).

Paul and Barnabas are persecuted by “the Jews” (Acts 13.50).

### **10. Acceptance and Opposition (Acts 14.1-28).**

In Iconium, the city was divided as to how to receive Paul (Acts 14.4).

#### **Paul and Barnabas preach and perform miracles and are received as gods (Acts 14.8-18).**

Local Phrygian legend told of an ancient visitation by Zeus and Hermes to Phrygia. In the story only one couple, Baucis and Philemon, received them graciously; the rest of the population was destroyed in a flood. Knowing some form of the story in their own language, the Lycaonians are not about to make the same mistake ancient Phrygia had made; they want to honor Paul and Barnabas, whom they mistake for gods. People sometimes considered miracle workers as gods. Lystra’s colonists, who were Roman citizens, employed Latin for official business; those speaking Lycaonian here are the longstanding indigenous residents of the area (who may have been more prone to listen than the more elite citizens).<sup>62</sup>

#### **“Paul, Mercurius” (Acts 14.12).**

Hermes was the messenger of the Olympian gods who spoke for the more dignified Zeus (though in other stories Zeus was less dignified and out chasing women or occasionally boys for his sexual delights). Like most early Jewish and Christian writers (cf. also Is 46:5-7), Luke is not above making fun of what he viewed as paganism’s folly.<sup>63</sup>

#### **“When Barnabas and Paul heard” (Acts 14.14).**

Villages of the East usually kept their own ancient language after Greek had become the language of the cities. Landowning citizens of Lystra spoke Latin, but outside the town proper people spoke Greek and the local dialect; Lystra was a market town for the surrounding territory. (outside Lystra, most inscriptions are Greek, but names are local, suggesting use of a mother-tongue in addition to the more geographically widespread trade and literary language.) Although the hearers would have understood Greek, they spoke among themselves in their mother tongue. Paul and Barnabas are preaching to the masses, the abundant Anatolian noncitizens who lived there; only at verse 14 are they informed of what the crowds are saying. Jewish people were required to tear their robes when they heard blasphemy.<sup>64</sup>

#### **Their response, “We are also men of like passions with you!” (Acts 14.15).**

#### **Paul is stoned (Acts 14.18-20).**

The visitors from Antioch had no legal authority outside their own territory, but they are able to persuade the mob to accomplish what had failed in Iconium (14:5-6). A mob could change its views quickly (cf. Lk 23:18), especially in a case like this one: when Paul and Barnabas deny the gods, they would be considered impious and hence would appear to fit a different category of ancient paganism. ***Now they were not gods after all, but dangerous magicians.*** (Whereas gods were popularly regarded as

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 362-363.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p .363.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

generally beneficent, sorcerers were viewed as secretive and usually harmful.) Iconium was only twenty miles away, but Antioch was four or five days' travel, nearly a hundred miles from Lystra by road. Nevertheless, it is known that Antioch and Lystra were in contact with each other, considering themselves sister cities. Sources show that particularly effective speakers could sometimes (though not always) calm mobs. ***Stoning was an appropriate penalty for blasphemy, as it was the most common form of urban mob violence in the Gentile world.*** Stones, tiles and cobbles were readily available in ancient streets. When Jewish crowds stoned a transgressor, they sought the transgressor's death; Paul's survival undoubtedly points to divine protection. Normally such executions were performed outside the city, and they may have dragged him out of the city for purity reasons; that he not only survived but could walk afterward must be understood as miraculous.<sup>65</sup>

### **They "ordain elders in every church" (Acts 14.23).**

### **They sailed to Antioch and dwelt with the apostles (Acts 14.28).**

When they return to Antioch, Paul and Barnabas report on their missionary work to the sending church. Although Jewish people in the Diaspora were concerned to propagate a favorable impression of their religion and to gain converts when possible, they do not seem to have engaged in a concerted effort at what we call "mission." Yet synagogue communities throughout the Diaspora informally remained in contact through travelers who reported news, and reports of large numbers of converts to Judaism would have been considered news when it occurred. The Antiochan church's commitment probably goes beyond such interest, because the early Christians' interest in missions was far more central than that of other Jewish sects; Luke-Acts is clear that missions is at the heart of Jesus' purpose for his church.<sup>66</sup>

### **11. The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15.1-22).**

**Acts 15.6** *Συνήχθησάν δὲ οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἰδεῖν περὶ τοῦ λόγου τούτου* "And all the apostles and elders were assembled to see what was up" Acts 15.6 my translation.

Apparently other members of the church were present (πᾶν τὸ πλῆθος, Acts 15.12; σὺν ὅλῃ τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ Acts 15.22), although the deliberation and decision rested with the leaders. How many of the apostles were still resident in Jerusalem is uncertain; probably those who were accessible were brought together for this consultation. The elders were led by James (Acts 15.13; cf. 21.18). The authority of the two groups was evidently unquestioned; whether or not either group had overriding authority in case of disagreement cannot be determined.<sup>67</sup>

### **Peter's message (Acts 15.7-11).**

Peter informs the council that there is "no difference between us and them" (Acts 15.9).

What Peter's agreement amounts to in the context of the current dispute is that circumcision (with the concomitant obligation to observe the law of Moses; cf. Gal. 5 :3) should not be required of Gentile

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 363-364.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 365.

<sup>67</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek with Introduction and Commentary*, Eerdmans, 1990, p. 335. I agree with F.F. Bruce here. I also understand the position and arguments of Elder McConkie, but just reading the text renders the position of F.F. Bruce to be the logical conclusion here. For Elder McConkie's position to be correct, there must be more to the story than is given in the text.

converts. "Peter was probably in fact and effect the bridgeman who did more than any other to hold together the diversity of first-century Christianity"<sup>68</sup> This is his final appearance in Acts; as far as Luke is concerned, "the legitimation of the mission to the Gentiles is virtually Peter's last work."<sup>69</sup>

### **Paul speaks (Acts 15.12).**

Ἐσίγησεν δὲ πᾶν τὸ πλῆθος καὶ ἤκουον Βαρναβᾶ καὶ Παύλου ἐξηγουμένων ὅσα ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς **σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα** ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν δι' αὐτῶν ("Then all the multitude held their peace, and began to listen to Barnabas and Paul, as they related the **signs and wonders** that God had worked through the Gentiles by their ministry" Acts 15.12, my translation).

The report of Gentile evangelization in Cyprus and Anatolia could but strengthen Peter's argument; to the example of Cornelius, adduced by Peter, Paul and Barnabas could add many more. But they spoke as witnesses, not as consultants, and at Jerusalem their words could have carried nothing like the authority of Peter's.<sup>70</sup>

### **James (Ἰάκωβος), the leader in Jerusalem renders his advice (Acts 15.13-22).<sup>71</sup>**

It is important to mention that this is not the James who was killed in Acts 12.2. That was James the son of Zebedee and the brother of John. The James in this text is the brother of Jesus. He is often referred to as James the Just or James the Righteous. In the Jerusalem Council, James plays a significant role in resolving a dispute regarding whether Gentile believers needed to follow Jewish customs, such as circumcision.

After hearing from Peter, Paul, and Barnabas about the conversion of Gentiles and the work of the Holy Spirit among them, James delivered a judgment that they should not be burdened with such customs. He suggested that they write a letter to the Gentile believers, advising them to abstain from certain practices that were particularly offensive to Jews (such as eating food sacrificed to idols, eating meat with blood, and engaging in sexual immorality), but not requiring them to be circumcised or follow the

<sup>68</sup> J. D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, London, 1977, p. 385.

<sup>69</sup> F.F. Bruce, p. 337-338. See also: M. Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity*, E.T., London, 1979, p. 125.

<sup>70</sup> F.F. Bruce, p. 338.

<sup>71</sup> From my reading of the history of translation, the reason for using "James" instead of "Jacob" to translate the Greek name Ἰάκωβος (Iakobos) in the KJV and other English translations of the Bible is not entirely clear. One possibility is that "James" was simply the preferred form of the name in English at the time the KJV was translated. At the time of the KJV translation, the name "James" was a common English name that was used as a translation for various forms of the name Iakobos in other languages. For example, in the Latin Vulgate Bible, the name Iakobos is translated as "Jacobus," which is the Latin form of "James." Similarly, in the *Wycliffe Bible*, which was translated in the late 14th century, the name Iakobos is translated as "James." During the 16th and 17th centuries, when the KJV was being translated, the name "James" was a common English name and had been used for several generations by monarchs of England and Scotland, including James I who was the reigning monarch at the time of the translation. Another possibility is that the use of "James" rather than "Jacob" was a deliberate choice intended to differentiate the New Testament figure from the Old Testament patriarch of the same name. In the Hebrew Bible, the name of the patriarch is written as יַעֲקֹב (Ya'akov), which is usually translated as "Jacob" in English. Using "James" rather than "Jacob" could help to distinguish the New Testament figure from the patriarch, who is a prominent figure in the Old Testament. It is worth noting that the form "James" has been used as an English version of "Jacob" since at least the 13th century, so it was already an established convention by the time of the KJV translation. See: Mark Wilson, *James or Jacob in the Bible? Biblical Archaeology Society, May 7, 2022*. Accessed 3.18.23.

full range of Jewish customs (Acts 15:13-21). James' leadership and judgment were highly respected by the early church, and he played an important role in promoting unity and resolving disputes within the church.<sup>72</sup> He was not an apostle in Luke's sense of the term, although Paul appears to count him as one (Gal. 1.19), probably because he was a witness to the risen Christ (1 Cor. 15.7).<sup>73</sup>

From my reading here of the text, it would seem that James' decision is *the* decision. It is important to note, however, that not everyone agrees with this assessment of the text. For example, Bruce R. McConkie took a different position:

"Uninspired commentators and others who are unaware of the true system of apostolic succession falsely assume that James was making a decision in the case and therefore was head of the Church in Jerusalem, having some pre-eminence over Peter. Some Protestants have argued that Peter could not have fathered a church in Rome because James and not Peter is in fact here shown to be the chief officer of the Christian kingdom. Interesting as this may be, the fact is Peter was the presiding officer in the Church and had in fact rendered and announced judgment on the issue of circumcision. (Verses 7-11.) James is simply proposing the detailed instructions to put in force the decision already announced by Peter."<sup>74</sup>

**“Abstain from pollutions of idols... fornication... things strangled... blood” (Acts 15.20).**

God forbade Noah and his descendants to eat meat with blood in it (Gen 9:4); Jewish people thus deemed as unacceptable even for Gentile consumption animals killed by strangling without draining the blood. The few requirements James suggests they impose may derive from requirements for Gentiles living among Israelites in Leviticus 17–18 and are representative of the handful of laws that Jewish tradition came to believe that God gave Noah. According to the more lenient Jewish position, any righteous Gentiles who kept those basic laws would have a share in the world to come. Because even stricter Pharisees had to get along with the majority of more lenient people, these teachers did not try to invalidate other teachers' rulings if they had majority consent. ***James provides a compromise approach that gives each side the basic element of what they need to work together*** (and not lose face with their constituencies): even conservative Jewish believers should treat Gentile Christians as saved provided they follow the minimal Jewish expectations for God-fearers. ***This means that cooperation was possible based on shared common ground; it does not mean that everyone in the Jerusalem church consented to Paul's view*** (articulated in his letters) ***that Gentiles were full members of God's people.***<sup>75</sup>

Μωσῆς γὰρ ἐκ γενεῶν ἀρχαίων κατὰ πόλιν τοὺς κηρύσσοντας αὐτὸν ἔχει ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς κατὰ πᾶν σάββατον ἀναγινωσκόμενος “For, from the earliest times, Moses has had in every city those as his heralds, proclaiming *his words*, with his words *being read* in the synagogues every Sabbath.” (Acts 15.21, my translation)

The ubiquity of Jewish communities, and therefore of synagogues where the Torah was read and expounded, throughout the Graeco-Roman world at this time is well attested. The origin of the

<sup>72</sup> Robert Eisenman, [\*James the Brother of Jesus: The Key to Unlocking the Secrets of Early Christianity and the Dead Sea Scrolls\*](#), Viking, 1996.

<sup>73</sup> F.F. Bruce, p. 339. “After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles” (1 Cor. 15.7).

<sup>74</sup> McConkie, [\*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary\*](#), 2:143.

<sup>75</sup> Keener, p. 366, emphasis added.

synagogue “may go back to the age of Ezra, or even to that of the exile .... Josephus and Philo, and later Judaism in general, trace the whole system back to Moses himself” (Schurer II, pp. 426f.).<sup>76</sup>

## **12. Letters are sent out to the churches of the decision of the Council (Acts 15.23-35).**

That ethnic Gentiles should be called “brothers and sisters” is significant (though sometimes Jews had called Gentile allies this; cf. 1 Maccabees 12:6; 14:40). The greetings are standard for Greco-Roman letters; the address shows that it is a circular letter, to be copied and circulated by its messengers to these different regions. Central authorities sometimes sent their authorized agents bearing circular letters. Both novels and historical works sometimes cited the contents of letters. The letter is of average length (papyrus letters averaged eighty-seven words, and this one is just over a hundred). Antioch was the leading city of Syria; Cilicia adjoined Syria and was administered as a common province with it in this period. One sign of the respect the Jerusalem church shows the Gentile believers is the care with which they craft the letter; Acts 15.24-26 is a “periodic sentence,” the most intricately designed rhetoric in the entire book of Acts. Division and rivalry characterized ancient urban life, but moralists often exhorted people to unity; “harmony” was a major topic of ancient civic rhetoric and the discussion of moralists.<sup>77</sup>

### **The Decision’s Limited Scope**

As forward-reaching and beneficial as the decision was by the Jerusalem Council, it was limited in its scope. The council did not decisively declare an end to the law of Moses, though it did settle the matter so far as the Gentiles were concerned. Furthermore, the council’s epistle was not addressed to all members of the Church—only to the Gentile members in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. And it should be noted that the council did not say the Gentiles could not or must not practice the law of Moses—only that they need not do so for salvation.

Why would the Brethren be so ambiguous and noncommittal? They seemed to have said as little as they could about the matter. Was it that they wanted to avoid a division in the Church and did not want to alienate the strict Jewish members? Did they not want to invite persecution from Jews outside the Church? James seemed to have had this in mind when, after announcing the moderate decision of the council, he said, “For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day” ([Acts 15:21](#)).

By wording the decision the way they did, the Brethren probably avoided a schism in the Church, and no doubt also avoided the ire that would have come from the Jews had the decision been more unyielding. There must have been many who would have preferred a stronger declaration, but the Brethren acted in the wisdom requisite for their situation—not out of mere political or diplomatic expediency, but judiciously, surely acting under the guidance of the Spirit, which the Lord had promised would guide his disciples aright (see [John 16:13](#)).<sup>78</sup>

## **13. Paul’s Second Missionary Journey Begins (Acts 15.36-41).**

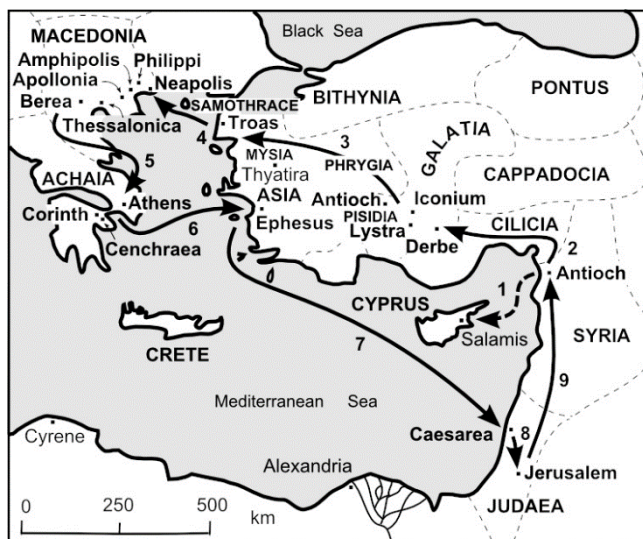
<sup>76</sup> F.F. Bruce, [The Acts of the Apostles](#), p. 344.

<sup>77</sup> Keener, [Background](#), p. 367.

<sup>78</sup> Robert J. Matthews, [A Crisis, A Council, and Inspired Leadership](#). *Ensign*, October 1995.



The second missionary journey of the Apostle Paul is covered in Acts, specifically in chapters 15-18. In Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas travel to Jerusalem to address a dispute regarding whether Gentile believers need to follow Jewish customs, such as circumcision. Typically this is discussed today in the Church as



“The Jerusalem Council,” and is an example of how the early Church obeyed the hierarchical decisions of the apostles. In this council the apostles decided that Gentiles did not need to follow the Jewish customs in order to be saved by Jesus.

After the Jerusalem Council, Paul and Barnabas decided to revisit the churches they had established during their first missionary journey. However, they had a disagreement about whether to bring John Mark with them, which led to Barnabas taking Mark and sailing to Cyprus while Paul chose Silas and headed towards Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:36-41).

Paul and Silas then traveled through Phrygia and Galatia, strengthening the churches there.<sup>79</sup> They were then led by the Holy Spirit to preach the Gospel in Macedonia, where they established churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea (Acts 16:6-17:15).

Next, Paul traveled to Athens and preached to the philosophers on Mars Hill (Acts 17:16-34). He then traveled to Corinth, where he stayed for a year and a half, establishing the Church there (Acts 18:1-17).<sup>80</sup>

Finally, Paul left Corinth and sailed to Ephesus, where he left Priscilla and Aquila to continue the work there while he traveled to Jerusalem for a short time before returning to Antioch, completing his second missionary journey (Acts 18:18-22). Most of this will be outlined in the next podcast.

<sup>79</sup> It is in Galatia where they (Paul and Silas) revisited Derbe and Lystra, where they met a young disciple named Timothy and took him with them on their journey.

<sup>80</sup> It was in Corinth where Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, tentmakers like himself, and worked with them. He preached in the synagogue, but when the Jews opposed him, he turned to the Gentiles, and many believed in Jesus.