

New Testament Historical Book: Acts

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Reading Acts: In Acts, Luke continues the story of Jesus' work in and through the apostles and other disciples. Acts records the progress of God's mission to reach the ends of the earth with the promise of forgiveness and everlasting life in Christ—a mission that continues today as the Lord works through His Church.

Luther on Acts: ...it should be noted that by this book St. Luke teaches the whole of Christendom, even to the end of the world, that the true and chief article of Christian doctrine is this: We must all be justified alone by faith in Jesus Christ, without any contribution from the law or help from our works.

Challenge for Readers: *Relationship to the Gospel according to Luke.* Acts differs from Luke in that Luke was himself an eyewitness to the events he records in Acts (cf Lk 1:1–4). For example, scholars have noted several “we” passages (Ac 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–28:16) where Luke writes as a companion of Paul, beginning with Paul's second missionary journey (c AD 49–51).

Blessings for Readers: By writing his Gospel and Acts, Luke wrote about 25 percent of the NT, more text than any other NT writer. In these two books, Luke provides an account of God's work from the announcement of Jesus' birth to the announcement in Rome of salvation in Jesus (AD 58). Luke shows that, through poor and helpless people on the margin of society, God spread His Word.

As you study the Book of Acts, consider how the Lord calls every believer—including you—to bear witness to Jesus' death and resurrection and to the salvation in His name. Acts records how God works through His Word, whether spoken or written, to bring people to faith in Christ. Through the Gospel, the Lord is turning the world upside down and advancing His kingdom from person to person and from nation to nation.

Outline Comment: The Book of Acts may be divided most easily between the work of Peter (chs 1–12) and the work of Paul (chs 13–28). Also, 1:8 provides a helpful outline for the progress of the 25 years of history presented in Acts (c AD 33–58):

- From Jerusalem (1:1–6:7)
- To Judea and Samaria (6:8–9:31)
- To the ends of the earth (9:32–28:31)

ESV Bible Acts Introduction: ...The story begins with Christ's ascension and the events of Pentecost. As Gentiles begin responding to the gospel, the focus shifts to Paul and his missionary journeys. Acts forms a bridge between the four Gospels and the rest of the New Testament, showing how the apostles carried on Christ's work and providing a historical background for Romans through Revelation....

The Promise of the Holy Spirit: 1:1-5

1. *Theophilus*. Recipient of Luke's [Gospel and the Book of Acts]. Possibly a patron who helped Luke produce and publish his Gospel [and the book of Acts].

2. The Gospel of Luke includes Jesus' b_____, l_____, d_____, r_____, and a_____.
3. Jesus said to His disciples, "...you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."
 - a. What important Jewish OT gathering would soon occur? _____
 - b. How many actual days from Jesus' statement until the Jewish gathering? _____

The Ascension: 1:6-11

4. ⁶ "...they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Who was ruling over the Jews at that time? _____
5. What did Jesus want the disciples to focus on after He ascended? Being His _____!
6. Who gave the disciples the ability to do what Jesus said? _____

Matthias Chosen to Replace Judas: 1:12-26

7. The disciples of Jesus were devoted to _____.
8. The reference to "Mary the mother of Jesus" is the _____ reference to *that* Mary in the Bible.
9. ¹⁵ *In those days...* – The days between Jesus' ascension and the Day of _____.
10. Since Judas had betrayed Jesus and hanged himself, and based on the Psalm verses quoted by Peter, the assembly of approximately 120 took action to replace Judas:
 - a. Qualifications:
 - i. A man (the Greek word specifically indicates a man, not just a person).
 - ii. Was with Jesus during His whole ministry, *from His baptism to His ascension*.
 - b. Purpose: "...become... a witness to his resurrection."
 - c. Qualified candidates: "Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias"
 - d. Person making the decision: _____
 - e. Means of selection: "...they cast _____"

The Coming of the Holy Spirit: 2:1-13

1. The Day of Pentecost was an OT festival, one of three which required all Jewish men to gather in Jerusalem (Deut. 16:16); therefore, many were present!
2. Who was filled with the Holy Spirit? Probably only the _____ apostles.
3. Who enabled the people to hear in their best languages? _____
4. What caused the multitude to go to where the apostles were at? _____
5. *Speak in his own language. The hearers [devout men from every nation under heaven] understood the proclamation neither in Aramaic nor in common Greek but in their local languages.*
6. What was the message of the apostles? They were telling "the mighty _____ of _____."
7. ¹² *And all were amazed and perplexed [at a loss – both amazed and at a loss at the same time], saying to one another, "What does this mean?"* Since the hearing of the people was humanly impossible, they knew _____ was up to something!

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Peter's Sermon at Pentecost: 2:14-41

Peter explained what was going on: 2:14-21

8. ¹⁴ “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem [*you who live in Jerusalem and you who are here for the festival*], let this be known to you, and give ear to my words [*pay careful attention*].”
9. ¹⁵ “the third hour of the day” – from 8 to 9 AM, a time when people would generally not be drunk.
10. Peter told the people that this prophecy uttered by Joel was being fulfilled, *from that day forward*:
¹⁷ “And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy...”
 - a. When are “the last days”? *In general*, from the first to the second coming of the Christ; *more specifically*, from the Day of Pentecost to the day of Jesus’ return.
 - b. The pouring out of the Spirit and many prophesying:
 - i. *I will pour out my Spirit*. The promised Baptism with the Spirit was “poured,” showing that the term “baptism” was not regarded strictly as immersion (cf v 33).
 - ii. God is continuing the pouring out, resulting in many prophesying among those who know Jesus as Savior.
 - iii. In today’s world, we tend to think of prophesy *only in the narrow sense* – foretelling future events, but the “chief effect of the Spirit’s activity is always prophesying...in the broad and far more important sense of voicing the saving and blessed will of God to men everywhere (Lenski, 74).
11. These verses of Joel’s prophecy point to Jesus’ return:
 - a. This is a more literal rendering of verse 19: “And I will ~~show~~ [give] wonders in the heavens [sky] above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke [*thus there are wars as mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 24; wars do not indicate Jesus’ immediate return, but remind us that Jesus is coming and that we should be ready through knowing Him*]...”
 - b. ²⁰ “the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the [great and magnificent] day of the Lord comes.” Jesus said in Matthew 24:29-30, “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven...”
12. Good news for all sinners: *calls upon*. A cry from the heart, lamenting sin and imploring mercy. “...everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord [in that manner] shall be saved.”

Peter explained who Jesus is, using David’s writing for support: 2:22-35

13. Think about Jesus’ miracles, who did them? _____
14. Some people may have viewed Jesus as weak, so they assumed He was overpowered, but the Bible says that He was ²³ “...delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God...”; so God, having knowledge in advance of all things, planned out what happened for our salvation!

15. God permitted lawless men to c_____ and k_____ Jesus, but He r_____ Him up to show His acceptance of Jesus' great sacrifice to pay for the sins of the whole world!
16. The Spirit moved David to write these words in Psalm 16; they are not written *about David*, but *about Jesus!* TLSB says that **through David, Christ speaks prophetically of his own soul's deliverance and His body's escape from corruption.** ²⁵ ... **"I saw the Lord [LORD – God the Father] always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken [so Jesus did not worry, but trusted His Father]; ²⁶ therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope [though His body would die, it would live again]. ²⁷ For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption."** So it was not D_____ nor M_____, but Jesus' body which did not decay.
- It can't be David, because his tomb was still known at that time.
 - Nor does the Bible tell us any such thing about Mary, since the last reference to her is in Acts chapter 1 when she was still alive.
 - So Peter explained – *by the Holy Spirit* – that David **"spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption."**
 - And how, in part, did Peter know such things? Because ³² **"This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses."**
17. Based on this verse, from whom did the Holy Spirit come? _____
³³ **"Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing."**
18. Regarding this phrase by David, **"The Lord said to my Lord,"** Who is **"The Lord"** _____ and who is **"my Lord"**? _____

Peter concluded his sermon: 2:36

19. Many of those hearing Peter may have called for Jesus' crucifixion 53 days earlier, so they had to be quite shocked with Peter's sermon and this final phrase – *as the Holy Spirit impressed it upon them:* ³⁶ **"...know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."**

The response of Peter's hearers: 2:37

20. Peter's hearers were **"cut the heart"**
- What does that mean? _____
 - How was that condition brought about? _____

Peter's answer and the outcome: 2:38-41

21. Peter's answer: ³⁸ ... **"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."** What does that mean?

22. Do children also need forgiveness and the Holy Spirit? Y N
23. Notice the outcome: ⁴¹ **"...those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls."**
- Then and today, some will receive and some will _____.
 - What "word" of God did some receive? _____
 - For those who are made alive in Christ, what is important for them going forward?

 - Note the growth spurt, 3,000 souls in 2:41; Acts has similar spurts in 6:7 "disciples multiplied greatly"; 9:31 "the church...multiplied"; 12:24 "word of God...multiplied"; 16:5 "increased in numbers"; 19:20 "increase"; and 28:31 "without hindrance".

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The Fellowship of the Believers: 2:42-47

24. Verse 42 sets the pattern going forward; *it's also a good pattern for us to continue* (for more info on verse 42, see a copy of my 4/12/08 sermon):

- a. ⁴² **And they devoted themselves**: The Greek literally says, **And they were continuing steadfastly**; Lenski said it means **“to adhere with strength’ to something... stressing the continuance.”** Being devoted is so important, and yet so many do not continue 😊.
- b. **to the apostles’ teaching**: All of God’s Word, *especially Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection!*
- c. [to] **the fellowship**: It’s a prime opportunity to *give and receive encouragement*; that happens among believers when they are together on Sundays.
- d. [to] **the breaking of bread**: Most likely a reference to the Lord’s Supper, since the rest of the verse includes things done before, during, and after the divine service.
- e. [to] **the prayers**: When we pray, we express our trust in God and our dependence upon Him; as we give Him our burdens, He gives us His perfect peace (Phil. 4:6-7).

25. God worked miracles through various people, for example, Moses, Jesus, and the apostles. Why?

26. They ⁴⁴ **“...had all things in common.”**

- a. What is the source of our possessions (James 1:16-17)? _____
- b. How do many tend to view their possessions? _____
- c. How should we view our possessions? _____

27. See v. 47; who was growing the number who were saved? _____

- a. Who is at work today to save people? _____
- b. How is that work accomplished? _____

The Lame Beggar Healed: 3:1-10

1. ¹ **“...the hour of prayer, the ninth hour”**

- a. They had a pattern of daily prayer; what is yours? _____
- b. What is meant by **“the ninth hour”**? It is between _____

2. Many must have known the lame man – day-after-day *seeing people carrying him* and *seeing him begging for a handout*; his helplessness was real and many knew it!

3. When the miraculous healing took place, who was given the credit (6)? _____

4. Think about an infant learning to walk or a bedridden person starting to walk again, the process is slow and difficult. Now compare that to v. 8: Very Similar or Very Different

5. God uses miracles to get people interested in hearing about Jesus.

6. View the *Faith like Potatoes* documentary, 34:46 to 38:29.

Peter Speaks in Solomon's Portico: 3:11-26

7. Similar to the Day of Pentecost, the miracle caused many to gather; then Peter explained:
 - a. ¹³ The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. Peter made it clear that Jesus was God's _____.
 - b. Underline the horrible things the people had done: ¹⁴ But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵ and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.
 - c. How did the miracle happen? Dr. Kretzmann wrote this brief explanation: "The power, the majesty, of the exalted Christ had worked through the apostles, and the sick man had accepted the gift of health by faith."
8. Peter called the people to repent:
 - a. Peter acknowledged the peoples' ignorance, thus their lack of k_____.
 - b. He wanted the people to see these important connections:
 - i. God told what would happen through the p_____.
 - ii. God accomplished His plan to remove all sins through J_____.
 - c. ¹⁹ "Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord"
 - i. In other words, *be sorry and believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins.*
 - ii. Then you will be *refreshed*, literally experience *a recovery of breath*; even though you had the spiritual wind knocked out of you by the law, God will enable you to recover your breath through the good news of the gospel!
9. Peter reminded the people of some key things spoken by God through Moses:
 - a. ²² ...'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.' Dr. Kretzmann noted these comparisons: "As Moses was the mediator between God and the people, both in conveying God's messages to them and in standing between the dead and the living, so Jesus is the true Mediator between God and sinful mankind; as Moses was the deliverer of his people when he led them out of the house of Egypt's bondage, so Jesus had delivered all men from the bondage of sin, death, and damnation."
 - b. 'You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you.' On what occasion during Jesus' life on earth did God the Father say very similar words? _____
 - c. ²³ 'And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.' Dr. Kretzmann wrote, "Peter here gives... [an] explanation of the words of Moses by saying that every soul that was guilty of willfully disobeying this great Prophet should be utterly destroyed from the people, should be punished with eternal condemnation."
10. Peter concluded his sermon with this great news: ²⁶ "God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness." Even though ALL HAVE SINNED AND FALLEN SHORT, God still desires to work in each heart to expose sin, make sorry, and impart faith in Jesus; then all such people are called to bear fruit in keeping with repentance!

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Peter and John Before the Council: 4:1-22

1. The arrest and its participants: ¹ And as they [Peter and John] were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, ² greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.
 - a. The miracle had taken place in Jesus' name; when many gathered, Peter preached.
 - b. The "priests" were "the regular priests, one of the twenty-four groups... whose time of service had been appointed for this day" (Lenski, 153).
 - c. The "captain of the temple" "was at the head of the entire police force of the Temple" (Lenski, 153).
 - d. The "Sadducees" "wielded a tremendous influence because they commanded wealth and social position... [They] claimed that this life was the whole of existence... that there is no resurrection of the dead... that souls die with bodies" (Lenski, 153-154). Therefore, they were "greatly annoyed" because the teaching involved Jesus and the topic of resurrection.
2. According to v. 4, who believed? _____
3. The numbers:
 - a. 2:41 says that "there were added that day about three thousand souls." There is no reason to believe that number was *only men*; it mostly likely included women and children as well.
 - b. 4:4 says that "the number of the men came to be about five thousand." So that included *those of the 3,000 who were men* – whatever that number was, as well as *the balance needed to reach 5,000 men*. *The Spirit was powerfully working through the Word!*
4. The official gathering the next day:
 - a. ⁵ "...their rulers and elders and scribes... ⁶ with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas..." The same people who had condemned Jesus and handed Him over to Pilate.
 - b. ⁷ ... "By what power or by what name did you do this?" How was Peter able to so courageously proclaim Jesus to those leaders? (also think about 1:8) _____
 - c. What did Peter say?
 - i. A partial truth that was pleasant to hear.
 - ii. The full truth that pulled no punches.
 - d. Regarding Jesus, why is there "salvation in no one else"? _____
5. The responses of the leaders:
 - a. ¹³ "...they were astonished." Peter and John were uneducated and unimportant, yet they were surprisingly _____!
 - b. ¹⁶ "...that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it." They wanted to deny it, *but they couldn't!*
 - c. To stop the further spread of this teaching about Jesus – *His death, His resurrection, and He being the only way to be saved*, ¹⁸ "...they... charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus."
6. The response of Peter and John: ²⁰ "...we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." They were both eyewitnesses and ear-witnesses!

The Believers Pray for Boldness: 4:23-31

7. Some important aspects of their prayer:
 - a. They began by acknowledging God's supreme power; when we remember that our God is very I _____, we will see our needs to be very s _____!
 - b. They went on to acknowledge that the things done by powerful people to harm and kill Jesus were actually the things God's hand and plan ²⁸ "...had predestined to take place."
 - i. When things are difficult for us, *let us remember God's power and control.*
 - ii. Let us remember that "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28 NAS).
 - c. In the face of the threats, they didn't pray for protection *but for continued help* ²⁹ "to speak [God's] word with all boldness" as He worked through them to heal, and do signs and wonders in the name of Jesus. So the miracles drew the attention of the people and caused them to listen to the apostles as they taught about Jesus.
8. God's response to their prayer: ³¹ "...the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness."
 - a. "The answer to the petition was immediate and miraculous" (Lenski, 184). God hears us through Jesus, and answers *at His own time and in His own way.*
 - b. "By the Spirit's help they continued their public preaching openly and freely as though the Sanhedrin had never made a threat" (Lenski, 185). Let us serve by the power of the Holy Spirit, rather than trying to serve in our own human weakness!

They Had Everything in Common: 4:32-37

9. As all the members of a human body are one – *nourished with blood by the same heart and controlled by the same mind*, so all the members of the body of Christ are one – *nourished by Word and Sacrament and controlled by Christ*, who is the head of His Body, the Church!
 - a. How often do you think about our oneness? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 - b. How can we increase the awareness of our oneness? _____
10. The tendency for many is to *trade* gifts: Since you got me a \$20 gift, I will get you a \$20 gift.
11. Think about the makeup of the Early Church: men, women, and children; young and old; and rich and poor. Nevertheless, ³⁴ "...as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵ and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."
 - a. They viewed their possessions as actually belonging to God.
 - b. They were all willing to help others, confident that God would keep providing their needs.
12. The end of chapter 4 hints at things to come:
 - a. The shocking account of Ananias and Sapphira in chapter 5.
 - b. Barnabas, *first mentioned here*, will bring Paul to meet the apostles (9:27), be sent to Antioch (11:22), accompany Paul on his first missionary trip (13:2), go with Paul to the council in Jerusalem (15:2), and take Mark with him to Cyprus (15:39).

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Ananias and Sapphira: 5:1-11

1. An OT – NT parallel: “The deceit of Achan, Joshua 7, and his severe penalty, which occurred when Israel first entered Canaan, are recorded as a warning for the entire OT Church. The deceit of Ananias and of Sapphira, which happened when the Christian Church began in Jerusalem, and their severe penalty are recorded as a warning for the entire NT Church” (Lenski, 193).
 - a. Joshua said to the people: ^{ESV} **Joshua 6:17** “...the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction....¹⁸ But you, keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction, lest when you have devoted them you take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel a thing for destruction and bring trouble upon it.”
 - b. ^{ESV} **Joshua 7:11** “Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things...”
 - c. The LORD said to Joshua: ^{ESV} **Joshua 7:15** “And he who is taken with the devoted things shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has...”
 - d. ^{ESV} **Joshua 7:24** And Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver and the cloak and the bar of gold, and his sons and daughters and his oxen and donkeys and sheep and his tent and all that he had. And they brought them up to the Valley of Achor.²⁵ And Joshua said... “The LORD brings trouble on you today.” And all Israel stoned him with stones. They burned them with fire and stoned them with stones.
2. The setting: “We must imagine that the congregation or a part of it was assembled for worship. The apostles are present to lead and to teach” (Lenski, 195).
3. Their sin:
 - a. ¹ “...a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property,² and with his wife’s knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”
 - b. “Ananias has the bag of money with him; and when the time came to make the offerings, he went forward and in the sight of all deposited the bag.... He acted with perfect assurance, certain that no one could possibly detect his deception” (Lenski, 195).
 - c. “Hypocrisy. This wealthy couple had the right to retain their property, but they sinned grievously by pretending to offer it all.... Their pious playacting and deceit disrupted the marvelous unity of the Church (4:32). This is the first deliberate sin recorded in the Church’s history.”
4. Their sin exposed:
 - a. God enabled Peter to know the whole truth about the situation.
 - b. ³ ... “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit...” When making a contribution for God’s work, *we are indicating that the Holy Spirit has prompted us to give*; however, in this case, it was *Satan* behind the prompting! *So our motivations are important!* Let us examine WHAT we do, as well as WHY we do it!

- c. ⁴ *...You have not lied to man but to God.*” Even though he spoke to Peter, *the Holy Spirit was very much involved!* “Ananias is sadly mistaken when he thinks that he is dealing with men; he is dealing directly with God himself” (Lenski, 199).

5. The consequences:

- a. ⁵ *“When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last.”* Take note that there was no second c_____; *the same will be true when Jesus comes again!* Therefore, *“...now is the day of salvation”* (2 Cor. 6:2 ESV).
- b. ⁵ *“...great fear came upon all who heard of it.”*
- i. *great fear. “Servile [submissive] fear”; terror of God’s judgment.* Servile is “having or showing an excessive willingness to serve or please others” (Google).
 - ii. Other uses of fear in the Bible:
 1. For us, the word *fear* often has a negative connotation, namely, to be afraid of something or someone. The Hebrew term can mean that. For example, when Jacob prepared to meet his brother... Jacob had fled from Esau years before because he had tricked Esau out of his birthright. Jacob prayed... *“Please deliver me from the hand of my brother... for I fear him, that he may come and attack me...”* (Gen 32:11). But the word *fear* can have other shades of meaning. When referring to a person of high position, it takes on the idea of standing in awe or reverence before that individual. God wants us to fear Him in this sense. He is our Creator, and He is our Savior. How can we ever think of God with indifference or treat Him lightly?
 2. Abraham illustrates a proper “fear of the LORD.” When Abraham traveled into the region ruled by Abimelech, he sensed that the king and his people were ruthless and would kill him just to get his beautiful wife Sarah. “Abraham said, ‘I did it because I thought, There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife’” (Gen 20:11). The Lord God wants us to have a healthy reverence of Him so that we respect Him and His Word as Abraham did.
 3. Fear in Proverbs: Proverbs points out that true wisdom begins with such fear. The opening verses sum up the entire Book: The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction (1:7). This fear is closely related to trust because we can truly respect and reverence God only when we believe that He is truly everything that His Word, the Bible, says He is.
- c. ⁹ *“But Peter said to [Sapphira], ‘How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.’* ¹⁰ *Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last.”* “Every imitation of faith and of love tempts the Spirit, challenges him” (Lenski, 204). See Gal. 6:7-8.
- d. Ananias and Sapphira pay a high price for their hypocrisy, taking grace for granted and forgetting that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2Co 5:10). Woe to those who disturb and deceive the Lord’s Church.... “If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father” (1Jn 2:1). • Lord, let a goodly measure of “fear and trembling” (Php 2:12) inform our trust in You. Amen.

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Many Signs and Wonders Done: 5:12-16

6. *God answers prayer!* In 4:30 they prayed for God to do “signs and wonders” through them; then God did, as noted in 5:12. *Let us pray in agreement with God’s will and without doubting!*
 7. ¹³ “None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem.” That is a difficult phrase – who are “the rest” and “them” and “the people”? *The rest* seem to be the Pharisees and other teachers, *them* are the apostles, and *the people* are the believers.
 8. *More growth!* Last time the count was 5,000 men (4:4); this time the number cannot be counted: ¹⁴ “And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women...”
 9. Many were sick and afflicted with unclean spirits, yet they were all healed – *some as Peter’s shadow touched them*. Why did God grant much healing then, but He doesn’t grant much healing today?
-

The Apostles Arrested and Freed: 5:17-42

10. 17-21a: *God is greater than men!* Even though the Sadducees, jealous of the apostles, had them arrested and imprisoned, ¹⁹ “...during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ²⁰ ‘Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life [this new life in Christ].’ ²¹ And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.” How do we receive God’s Word – *believing and doing or doubting and taking no action?*
11. 21b-26: *God was at work on the members of the Sanhedrin* (the Jewish leaders), *the officers* (those who assisted the Sanhedrin), *and the prison guards*. They all EXPECTED the apostles to be in the prison, so the leaders were “greatly perplexed” that they were not and the officers “were afraid of being stoned by the people.” *Can you imagine their thoughts and conversions about what God had done?* How can we proceed in these situations so that people begin to think about God?
 - a. When people sin against us? _____
 - b. When someone is in need and we are able to help? _____
 - c. When we are persecuted? _____
 - d. When people are our enemies? _____
12. 27-32: *A sharp accusation and a bold response!* ²⁷ “...the high priest questioned them, ²⁸ saying, ‘We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.’ ²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than men. ³⁰ The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³² And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.’”
 - a. Was it right for Peter and the other apostles to disobey the Jewish leaders? Y N
 - b. Did Peter proclaim the *full sternness* of the Law? Y N
 - c. Did Peter proclaim the *full sweetness* of the Gospel? Y N

13. 33-39: *The wisdom of Gamaliel!* Even though many members of the Sanhedrin wanted to kill the apostles, Gamaliel – a Pharisee, a council member, a teacher of the law, and a person honored by the people – gave two examples of rebel leaders with followers: once the leader died, the followers dispersed. Then he said, ³⁸ “So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; ³⁹ but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!’ So they took his advice...”
14. 40: *A beating and a command!* ⁴⁰ “...they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.”
15. 41-42: *Two surprising responses!* They were ⁴¹ “...rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name” and ⁴² “...did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.”
 - a. Are we similar to the apostles in attitude and action? Y N
 - b. Should we be similar to the apostles in attitude and action? Y N
 - c. How do YOU plan to be more like the apostles this week? _____

5:17-42 Summary from TLSB: God’s patience (Rm 2:4) is running out. Those at the head of Israel are dangerously close to judgment. Under fire, the Church holds firm, confesses the truth, and accepts the suffering that follows. Today, pray for bold witness and the blessing of peaceful service. When trouble threatens, have confidence that the crucified and risen Savior will keep us steadfast in His grace. • Lord, protect and deliver Your holy people who are still persecuted countless times each day. Amen.

Seven Chosen to Serve: 6:1-7

1. *An Early Church conflict!* ¹ “...a complaint by the Hellenists (*Jews who accepted the Greek language and culture following the rule of Alexander the Great, 356–323 BC, page 1556*) arose against the Hebrews (*Jews residing in Jerusalem, speaking Aramaic as their primary (and perhaps only) language; generally resistant to Hellenistic culture*) because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.”
2. *Good solutions!*
 - a. Get everyone together: ² “...the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples...”
 - b. Propose a plan: “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. ³ Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.”
 - c. Agree on a plan: ⁵ “...what they said pleased the whole gathering...”
 - d. Act on the plan: “...they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶ These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.”
3. From διακονεῖν in verse 2, the men that were chosen are called deacons; these are some definitions from the Friberg, Analytical Greek Lexicon: (1) generally, of services of any kind *serve* (MT 4.11); (2) of supplying with life’s necessities *support, take care of, minister to* (MT 25.44); (3) of table service *wait on, serve* (LU 12.37); (4) of religious service relating the physical needs of believers *serve as deacon, perform duties of deacon* (1T 3.10).
4. **Luther: The diaconate is the ministry, not of reading the Gospel or the Epistle, as is the present [medieval] practice, but of distributing the church’s aid to the poor” (AE 36:116).**
5. Lenski: “The apostles were not delegating a part of their divine office to others – they could not. They were relinquishing tasks that were not a part of this office, that were interfering with that office.” Is there any application for BLC? _____

New Testament Historical Book: Acts

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Stephen Is Seized: 6:8-15: Stephen is the new target of persecution.

6. 8-10: Various Jews who accepted the Greek language and culture tried to oppose Stephen: ⁹ ...some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called) [*likely indicating Jews from Italy who had been freed from slavery*], and of the Cyrenians [Cyrene was an ancient Greek city on the North African coast], and of the Alexandrians [Alexandria in Northern Egypt was founded by Alexander the Great, in 331 BC], and of those from Cilicia [an early Roman province, located on what is today the southern (Mediterranean) coast of Turkey] and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen [one of the new deacons]. ¹⁰ But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.
 - a. Regarding those various people who opposed Stephen, Lenski noted that they were “Hellenistic Jews, like Stephen himself, [and] had their present permanent homes in Jerusalem” (252).
 - b. Even though Stephen was not an apostle, he did miracles similar to theirs because the Spirit was powerfully working and speaking through Him! Remember: We have that same Spirit living in us, from when we were baptized!
7. 11-15: Stephen was like Daniel and Jesus! His opponents could not defeat him with the truth:
 - a. ¹¹ Then they secretly instigated men who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” “The idea of blasphemy against Moses and God stirred up the most violent passions in almost any Jew” (Lenski, 253).
 - b. ¹² ...they...seized him and brought him before the council... That is a time when we need to remember these words from Jesus to His disciples from Matthew 10: ¹⁶ “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. ¹⁷ Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, ¹⁸ and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. ¹⁹ When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. ²⁰ For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”

Stephen’s Speech: 7:1-53 – A nice OT summary, from Abraham to Solomon and pointing ahead to Jesus!

After Stephen was falsely accused, the high priest gave him an opportunity to respond to the charges:

1. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: God said to Abram: ³ “Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.” So Abram packed up and moved from Ur to Haran. ⁴ Then... after his father died, God removed him from there into [Canaan]. God told him ⁶ ...that his offspring would be sojourners in a land belonging to others, who would enslave them and afflict them four hundred years. ⁷ ... “and after that they shall come out and worship me in this place.” ⁸ ...And so Abraham became the father of Isaac... and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs. *And eventually the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ!*

2. Jacob and his family: ⁹ “And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph [their younger brother and favorite son of their father], sold him into Egypt; but God was with him ¹⁰ and... made him ruler over Egypt and over all his household. Due to the famine, Jacob and his whole family eventually moved to Egypt.
3. The Egyptian incubator: Only 75 descendants of Abraham entered Egypt; however, according to God’s Word, they were eventually enslaved and – *with God’s blessing* – grew to number in the millions. *They needed that size in order to possess the Promised Land!*
4. Moses – his first 40 years: God had everything planned out, so, at the right time, He sent Moses, protected him as a child, and gave him the best instruction in the world. ²¹ ...Pharaoh’s daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. ²² And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds.
5. Moses – his second 40 years: After killing an Egyptian in order to defend a child of Israel, ²⁹ ...Moses fled and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons.
6. Moses – his third 40 years: The Angel of the Lord spoke to Moses about His people in Egypt from the burning bush, ³⁴ “I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.” Then after the ten plagues, leaving Egypt, crossing the Red Sea, receiving the Ten Commandments, worshipping the golden calf, wandering in the wilderness for nearly 40 years, and Moses dying, Joshua finally led the people of Israel into the Promised Land.
7. Tabernacle, David, and Solomon: Stephen reminded the people: ⁴⁴ “Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness... ⁴⁵ Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers. So it was until the days of David, ⁴⁶ who... asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷ But it was Solomon who built a house for him.
8. Stephen’s application of his speech: ⁵¹ “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. ⁵² Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered...”
 - a. **Stiff-necked**: A yoked or haltered animal might tighten its neck muscles to resist having its head turned to go a new direction. Like a farm animal that refused to be guided, Israel refused to follow God’s new direction for them.
 - b. **Uncircumcised**: Thus, unrepentant – *not sorry for their sins and / or not trusting in God.*
 - c. Jesus is the Promised Messiah, *and yet YOU murdered Him!*

The Stoning of Stephen: 7:54-60

9. *Nobody likes to be condemned*: So ⁵⁴ ...when they heard these things they were enraged...
10. *Stephen told what he saw*: ⁵⁶ ...“Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”
11. *Hating the message, they silenced the messenger*: ⁵⁷ ...they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. ⁵⁸ Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.
12. *Forgiveness*: ⁶⁰ ...falling to his knees [Stephen] cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” As Jesus forgave before the soldiers asked, *so Stephen did the same! So should we!*

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Saul Ravages the Church: 8:1-3

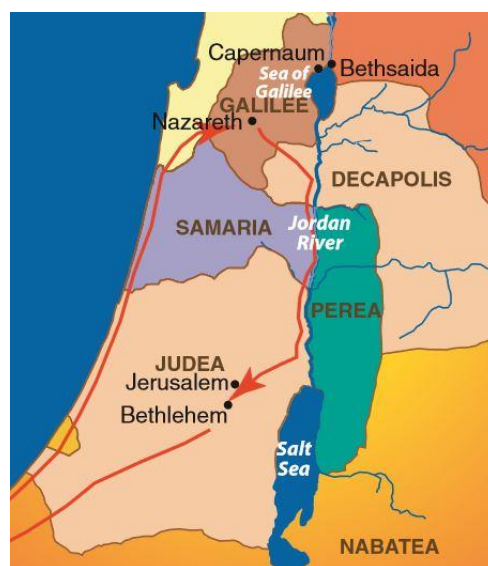
- ^{1a} And Saul approved of his execution. **Saul's eagerness to support Stephen's death anticipates his future persecution of Christians.**
- ^{1b} And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem... **Persecution came not only on the apostles but on the whole Church.** See 2 Timothy 3:12 "And indeed, all..."
- ^{1b} ...and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria... Why should we not be surprised as to where they were scattered (1:8)? _____
- ^{1b} ...except the apostles. **The apostles' responsibilities to the Church required them to stay in Jerusalem under threat of arrest and death. Sometimes we need to stay rather than run!**

Philip Proclaims Christ in Samaria: 8:4-8

- ⁴ Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.
 - Who were those people who were scattered? (v. 2) _____
 - What did they do? _____
 - How are you like / unlike them? _____
- One such person was Philip, one of the seven chosen in chapter 6; the people in Samaria ⁶ ...heard him and saw the signs that he did.

Simon the Magician Believes: 8:9-25

- 9-13: *Simon great, but Jesus far greater:* Due to Simon's magic: ¹⁰ They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." But when Philip came and preached the ¹² ...good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ... Many believed and were baptized, including Simon. No matter how great a person or action might appear to be, *no person or action is greater than Jesus and His saving work!*
- 14-17: *Baptism and the Holy Spirit:* In Acts 2 Peter said the gift of the Spirit would be given when they were baptized, but here it sounds like the Spirit was not given. Lenski made these comments:
 - "They had been baptized as believers, they had received... all that Word and sacrament bestow, the Holy Spirit in their hearts, and thus regeneration, conversion, justification, the power of a new life, in a word, salvation."
 - "Still other marks were to be granted them... those gifts which the Spirit distributes freely in the church (1 Cor. 12:7-13: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, etc.)."



- c. “Here and in 19:6 [where Paul baptized some who had been baptized by John] its purpose is apparent: the Spirit uses the chosen apostles of Jesus in order to unite all his believers into one spiritual body and to make this apparent. Not two or more churches were to be established: one that was Jewish, another that was Samaritan, others that were Gentile; no, only one, in which all believers were to be on the same level.”
 - d. “The Spirit’s manifestations at the time of Pentecost [and] here in Samaria... had their own special purpose...”
9. 18-25: *God’s power is freely given, never purchased*: When Simon thought he could buy the ability to lay his hands on someone and impart the Holy Spirit, Peter immediately and strongly pointed out Simon’s sin and called him to repent. Then, *since the Holy Spirit was at work*, ²⁴ ...Simon answered, “Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.” As Simon received Peter’s rebuke with utmost seriousness, *so the same is important for each of us!*

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch: 8:26-40

10. *Obedience*: ²⁶ ...an angel of the Lord... told Philip where to go, and he went! See [Luke 6:46](#).
11. *A VIP*: ²⁷ ...an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. Even though VIP’s may seem to be unlikely candidates for conversion, God does convert some – *like Paul and Martin*; then He uses them to influence many others! Therefore, if the Spirit leads us to a VIP, let us seize that opportunity to share God’s Word!
12. *A key question*: When Philip heard the eunuch reading Isaiah, he asked: ³⁰ ...“Do you understand what you are reading?” ³¹ And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” Rather than TELL things to people, *it can be a better approach to ASK them a question!*
13. *A most important chapter*: The eunuch was reading Isaiah chapter 53, which is the most vivid chapter in the entire OT in describing the work of the Messiah to take away the sin of the world.
- a. If we are talking to someone who only believes the OT, Isaiah chapter 53 is an excellent place to turn.
 - b. If you are unsure about the meaning of Isaiah 53, see my two-part sermon series called, “Jesus – God’s Suffering Servant: Part 1 and 2” – available on our church website.
14. *A question from the eunuch*: So Philip’s question to the eunuch led to a question from the eunuch to Philip; ³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. Are YOU ready to share that good news with someone?
- a. What would you say? _____
 - b. What resources might you use? _____
15. *For adults, the order is basic teaching followed by baptism*: ³⁶ ...as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” ³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.
- a. Since Jesus had commanded baptism before He ascended into heaven, most of the people we encounter in the book of Acts had NOT been baptized; *so many adults were baptized*.
 - b. The normal order: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, **baptizing** them... [and] **teaching** them to observe all that I commanded you” (Mt. 28:19-20 NAS).

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The Conversion of Saul: 9:1-19a – Stephen was stoned to death, and Saul was present and gave his approval; then many believers dispersed from Jerusalem and told others about Jesus.

1. *Expanding the business*: Saul had been working in Jerusalem to identify, bind, and imprison the followers of Jesus in order that they would be put to death.
 - a. To expand his business, he ¹ ...went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.
 - b. **We do not have a specific report that he actually killed Christians, though those he imprisoned were executed (22:4).**
2. *Identification and law*: As Saul ³ ...approached Damascus... ⁴ ...he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” ⁵ And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus... ⁶ ...enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” ... ⁸ ...although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing.... ⁹ And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.
 - a. Since Saul *thought* Jesus was a false prophet who opposed the true God, he was zealous to round up His followers and bring the Way to an end! Like a suicide bomber, let’s give Saul some credit for acting on his convictions – *though they were very wrong!*
 - b. Can you imagine how Saul’s mind and heart must have been racing:
 - i. He went from *total sight* to *total blindness* immediately!
 - ii. He realized that Jesus, whom He strongly opposed, IS THE PROMISED MESSIAH!
 - iii. He realized he was responsible for putting some/many of Jesus’ followers to death!
 - iv. He realized he deserved very severe punishment from the Almighty God!
3. *A dangerous job for Ananias*: Not the Ananias who died in Chapter 5, but **“One of the people Saul would have brought “bound to Jerusalem.”** Why? *For the purpose of being put to death!* ¹¹ ...the Lord said to him, “...go to... the house of Judas [and] look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying...” Since Saul was praying, *that was very encouraging!* But still, what would you do? *Trust in the Lord and go OR Trust in your own reasoning and hide*
4. *Negotiations*: Ananias told the Lord what he had heard about Saul’s evil ways, as well as the evil he planned to do in Damascus, ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.” Even though our excuses make sense, *let us be convinced that the ways of the Lord are always best!*
5. *Obedience*: ¹⁷ So Ananias departed and entered the house. During Saul’s time of blindness, the Holy Spirit gave Him faith and spiritual sight; then the Lord used Ananias to restore Saul’s physical sight; he was also baptized and received the gift of the Holy Spirit! *A total transformation (2 Cor. 5:17)!*

Saul Proclaims Jesus in Synagogues: 9:19b-22

6. *Saul's Gospel info*: Saul was probably very intelligent and well-educated; however, Lenski wrote that "Saul received his entire gospel directly from the Lord as he declares, 'by the revelation of Jesus Christ'" [Gal. 1:12] (369).
7. *Saul's proclamation of Jesus*: Luke wrote that ²⁰...immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." ²¹And all who heard him were amazed... Such a radical change, *one that could only be brought about by the power of God!* Note the sequence of events:
 - a. Wrong info, dead in sin, opposing Jesus!
 - b. Right info, alive in Christ, proclaiming Jesus!
 - c. Does the sequence in letter b apply only to people like Saul **OR** to all believers (1 Peter 2:9)?
 - d. What is holding you back from sharing God's Word with others? _____

Saul Escapes from Damascus: 9:23-25

8. *The hunter became the hunted*: Not long ago Saul was bent on hunting down followers of Jesus; however, now, having been made a follower, *he was being hunted!* ²³...the Jews plotted to kill him, ²⁵...but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall...

Saul in Jerusalem: 9:26-31

9. *Overcoming a horrible reputation*: ²⁶...when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.
 - a. When he was in Jerusalem, he was arresting disciples; then, when he came back, *he was claiming to be a disciple!* That sounds like a perfect way to secretly identify and arrest more disciples! But let us not forget the God-Factor, *that God can radically change anyone!*
 - b. Proof was needed, so Barnabas, whom we met in chapter 5, a trusted disciple, brought Saul ²⁷...to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.
10. *The practice of the Church*: The disciples were ³¹...walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, [and the Church – *the believers in Jesus*] multiplied. How can we do such things?

The Healing of Aeneas: 9:32-35 – "Having practically concluded the preliminary account in regard to Saul, Luke returns to the activity of Peter" (Lenski, 381).

11. *Building the kingdom*: ³³...a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. God used Peter to heal him in Jesus' name, *resulting in all who lived in Lydda turning to the Lord!*

Dorcas Restored to Life: 9:36-43

12. *A mighty miracle*: Tabitha (Dorcas) of Joppa ³⁶...full of good works and acts of charity... ³⁷...became ill and died... Therefore, hearing that Peter was not far away, sent men who urged him to come. Then, *by himself in a room with the dead body of Tabitha*, he ⁴⁰...knelt down and prayed; and turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. Similar to the healing of Aeneas, many heard the amazing news and ⁴²...believed in the Lord.