

# ACTS

Luke's Story of the Renewal of Israel

Nine Windows

Bobby Valentine 2026

THE RESTORATION INITIATIVE

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THRIVING CONGREGATIONS

## HOW A JEW BECAME KING OF THE WORLD

*“Fellow Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the God of our ancestors, has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. But you rejected the holy and righteous one and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses ...*

*“Repent, therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord and that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus, who must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets ...*

You are the descendants of the prophets and of the *covenant* that God gave to your ancestors, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your descendants *all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*’” (Acts 3:12-16, 19-21, 24-25).

Peter’s speech in Acts 3:12-26 is a microcosm of the message Luke wants to tell to Theophilus and those gathered with him. It is essentially a Jewish story about Yahweh’s ancient promises to a nomad named Abraham to bless him, his descendants and all the nations through him. Luke insists there is no story of Jesus and his followers apart from Israel.

The story of Jesus is the story of the covenant keeping, promise keeping, grace keeping God of our ancestors. Luke has a powerful message for his original hearers and for disciples today. In a nutshell it is the audacious story of how a Jew from Nazareth became King of Israel and Lord of the world. Will Israel embrace her king, will the nations submit to their Lord? But no matter what the same long story of:

- The Same God, *the God of Israel.*

- The Same Promise, *the Promises to Abraham, David & Israel*.
- The Same Mission, *the Mission for which Israel was created*.
- The Same People, *Renewed*.

(Note: The word “Israel” in these studies refers to the people of God and should not be understood as the State of Israel founded in 1948. Scripture marked NTFE is New Testament for Everyone, translated by N. T. Wright. Unless otherwise noted scripture is from the New Revised Standard Version).

# ACTS: LUKE'S STORY OF ISRAEL RENEWED (Story continued, Messiah renews, Spirit empowers) #1

## AN INVITATION TO HEARING

*“He [God] has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever” (Luke 1:54-55)*

*“[I]t is for the sake of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain ... [Paul] proclaimed the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus the Messiah with all boldness, and with no one stopping him” (Acts 28:20, 31, NTFE).*

The Book of Acts is unlike other books in our New Testament in that it is a sequel. Imagine a multi-volume series today: *Lord of the Rings*; *Hunger Games*; *Star Wars*; *Game of Thrones*; *the Pendragon Cycle*. One cannot fully understand *Return of the King* or *Return of the Jedi* as a stand-alone work. To use an analogy: as *Return of the Jedi* shows the redemption and renewal of Anakin Skywalker, so Acts continues the “tale” of the redemption and renewal of Israel as the people of God. *Return of the King* reads differently, and reads more coherently, when one connects the people, places and episodes against *The Fellowship of the Ring* and *The Two Towers*.

Luke tells his story of the God of Israel keeping his promises to Abraham, to David, to his people between the Song of Mary and the words of Paul quoted above. These texts form bookends to how Luke tells his story and offer clues as to why he tells his story. Jesus himself, according to Luke, provides the lens for hearing the entire two-volume work Luke-Acts, the Scriptures of Israel. According to Luke the risen Messiah Jesus spent forty days teaching the disciples “*the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms*” (Luke 24.44). The Book of Acts is best read first as the continuation of the Gospel of Luke and then within the story of Israel

recorded in the scriptures of Israel. The scriptures of Israel are the “music” that is playing as Luke tells his story.

One of the hardest things is reading scripture with first century eyes. In the first century there no such thing as a "Bible" as we think of one in our modern setting. So, with Acts.

Luke does not write his story for the benefit of the people in the narrative; most have long died. The original hearers of Acts, though likely both Jews and Gentiles seem to be predominantly Jewish. These hearers seem to be wrestling with important questions. *Jewish believers* may be asking, “How do we "fit in?" Paul, Peter, James are all dead. Jerusalem and its temple have been destroyed by the Romans. *Gentile believers* may be thinking along some of the lines Paul addressed in Romans 9-11, that we, as gentile believers, have come to see "Israel" as a liability and that the "church" has "replaced" Israel.

At the same time, Luke makes some rather surprising assumptions of *Jewish* knowledge on part of his readers. For instance, he assumes they know what a “sabbath’s day journey” (1:12) and what "the Fast" (27:9) means with no explanation. He assumes the readers know the story of Israel.

2) We do not know if the original hearers of Acts knew the other Gospels in written form, but they do know Luke's "*previous book*." What we call the Gospel of Luke. So, we hear the story of Acts with and from book of Luke. They are intended to be heard together.

3) As we have seen Luke’s story is a “story within a story.” What they know for certain is the story of Israel that they hear read in the scriptures encountered in worship. These scriptures are the Law, the Prophets, the Psalms, the very ones Jesus gave the disciples a crash course in. So here is a challenge for you, read the story of Israel in 1 & 2 Chronicles *then* open up to Luke 1 and read to Acts 28. These scriptures are read with Jesus as the Gospel of Luke shows. In many ways it seems Luke understands his work as sort of a 3 & 4 Chronicles ... and Chronicles assumes we know Samuel-Kings. A convenient place to get a “handle” on the narrative structure of Israel’s story is read “the Mini-Bible” which is Psalms 103 to 107. Read these together over and over.

Luke invites us to hear Acts *from* the perspective of the story of Israel. Jesus continues that story; the Way continues that story. Worship, the temple, the Son of David and the Nations are major themes in Chronicles (the Prophets and Psalms

too). All Israel gathers and is "renewed" in festivals (Passover & Shavout/Pentecost particularly). The Davidic King is prominent in these covenant renewals.

4) Turning to Luke and Acts after immersion in the “music” of Israel it "sounds" familiar. Luke himself is so saturated with his Scripture that he writes with a sort of “Biblese.” In this way, Luke places us in a story that feels familiar while at the same time calling us to a new horizon. We have been here before. Our city has been destroyed. Our Temple has been destroyed. We even had no king! But God *is* the God of Israel – “the God of our ancestors” - and renews his People so the Son of David will inherit the nations. *And Luke says that is what this God has done.* The Kingdom - the counter Empire - and the hope of Israel are intimately integrated in Luke-Acts. Paul's words in Acts 28.20, 31 are the completion of the arc begun by Mary in Lk 1.46-55.

5) When we listen to Luke-Acts as Luke invites we see that the *restored* Davidic kingdom is made up of more than ethnic Jews just as David's kingdom had more citizens than just Jews. Jesus is King of Israel and Lord of the nations as the Son of David. It is important that non-Israelites remain non-Israelite. It is also why Jewish members of the Way continue to worship in the temple, keep the sabbath, even offer sacrifices, etc but non-Israelite citizens are not bound by “ritual” specifics that marked the Jews as the sons of Abraham. This is why Luke no more thinks Paul sinned by offering a sacrifice in Acts 21 than he thinks James sinned for colluding with Paul to do it. In fact, Luke believes Paul already intended to do it before he entered into fellowship with the brothers in their Nazarite vow.

Luke has a word for both the Jewish and gentile believers of his day. Israel, as Luke understands it, is a microcosm of restored humanity itself. The restoration of Israel under the Jewish Messiah results in a restored humanity in all its creational diversity and beauty united under the Davidic Messiah. The gentile church has not replaced Israel as the people of God. Rather God has renewed his people through his Messiah and poured out his Spirit to enable Israel to be a light to the nations so that all will be blessed. Israel itself is made up of children of Abraham both ethnic Jews and gentiles. But Luke wants to stress that the gentiles are now part of Israel they have not replaced Israel. He instead believes that God has kept his promises and is renewing Israel to fulfill her cosmic role given to her in the promise to Abraham ... through *you* I will bless all nations. Acts is thus the Story of the unity of God's people in their created and sanctified diversity.

This is the big picture to keep in mind when we approach the Book of Acts, the second half of Luke's Story of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob keeping his

promises because our God is the faithful, loving, committed God who never gives up.

When we read Luke-Acts as the continuation of the story of Israel that now includes the Gentiles as fellow-heirs and fellow-citizens, then we may recognize Jew and Gentiles share a common ground.

- The Same God, *the God of Israel*.
- The Same Promise, *the Promises to Abraham, David & Israel*.
- The Same Mission, *the Mission for which Israel was created*.
- The Same People, *Renewed*.

Welcome to the exciting story of Acts.

## ACTS 1: ENTHRONED MESSIAH RENEWS ISRAEL #2

### The Story So Far

Is there life after death? Is there hope in the face of our gross failure? Luke says there is with the God of Israel.

Luke begins part two of his story with some significant flashbacks to his previous Gospel as well as the story of Israel. In Luke's telling of the Jesus story, it does not end at the cross nor even the bodily resurrection of the Nazarene. It continues with an Ascension and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Both are rooted in that biblical music playing in the background. According to the Scriptures of Israel, the salvation out of Egypt that the Passover celebrates does not end with the Exodus but with God coming to live with his People. The shekinah, the glorious presence of God, came to dwell in the midst of Israel. God would dwell with humanity through Israel.

According to the story though, tragedy happened. The golden calf (Exodus 32)! God's newly redeemed people have fallen. Will Israel still be God's people? Will he cast them to the pyre? The prophet, Moses, begs God to forgive them and to dwell with them in spite of their sin. Yahweh, in amazing grace, does just that. Not only does Yahweh forgive but his glorious presence will fill the tabernacle in a brilliant fiery "cloud" (Exodus 40.34-38).

In the previous book, Luke says that God sent Jesus to lead another "exodus." And Jesus died at the Passover, the gift of love was crucified (as we sing). Is there still hope? This is worse than the golden calf. But only Luke tells us that the rejected One does what Moses did on Mount Sinai, he prayed "*Father forgiven them*" (Luke 24:34). In the story of Israel what came after the Exodus was gross sin, a "fall" if you will, in the golden calf which was followed by the greatest pronouncement of *Hesed* (steadfast love/grace) demonstrated in the sending of God's glorious presence to live with Israel. There is indeed hope after sin, even after failing to recognize the Messiah. The God of Israel will honor his promises to



Abraham, to David, to his people based on God's own goodness. That Jesus will be bodily raised, enthroned and will become the instrument to pour out God's own glorious presence on lifeless Israel and all nations will be blessed. We will look at three critical verses in Acts 1.

### **"The Promise of the Father" (1:4)**

The faithlessness of the people of God will not keep Israel's God from being faithful to his promises. First Jesus is bodily raised, the power priestly aristocracy, even partnering with the Roman Empire, cannot keep God from installing Jesus as the Davidic king. And God will pour out the Holy Spirit through his Messiah.

The promise of the Father (1:4) is crucial in Acts. This promise connects the opening of Acts not only with the ending of the Gospel of Luke (24.49) it connects with multiple texts in Israel's scriptures. The promise of the Father is the Holy Spirit. In the narrative of Israel, the coming of God's Spirit is after the coming of the Messianic king. If the Spirit is here, Luke seems to say, then the king has already been enthroned.

Three passages in the Scriptures of Israel are critical, Isaiah 59:21, Ezekiel 36:22-38, and Joel 2:26-32.

*"And as for me, this is my covenant with them [Israel], says the LORD:  
my Spirit that is upon you,  
and my words that I have put in your mouth,  
shall not depart out of your mouth,  
or out of the mouths of your children,  
or your children's children, says the LORD,  
from now on and forever" (Isaiah 59.21)*

The echoes of Peter's words in Acts 2.39 of the gift of the Spirit to the "*children*" are plainly evident.

The coming of the Spirit was *proof* of the messianic age having arrived. *If* in fact the Spirit is here *then* the Messiah had come. Luke insists we not miss this point. The coming promised Spirit means the covenant has been renewed and creation itself is being renewed. That God's keeps the promise means God, as with Moses, heard the prayer of Jesus. The promise of God has come. Israel's sin could not

keep Yahweh from dwelling with the people at Sinai and our sin today still will not keep God from living with humanity.

The “finger prints” of Joel are already on Luke’s writings from the very beginning of his Gospel (i.e. Spirit active in old men, old women, young women and they prophesy). In Joel 2 creation (as in Genesis 3 and Romans 8) is in anguish as a result of human sin. Even the animals are groaning and crying to Yahweh for relief (1:18, 20). God’s army of punishment devours “*the garden of Eden*” (2:3) before it, leaving a wasteland behind it. The prophet quotes the Golden Text of the Bible, Exodus 34:6, the very text spoken by Yahweh after the golden calf and after Moses prayed (but before the filling of the Tabernacle) in 2.13.

*“God is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger and abounding in **hesed** [steadfast love/grace],  
and relents from punishing” (Joel 2:13).*

How is it that the earth, the animals, and the people are “healed?” Because God promises to live (dwell) among his creation just as he did in Eden.

*“You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel.”*

How?

*“I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh” (2.28).*

The original hearers of Acts know what the “*promise*” of the Father is. In fact, Luke has been using Joel 2 as a sort of template for his narrative since the he opened his Gospel in Luke 1.

**“You Will Be My Witnesses” (1:8)**

Jesus “commissions” his disciples. Our failure, Luke tells his hearers, will neither cut us off from the grace of our God nor relieve us from our original task. The bodily risen Jesus commissions the disciples in 1:8 with “*you will be my witnesses.*” This is not some randomly chosen verbiage by Luke. Rather they are “lyrics” from the poetry of Israel that describe why Yahweh created and called Israel in the first place.

The Book of Isaiah (49:1-7) tells us that Israel was created for a *priestly function* (cf. Exodus 19.6) to be a “*light to the nations*” in fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12.1-3). But Israel did not show the world either who God was nor

what it meant to live as a holy nation. Rather God's name became profaned because of Israel.

Israel, in exile, (as in Joel 2) is not cast off. Instead *God acts* on his own account (by grace) and will place Israel in a situation where they will bear witness to the nations. Isaiah 43:8-13 and Isaiah 44:6-8 are salient for Luke. We will look at 43:8ff. God calls forth a people "blind" and "deaf" before an assembly of the nations/gentiles in v.8. Israel, characterized as blind and deaf, is placed on the Stand to testify about the one true God.

*"You are my witnesses, says the LORD,  
and my servant whom I have chosen ...  
besides me there is no Savior ...  
you are my witnesses ...  
declares the LORD,  
'that I am God.'"*

The refrain "*you are my witnesses*" is in 43:10, 12 and 44:8. The entirety of chapters Isaiah 43 and 44 are relevant to Acts, but I will refrain from quoting the entire section.

The commission of Acts 1:8 is to continue the *very mission of Israel herself*. The promised Spirit will renew God's people so the mission can continue. Thankfully God is gracious and faithful because the "church" will be just as "blind" and "deaf" to the ways of God (as in Kings and Chronicles) as the narrative of Acts clearly goes on to show. The promised Spirit seemingly drags the renewed people of God kicking and screaming to be his instruments of *covenantal* and *creational* renewal.

Being a witness is not simply another word for "evangelist." Rather Luke is saying, by connecting to Isaiah, that even the exile, even the crucifixion of Jesus has not derailed God's purposes for his people to be his witnesses in the middle of a sin cursed creation. The renewed people of God are formed, as in Isaiah, "*so that they might declare my praise*" (Isaiah 43:21). They can do this because they are "Exhibit A" of God healing grace. They witness to it because they are the "graced." God's people testify to the Spirit's healing grace because the Messiah has come and the Spirit has been given to bring healing not only to traditional Israel but to bring all creation into the new world. The church will be put on display, like a light before the nations of what the world was intended and is destined to be.

### **“To the Ends of the Earth” (1:8)**

The risen Jesus commissions his witnesses to proclaim, “*to the ends of the earth*” (1:8). This is not only geography but missional geography. The message radiates out from Zion, Jerusalem (Luke uses the word “Jerusalem” 95x) to the farthest corners.

Luke’s language is rooted in Isaiah 49 one of Isaiah’s “Servant Songs.” In the song Israel is told she will be a “*light for the Gentiles, so that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth*” (Isaiah 49:6). The phrase to the ends of the earth are ethnic, meaning to non-Jews. The full text of Isaiah 49:6 is quoted again by Luke in his version of Paul’s synagogue sermon in Acts 13:46.

God’s deaf and blind people are gathered graciously by the Lord himself and commissioned to testify and to fulfill the role for which they were created. The “gentile mission,” as some call it, is directly connected to the *restoration of Israel* in these texts.

In the story of Acts the coming in of the gentiles will not signify the creation of a new and different people of God that replaces the old rejected people of God. Rather the coming in of the gentiles symbolizes that God is restoring Israel herself to the task and commission for which she was created in the first place. God is faithful, he has kept his promise in sending the Spirit and will restore his people to their role as his “servant” under the risen king named Jesus.

### **The Ascension, the Enthronement of the Risen King (1:9f):**

Luke is the only NT author to record the Ascension of Jesus. And he does it twice. In important ways, the Ascension is the hinge that holds the Gospel and Acts together. Both in the telling in Luke 24:50-52 and in Acts 1:9f, he uses powerful images from the story of Israel. We must not think that Luke means merely that Jesus exited the earth via a white fluffy Cumulus cloud. Simply white-water vapor. This would be to miss the music.

While it is possible that some water vapor was involved, it is not likely a first century Jew would have heard the text that way. It may surprise us but the word “*cloud*” (Hebrew ‘*anan*’) occurs 87 times in the scriptures of Israel. Fifty Eight of those eighty-seven are *used in connection with God’s theophanic presence* not some meteorological activity. Most of the time when the Bible mentions something about clouds it is not about rain but when *God* “shows up” in a big way.

We recall that it was a glorious cloud that showed up after Moses had interceded for Israel after the golden calf. The cloud represents God's "*shekinah*" glory. The Israelite would think principally of the completion of the Tabernacle in Exodus 40:34-38 and the dedication of the Temple in 1 Kings 8:10f; 2 Chronicles 5:13-14; 7.1-2. We read,

*"Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the tent because of the cloud ...the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle ... For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night ..."* (Exodus 40.34-38).

This *same cloud* that enveloped the tabernacle enveloped Jesus in the Transfiguration (Lk 9.28-36). Luke tells us that the last thing the apostles see of Jesus is a theophany. What a glorious moment.

*"while he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice ..."* (Lk 9:34-35).

The Ascension is God showing up to claim Jesus as his own, exalting him to the throne as the Davidic king. Here he tells the "Holy and Righteous One" (3:14) to take his place on the throne as both Messiah and Lord. Here the bodily resurrected Jesus is recognized as the promised king receiving honor, glory and authority to pour out the Holy Spirit upon Israel and through Israel the nations.

This king will appear again the believers are promised. We look forward to that day in the meantime we are called to be witnesses in the power of the Spirit.

## ACTS 2: LORD AND MESSIAH POURS OUT THE SPIRIT #3

### Covenant of Hopes and Dreams (2.1-12)

Pentecost has long been viewed in Christianity as a defining moment in the church. For Luke it is the critical moment when the risen and ascended Messiah renewed God's people by pouring out the Holy Spirit on Israel. As we learned in our previous two lessons, Luke tells his story according to the music of Israel. It is the music of a God who loves the unlovable. That story is easily summarized as

*Exodus comes before Sinai.*

*Golgotha comes before Pentecost.*

*Grace comes before Faith.*

In the scriptures of Israel God redeemed Israel before Israel had faith and before Israel had law to obey. In the story God redeemed in the Exodus, entered covenant at Sinai, forgave the golden calf and renewed his covenant with his glorious presence in the tabernacle. In many ways Sinai became the first of many covenant renewals (cf. Exodus 34:10). Throughout Israel's history both in the canonical scriptures and outside, Pentecost came to embody the hope of a fresh outpouring of grace and presence. In Jesus's time the hope and dream that God would at last do something as spectacular as Sinai or even the dedication of the Temple in 2 Chronicles 5-7 filled pious hearts. It was a time of great celebration and joy in the Lord. For at Pentecost God gave himself to Israel and he may do something even more spectacular this time.

It is because of what happened on Pentecost (called "Feast of Weeks" "First Fruits" and "Ingathering" in Israel's Scriptures) evoked for Jews that they would come from all over the world. The nations listed in 2:9-11 are centered geographically on Jerusalem. Luke tells us that "*devout Jews*" from "*every nation under heaven*" (2:5). Scattered Israel has been gathered in and what was longed for, happened. Suddenly sounds of "*violent wind*" filling the temple and "*tongues of fire*" evoking the sights and sounds of Sinai.

Amazement came over the thousands of pilgrims as they heard of "*God's deeds of power*" in their native languages. God is renewing his people and healing the world too. Luke does not tell us that each heard the grace of God in the same language

but “*in their own language*” (2:11). Luke stresses something vital here at the renewal in the words of New Testament scholar Isaac Oliver, when people embrace the Messiahship of Jesus and are filled with the Spirit they do not lose their particular creational identity.

“All person may be saved by the same messiah regardless of ethnicity, according to Luke ... Salvation is universal but not univocal. Cultural difference will persist ... even in the realm of language” (*Luke’s Jewish Eschatology*, p. 117).

Renewed Israel will still have some surprises as Luke tells the story.

### **Peter’s Messianic Sermon (2:14-36)**

Pentecost is not so much the beginning of the people of God as the renewal of God’s people. This renewal focuses upon the resurrection of Jesus, his exaltation as Messiah and his pouring out the Spirit of life. That is what Peter claims in his epic sermon. In the midst of the excitement in the Temple of the Lord, Peter begins a sermon. Three primary texts from the Scriptures shaped Peter’s Pentecostal address:

<b>Acts</b>	<b>Scriptures of Israel</b>
2:17-21	Joel 2:28-32
2:25-28	Psalms 16:8-11
2:31	Psalms 16:9-10
2:34-35a	Psalms 110:1

The confused crowd hears the mighty acts of God being proclaimed by both men and women, there are 120 of them (1:15; cf. 2 Chronicles 5:12). So, Peter calls out to “*fellow Jews*” or “*Israelites*” (2:13, 22, 29). What they see and hear is what Joel had promised. The sight of men and women preaching is not a sign of inebriation. Rather men and women filled with the Spirit preaching God’s acts is what Joel had long ago promised. “In the last day” Joel promised “*your sons and daughters shall prophesy ... both men and women in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy*” (2:17-18, citing Joel 2:28-29).

The apocalyptic imagery of Joel was not understood to mean that literally

hematopoietic fluid was dripping from the moon or that the sun had disappeared. As N. T. Wright has observed ancient Jews did not read such texts as if “they were a weather report.” Rather, the language of Joel points to the cataclysmic turn in the history of redemption. In the case of Pentecost the Messiah has been exalted, and the Spirit has been poured resulting in a world where the divisions of the fallen world are healed, they are forgiven. The renewal of God’s people is the beginning of the healing of all creation. Much later the apostle Paul, alluding to the same text in Joel 2:28-29, will tell the Galatians that old divisions on rank, status, ethnicity and gender are reframed and glorified in Messiah Jesus (Galatians 3:26-28). As the prophet Joel promised the “targets” of grace for the healing Spirit will be the hurting world, animals themselves and humans too (cf. Joel 2:21-29). Don’t be confused Peter says, we have read these Scriptures and now we have Miriams, Deborahs, Huldahs, Annas and Philip’s daughters (Luke 2:36-38; Acts 21:9) along with himself.

### **God’s Raised Him Up and Exalted (2:22-36)**

Peter quickly turns to the crux: Jesus of Nazareth. What is happening is because Jesus was sent. Like Moses he was “*attested by God with deeds of power, wonders and signs*” (cf. Deuteronomy 34:11; Acts 7:36). But Jesus was rejected and crucified. Luke holds his fellow Israelites culpable, but he says they were misled by “*the hands of those outside the law*” (2:23).

God sent the one longed for, prayed for, the hope of Israel. But “we” killed him. There is a sense of communal failure here of all not just *those* Jews. The man preaching to his fellow Israelites is after all, Luke’s original hearers know, is the man who said “*Man, I do not know what you are talking about!*” (Luke 22:60).

Everyone was guilty. Can there be life after the tsunami of failure?

The answer of Luke is yes! Pentecost comes because the God of Israel refused to accept defeat. So, God had planned it all out to redeem Peter, his fellow Israelites, those who had crucified him by exalting Jesus to the throne. Resurrection is the heart of the matter.

*“You crucified ... But God raised him up,  
freed him from death,*



*because it was impossible for him  
to be held by its power”*

David died. David is still buried. But David prophesied that his *“flesh will live in hope”* (2:26). It is the bodily resurrection that Peter hangs the hopes of Israel. He stresses the physical nature of this resurrection:

*“God raised him”* (2:24)

*“my flesh will live in hope”* (2:26)

*“will not ... let your Holy One see corruption”* (2:27)

*“David spoke of the resurrection”* (2:31)

*“did not let his flesh see corruption”* (2:31)

*“This Jesus God raised up”* (2:32)

The resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth in the flesh is the “hope of Israel” according to Luke. What the God of Israel does to and for the king, he will do to and for the people. Luke has already told Theophilus and his hearers exactly what resurrection is. Every time the Book of Acts refers to “resurrection” it is pointing back to Luke 24. When Peter stresses the physicality of the resurrection, we can see him remembering the resurrected Jesus standing amid the stunned disciples saying,

*“Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have. And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet”* (Luke 24:38-40).

The bodily resurrected Jesus was “raised up” by God and “exalted at the right hand of God.” This brings Peter to his last Scripture from Israel, Psalm 110. God has enthroned the resurrected Jesus. God has placed him on the throne of David and told him “Sit at my right hand” (2:34 citing Psalm 110:1). The Davidic king has returned!

Peter reaches the crescendo of his proclamation of God’s deeds of power. In bold, powerful, language Peter speaks so that all the gathered devout Jews from all over the world hear in their native language the earth-shattering declaration:

*“Therefore, let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified”* (2:35).

That is why the Spirit is here. That is why Joel's promise is reality. Because God has kept his promise and no amount of human failure, unbelief or even outright rebellion can thwart the plan of God. There is life after death. There is hope in the face of rebellious unbelief. Because the God of Israel is faithful and raised Jesus of Nazareth to sit as King of Israel and Lord of creation.

### **What Shall We Do? (2:37-42)**

Many of Peter's fellow Israelites are terrified. What do we do in the face of such colossal failure? People who have dedicated their lives to Scripture, serving God, saving a lifetime for a pilgrimage to Jerusalem only to find out we have rejected the gift of God. They ask, perhaps in a voice of lament, they are after all "*cut to the heart*" (2:37), "*what should we do?*" Peter tells them what Jesus told him to say: preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47). The story of God's deeds of power is not to be told to condemn but elicit faith and hope but in the story of Israel's Scriptures repentance is the standard response to the goodness, grace and love of the God of Israel.

*"Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins"* (2:38).

The word *aphesin* is a powerful word. Jesus uses it in his homily in Nazareth, he had been sent to "*proclaim apheresis to the captives*" (Luke 4:18). The term peppers Sabbath and Jubilee texts in Israel's scriptures in Deuteronomy 15 and Leviticus 25. It is a Year of Jubilee word. Peter's word is the stunning word of grace. Yes, we have been unfaithful and stiff-necked (have God's people ever been anything but?). But God ... God exalted Jesus to the Messiahship and through him the new world of shalom, the world of the "Year of the Lord's favor" is here. A sin greater than the golden calf is overcome and God is renewing his people, even renewing them like a resurrection from the dead. And the "promise" of that Spirit of life is for all of us (2:39).

It is important to digest Peter's sermon. The sermon is not about the church. In fact, the word "church" never occurs in Acts 2. [The King James Version and the New King James Version rely on inferior Greek manuscripts when they insert the word "church" in 2:47. All modern translations omit that textual variant.] The sermon is not about baptism, though repentance and baptism are appropriate responses to the sermon. The sermon is about the resurrection and exaltation of

Jesus of Nazareth to be Messiah and Lord. That message, however, resulted in 3000 Jews accepting that Jesus is the King of Israel (Messiah).

This group is at the forefront of renewal. They are a Jubilee – a grace centered – community. The poor are equal and cared for. The group gathers in the Temple to worship the God of Israel daily. They share communal meals remembering King Jesus in those meals. They devoted themselves to “the” prayers (2:42, NRSV) And they praised God cultivating goodwill. The community of Messiah Jesus seemed like a community from another realm. And they are. They are God’s renewed world planted in this world to do the will of God on earth as in heaven.

### Reflections

- Why is Joel 2 so important to Luke? Read Joel 2, how might the whole passage inform the hope of renewal in Acts 2?
- Why is the resurrection of Jesus critical to Peter’s sermon?
- What are some of the glorious dimensions of “freedom” or “forgiveness” that thrills Luke?

### APPENDIX THE HOLY SPIRIT IN ACTS

The messianic age for Luke is the “age of the Holy Spirit.” It is nearly overwhelming the emphasis on the Spirit. In order to impress upon our collective consciousness with them, I will quote the Spirit texts in Acts.

- 1.2 “*instructions through the Holy Spirit*”
- 1.5 “*baptized with/in the Holy Spirit*”
- 1.8 “*the Holy Spirit comes on you*”
- 1.16 “*which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago*”
- 2.4 “*filled with the Holy Spirit ... as the Holy Spirit enabled them*”
- 2.17 “*I will pour my Spirit on all people*”
- 2.18 “*pour out my Spirit*”
- 2.33 “*received from the Father the gift of the Holy Spirit*”
- 2.38 “*received the gift of the Holy Spirit*”
- 4.8 “*Peter filled with the Holy Spirit*”
- 4.25 “*spoke by the Holy Spirit*”
- 4.31 “*filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God*”

- 5.3 *“lied to the Holy Spirit”*
- 5.9 *“test the Spirit of the Lord”*
- 6.3 *“chose seven ... full of the Spirit and wisdom”*
- 6.5 *“full of faith and the Holy Spirit”*
- 6.10 *“the Spirit by whom he spoke”*
- 7.51 *“you resist the Holy Spirit”*
- 7.55 *“Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit”*
- 8.15 *“that they might receive the Holy Spirit”*
- 8.16 *“because of the Holy Spirit”*
- 8.17 *“they received the Holy Spirit”*
- 8.18 *“the Spirit was given ... ”*
- 8.19 *“they received the Holy Spirit”*
- 8.29 *“the Spirit told Philip, Go ... ”*
- 8.39 *“the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip”*
- 9.17 *“filled with the Holy Spirit”*
- 9.31 *“strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit”*
- 10.19 *“the Spirit said to him, Simon ...”*
- 10.38 *“God anointed Jesus ... with the Holy Spirit and power”*
- 10.44 *“Holy Spirit came on all who heard”*
- 10.45 *“gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out”*
- 10.47 *“received the Holy Spirit as we have”*
- 11.12 *“the Spirit told me to have no hesitation”*
- 11.15 *“the Holy Spirit came on them as he had on us”*
- 11.16 *“baptized with the Holy Spirit”*
- 11.24 *“He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit”*
- 11.28 *“Agabus stood up and predicted through the Spirit that a severe famine would spread”*
- 13.2 *“the Holy Spirit said, ‘set apart for me ...’”*
- 13.4 *“sent on their way by the Holy Spirit”*
- 13.9 *“Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit”*
- 13.52 *“the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit”*
- 15.8 *“he accepted them by giving them the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us”*
- 15.28 *“it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us ...”*
- 16.6 *“having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word”*
- 16.7 *“the Spirit of Jesus would not allow it”*
- 19.2 *“Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”*
- 19.6 *“the Holy Spirit came on them”*

- 20.22 “*compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem*”
- 20.23 “*in every city the Holy Spirit warns me*”
- 20.28 “*which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers*”
- 21.4 “*through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go*”
- 21.11 “*The Holy Spirit says*”
- 28.25 “*the Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers*”

# ACTS 3-4: WORSHIP, MESSIANIC SALVATION AND PRAYER #4

## Approaching Luke's Story

Three thousand had repented and been baptized in response to Peter's sermon. Luke delights in relating the huge masses of Jews embracing Jesus as Messiah (cf. Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1, 7; 9:42; 12:24; 13:43; 14:1; 17:10-13; 19:17, 20). The three thousand embracing Jubilee style grace are on the forefront of renewal. They are a Jubilee – a grace centered – community. The poor are equal and cared for. The group gathers in the temple to worship the God of Israel daily. They share communal meals probably remembering King Jesus in those meals. They devoted themselves to “*the*” prayers (2:42, NRSV) And they praised God cultivating goodwill. The community of Messiah Jesus seemed like a community from another realm. And they are. They are God's renewed world planted in this world to do the will of God on earth as in heaven.

Luke lingers long, a full chapter and half, on the *salvation* of the lame man (Acts 3.1-4.22). The saved man is a microcosm of what genuine *salvation looks like*. A lame man (the kind of person Jesus speaks of in his Jubilee message in Lk 4.18-19) has been “*rescued*,” he has been “*saved*” (4.9; Gk, *sozo*) from shackles of death and decay operating in God's world. The “Jubilee” message and *mission* of the resurrected Messiah Jesus has saved this man (Peter stresses the resurrection of Jesus's body, 3:15,26; 4.2, 10). How did this all happen?

## Hour of Prayer and “Healing” (3:1-10)

At the “*hour of prayer*” (known as “the Tamid”) before the “*Beautiful Gate*,” Luke begins his exposition of what salvation looks like. This story is a microcosm of what God is doing to all creation.

Peter and John are confronted by a man “*lame from birth*.” It was the lame Jesus came in the Spirit to proclaim the “*liberty/release/forgiveness*” to (Luke 4:18). Jesus's defense to John the Baptizer was he made the “*lame walk*” (Luke 7:21-22).

But Peter and John have no gold to offer this man. Rather they give him a *gift* from the newly crowned Jewish Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. They simply command him “*In the name of Messiah Jesus of Nazareth, get up and walk*” (3:6, NTFE). Peter

did what in most contexts would be extremely unsettling. He grabbed the man and yanked him up (3:7). The man, lame since birth, began to jump, leap and dashed into the temple praising God. All the people who witnessed this salvation joined in the worship of God at the hour of prayer (3:8-10).

For the hearers of Luke's story, they had heard the music blaring in Isaiah. Those with "*weak knees*," and even the blind, the *lame shall leap like a deer; the tongue of the speechless sing for joy*" (35: 5-6). This happens, Isaiah declares, because "*He [the Lord] will come and save you*" (v.4). The result of that salvation is "*then the eyes ... then the lame ...*" in v.5. This is what Luke sees in Acts 3. Luke claims that the on this day, at the daily "hour of prayer" when the unexpected can happen God saved this lame man through the Messiah.

Worship provided the opportunity for salvation to break into God's vandalized world. Salvation then produced worship in God's messengers, in those who received salvation and those who witnessed it.

It is like Luke is telling us to never imagine that showing up and worshiping God is mundane. The Spirit unleashes salvation upon our world through us and through worship.

### **Peter Explains the Meaning (3:11-4:22)**

The lame man "*enters the Temple*" (this would be the inner court of women where the Tamid takes place) perhaps for the first time in his life and begins "*walking and JUMPING and praising God*" (3.8).

How is this man whole? Peter rehearses "*the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors*" glorious deeds again. God's people did not recognize Jesus and killed him. But God raised him from the dead (3:15) and exalted him.

"The goal of salvation, in the New Testament and the early Fathers, is the remaking of the good, God-given created universe, and the resurrection of the body for those who have died, so they can share in the world that has been put to rights." (N. T. Wright, *Judas and the Gospel of Jesus*, p. 102)

The gathered crowd is urged to "*repent and turn so their sins may be wiped out and seasons of refreshment can come from the presence of the Lord*" (3:19; cf. Lk. 24.47). This Messiah will, as the prophets promised, usher in a "*time of universal restoration*" (3:21). The lame man is the

picture of that restoration to wholeness. He is Peter's postcard for what messianic salvation looks like.

The much-annoyed Sadducees show up. The Sadducees control the temple, they also deny the resurrection (Acts 23:8). Peter and John are arrested. The next day they give a defense of their actions regarding the man at the Beautiful Gate. Peter says, "*if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been saved/healed ...*" (4:9). This man has been what?

A few verses later Peter utters those famous words, "*There is soteria (salvation) in no one else ...*" (4:12).

Peter informs the Sadducees the man is in a present state of salvation and the action that led to his salvation can be in no one else's name but King Jesus who was raised and exalted. The statement in 4:12 points to the saving of the man who was lame.

Though most of our common English translations will use the word "*healed*" in v.9, it is the word Luke uses repeatedly for salvation. For example, in 2:40, the same Peter says to the crowd in the temple, "*save yourselves from this corrupt and wicked generation*" is the exact same term in 4:9.

In our western understanding of the "doctrine of salvation" we drive a wedge between what is called "spiritual" (i.e. deliverance from sin") and "physical" (i.e. this man's restored=l body). But Luke's understanding of "salvation" is as comprehensive as Isaiah 35; Isaiah 61 and the Psalms (like Psalm 30, a text I am sure the lame man had prayed before).

Peter looks at the powerbrokers and baldly states that King Jesus saved this man.

I know of only one translation that lets the English reader know Luke is using the same terminology (a verb and noun) in 4:9 and 4:12. That is New Testament for Everyone.

*"if the question we're being asked today is about a good deed done for a sick man, and whose power it was that RESCUED him ..." (4:9).*

*"RESCUE won't come from anybody else!" (4:12).*



The lame man dancing in the temple before the Lord is a Jubilee moment of victory/salvation in Luke's mind. Salvation is healing creation in all of its dimensions. It is restoring the world, with you and me, to what God intended in the first place. And then some!

The work of King Jesus, crucified and risen, is to heal the world that has been vandalized by the fall (Genesis 3) in all areas that finds any trace of the curse. There is no dichotomy between so called “physical” stuff and “spiritual” stuff here or anywhere in Luke’s writings. Luke’s “doctrine of salvation” is cosmic in breadth. It is stunning. The implications of this for the ongoing work of Jesus in local churches are profound.

Luke tells us this story at the beginning of his account of God renewing the people of God. He lingers on it. This lame man saved at the hour of prayer/sacrifice by King Jesus is a microcosm of what the resurrected Messiah will do for all creation when he appears, when he restores all things (3:21). Resurrection of the body is the God of Israel’s great work of redemption from the ravages of sin and death so apparent in that man’s frail body. Luke fastens our eyes upon this man and says, The Messiah rules, he is the “*Author of Life*” (3:15).

### **Prayer for Bold Mission (4:23-37)**

After Peter and John’s night in jail, Luke tells us the disciples came “*all together*” (4.23), blending their voices in prayer. All men and women (since males and females are included in Acts 2.17-18) cry out to the “*Sovereign Lord*” who has “*made heaven and earth and the sea.*” This is the language of the Psalms (Psalm 124) the “music” is playing loudly. They know this music. After all they go to the temple daily and Jews already know the Psalms of Ascents by heart. The Psalms of Ascents regularly used in the temple worship are Psalms 120 to 134.

God the Creator is, for Israel, an extremely comforting thought. The Psalms of Ascents directly link the notion of the Creator to God’s *protection* and *presence*. Psalm 121 links the idea of God as Creator directly to protection.

*“My help comes from Yahweh,  
who made the heaven and earth.”*

Yahweh is the Maker of Heaven and Earth which means he “*watches over you*” and he “*keeps*” Israel (6x)! See Ps 124. Yahweh promises the exiled Israelites that

*“he who created you” ... “Israel’s creator” is the King. This means, again, presence and protection. So “when you pass through the waters ... they will not sweep over you ... When you walk through the fire you will not be burned.” (cf. Isaiah 43:2).*

The Creator God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; he owns Israel and is with them (Isaiah 43). So the gathered saints in Acts 4:25ff call out to that Creator God because they are about to walk through the fire!

## **The Prayer**

And it is fire. They utter Psalms in unison, especially Psalm 2. The renewed people of God *find themselves in the Scriptures of old. They grasp who they are, and with, in the story of scripture.* They pray Psalm 2 (they probably prayed the entire psalm but Luke quotes only verse 1 and 2). Scripture is the source of prayer. It is the source of what to pray. It is the source of understanding what is happening “now” and what we are to do “now.” This is the real authority of Scripture in that it shapes and molds who we are and what we do in the here and the now.

*“Why did the nations/gentiles rage,  
and the peoples imagine vain things?  
The kings of the earth took their stand,  
and the rulers have gathered together  
against the Lord and against his Messiah“*  
(Acts 4:25-26, citing Psalm 2:1-2 from the Greek Septuagint)

The nations (Romans) and the peoples (Sadducees/chief priests) in the persons of Herod and Pilate have both attacked God’s anointed, the holy servant Jesus *and his followers.*

First, the disciples are *not* surprised that they are attacked. They knew they would be because it was in their prayer text in the Psalms. *If the nations raged against the Lord and his Anointed then we will surely not be exempt.* This is a direct challenge to the Messiah Jesus and the resurrection.

Second, when they prayed the Psalms they confessed that the scripture was true. They pray the psalm back to the One who gave it and then tell the Sovereign Lord, *it is true* (4:27). They confess that the holy servant/child Jesus was handed over. But this too, took place because the scripture was true. This very scripture, that they found themselves in, states clearly the powers will make war against the anointed.

Third, considering the promised *presence* and *protection* of the Creator and the truth of the Scriptures they do *NOT pray for the removal of the persecution*. They did not pray as I likely would have. They did not pray for deliverance from the challenge at hand. Instead, they prayed for the power to be *bold* in the face of those who oppose the Lord and his resurrected Messiah.

*“So now Master, look on their threats; and grant that we, your servants, may speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand for healing” (4:29-30).*

They prayed for boldness. Removal of the threat lessens the chance to bear witness. They would be witnesses to the new creation salvation that has broken in through King Jesus and his resurrection. They would be witnesses to that renewed world.

**Two things resulted from the prayer:**

- 1) They did speak with boldness in the face of the powers that be
- 2) They were united in mission in the face of threats and this unity manifested itself in *“nobody said they owned their property” (4:32)*. They were a Jubilee community.

## ACTS 5-8: KICKING AGAINST THE GOAD OF GRACE #5

Luke's story of renewing God's people take place in the real world. Even when God's people embrace the Messiah we still wrestle with the forces that would turn us away from the values of the empire of Jesus. So in Acts 5-8 we find Ananias and Sapphira lying about money. We find that even as the apostles bear witness that there is cultural discrimination among the disciples in the caring for the poor. Consequently, people full of the Holy Spirit are tasked with making sure grace is ministered. Luke tells us of the death of Stephen and the preaching of Philip.

### Acts 5:1-11

The story of Ananias and Sapphira evokes many somber notes in the history of Israel. Stories like Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10) and Achan (Joshua 7) come to mind. But more than that. When Israel was redeemed, Yahweh came to dwell with the people. The creator God is in the midst of the camp. Israel in the wilderness is the assembly of God, with God surrounded by his people. According to Luke that assembly is now the disciples of Jesus. The Spirit has been poured out and God is once again dwelling with, among, and in his people. The first time Luke uses the word "church" is in this sad episode (cf. 5:11).

The disciples infused with Jubilee kind of grace decided to hold nothing as a personal possession (4:32). It all belongs to God! This husband and wife collaborated in deceiving the church, the gathered by God people. They made it look as if they gave everything but hid some for themselves. In a moment reminiscent of Uzzah (2 Samuel 6) Ananias falls dead. And then his wife.

Peter gets to the heart. Satan has entered the camp (5:3). But God is in their midst as certainly as Yahweh was frightfully at Mount Sinai. Our God, the God of King Jesus, cannot be manipulated or tamed. God will not allow the principalities and powers, Satan, to creep back wreak the havoc they have historically done. Holy fear "*seized the whole church*" Luke says.

## Acts 6:8-7:60 Stephen's History of Two

The story of Ananias and Sapphira remind us that God's people always exist in the hope of full redemption. There has never been a time in the history of God's people, before Jesus nor after, that we have not been a profound mixture of faith, failure, even rebellion held together by the utter grace of the God who sent Jesus. We first meet Stephen because God's people are that mix. He was among the "seven" chosen to make sure the Hellenist widows were not neglected in the distribution of food (6:1-6). The Hellenist widows are not ethnically Greek, they are Greek speaking Jewish widows. Class prejudice was at work among disciples. But Stephen was "full of grace" (6:8).

Stephen was a powerful preacher. Some enemies of Jesus followers lied about him. Luke stresses that "*false witness*" made false claims about Stephen. They lied about what he said about Moses, the temple and God. Lies are powerful and damaging. Stephen is arrested. Many modern readers tend to agree with those Luke calls "false witnesses" against Stephen.

When we read Acts 7, the longest speech in the Book of Acts, we need to take care not to read it through centuries of antisemitic caricatures. As a rule, God's people were no more stiffnecked in Stephen's day than they are in our own day. Luke did just tell us two stories about the failings – Ananias and Sapphira and neglect of the poor Hellenistic widows. The original hearers of Acts will be quite familiar with the long Hebrew tradition of self-examination through the scriptures and liturgy of Israel.

Stephen's speech, is a long recitation of the faithful God who saves in unusual ways and Israel kicking against the goad of grace. It is a story that is encapsulated throughout the Hebrew Bible. God's people (same today as always) have never been very loyal to God but have always been self-centered. Stephen's speech is very traditional Moses said, "*you have been rebellious against the LORD as long as he has known you*" (Deuteronomy 9:14).

### Confessions of Sin in Israel's

#### History

Deuteronomy 9:1-29

Nehemiah 9:1-37

Ezekiel 20:1-32

Psalms 78

Psalms 106

But it is a serious misreading of Stephen's speech if all we get out of it is the diabolical nature of ourselves and our ancestors (or worse the diabolical nature of "the Jews!"). The purpose of this recitation of sin in the scriptures of Israel is not that God is finally casting off his people. The purpose is point to the faithfulness of God which hopefully will bear fruit in repentance. Willie James Jennings in his brief theological exposition notes that "Stephen is telling a story of two" (*Commentary on Acts*, p. 71). In fact, it is a story of the faithful God of grace with a subplot of the failing wayward people of God.

The star of Acts 7 is the ever true, ever committed, ever faithful, ever gracious, ever acting, ever delivering *God* of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. It is this God who is the star of Acts 7 and Israel (the subplot) who keeps departing from the "script" by making the story change from God's faithfulness to Our Unfaithfulness. *The word "God" "Most High" or "Lord" occur a whopping 19x in Acts 7.* We hear that,

- God appears,
- God calls,
- God said,
- God delivers,
- God is "with" ...

God is with them even as Israel God's people rebel, refuse, and reject.

When read Acts 7 alongside the traditional music of playing Luke's head, like Psalms 105, 106, and 107 the "script" is the same apart from minor details.

Stephen's word, Luke's message, from the story of two is that we have:

- The Same God all along.
- The Same Promise sustained us through it all.
- The Same Mission from Abraham to today.
- The Same People *can be Renewed*, we do not have to walk in idolatrous self-centered ways exchanging ritual(ism) for genuine Covenant.

We do not have to walk as our ancestors did. The truth is they were hardly righteous (they killed God's prophets! What have WE done!?), but we do not have to walk that way. We can respond to the God who owns the temple *but is also present in all the world*. The God who calls us to respond now. This story should humble us and thrill us. Because God has not given up on us but instead promises

to renew us through Messiah Jesus and the poured-out Spirit. It is good news.

Stephen's Story of Two is a story of grace in the face of idolatrous rebellion. It is a story of two that squarely places the "onus" not on the ancestors but on those alive now. Don't walk in the way of rebellion but in the way of faith. What will we do? Will we Walk the way with our faithful God? Or will we continue to be consumed with ourselves.

### **Philip Preaches (Acts 8:4-39)**

*“[Y]ou will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to all the ends of the earth”* (Acts 1:8)

It is difficult to exaggerate Jerusalem's centrality in Luke's two-volume story. It is, not Rome, the center of the world. The ends of the earth are in reference to Jerusalem, not the city of Caesar. Jerusalem is of course where the temple is. It is where Zion is. The mention of “Jerusalem” ignites gigabytes of lyrics filling the minds of hearers. There are “songs of Zion” (Psalms 48, 84, etc). The prophets had sung of Yahweh's word flowing out of Jerusalem.

*“In those days ...  
all nations shall stream to it,  
Many peoples [nations] shall come and say,  
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD  
to the house of the God of Jacob;  
that he may teach us his ways  
and that we may walk in his paths.'  
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,  
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”*  
(Isaiah 2:1-3; Micah 4:1-4)

Isaiah promises that the nations will learn Yahweh's word from Jerusalem and that peace will reign (Isaiah 2:4). But Jerusalem is not just the city of Yahweh, it is the city of his Messiah, his anointed king. Luke is the only New Testament writer to call Jerusalem the “*city of David*” (Luke 2:4,11). Remember Luke 24 ... “*from Jerusalem*” (24:47).

Luke has stressed that Jewish king has come. He has been bodily raised and exalted by the God of Israel. One thing the scriptures promised was that when the king comes, and the Spirit comes, God will heal divided Israel under that king. Ezekiel (among others) promised that shattered Israel will be enlivened by God's Spirit, dusty bones filled with life (Ezekiel 37:1-14). Those bones resurrected by divine grace will be the southern kingdom (Judah) and the northern kingdom (Israel) and God will reunite them. "*My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall have one shepherd*" (Ezekiel 37:24, vv.15-28).

Suddenly, Philip comes from Jerusalem to Samaria "*proclaiming the word*" (Acts 8:4). He proclaims the good news about "*God's empire*" and the Messiah Jesus. Many of the Samaritans men and women believe and are baptized (8:8,12,14).

The apostles "*at Jerusalem*" (8:14) come and investigate. The Samaritans in the story do not accept the apostles but the apostles from Jerusalem accept them. The apostles proclaim the "*good news to many villages of the Samaritans*" (8:25) before returning to "*Jerusalem.*"

It is easy to miss that there is no controversy over Philip preaching the kingship of Jesus to the Samaritans. In Luke's day Samaritans were often viewed as what was left of the northern kingdom, Israel. When Philip goes into the ancient capital of the northern kingdom and preaches the good news of Jesus, the Davidic king, they accept it. The apostles, representatives from the "*city of David,*" welcome them. God is keeping his promise. God is reuniting shattered Israel through king Jesus and the Spirit comes to them after the messianic representatives from Jerusalem can facilitate that healing. Restoring and healing all Israel is necessary for Luke for Israel to be the light to the world. Healing Israel, like Jesus healed that lame man, is the picture of what God intends to do to all creation through his people.

### **A Man from Meroe**

Luke tells us that "an angel of the Lord" told Philip to go because "*there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians*" (Acts 8:27). In Luke's day "Ethiopia" was not the "horn of Africa." The horn of Africa did not acquire the name Ethiopia until the twentieth century. This man was from the Kingdom of Meroe (it is known as Cush or Nubia in the Hebrew Bible) in what is now Sudan. Meroe is a thousand miles into the heart of Africa. For comparison,



Meroe is about as far south from the Mediterranean coast as Amarillo, Texas is from Los Angeles on the Pacific coast. Meroe doesn't even appear in most maps in the back of our Bibles. It is truly the "end of the world" in Luke's time.

Somehow this man from the heart of Africa had embraced the God of Israel. He is a proselyte and had traveled a long way to come to Jerusalem (remember the nations would come to worship Yahweh) to worship. As a proselyte he is ethnically a non-Jew who has accepted Israel's God. But sadly, there are barriers to his full inclusion. Eunuchs in the ancient world were made, not born. They were the victims of gross power over another human being. They were often not viewed as fully human being somewhere in between "male" and "female" in the ancient world. Eunuch's could hold considerable clout but they were also slaves.

The man in Acts 8 is, in many ways, like the nameless man in Acts 3:1-2. He is excluded. Salvation came to that man born lame, and he went rejoicing and praising God *in the temple* Because of his healing. The man from Meroe was also excluded because of the *condition of his body*. Those hearing Luke's story have the "music" of Israel playing,

*"Do not let the foreigner joined to the LORD say,  
'The LORD will surely separate me from his people';  
and do not let the eunuch say,  
'I am a dry tree.'  
For thus says the LORD:  
To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths,  
who choose the things that please me  
and hold fast my covenant,  
I will give, in my house [i.e. temple] and within my walls,  
a monument and a name  
better than sons and daughters;  
I will give them an everlasting name  
that shall not be cut off.*

*And let the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD,  
to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD,  
and to be his servants, ...*

*for my house shall be called a house of prayer  
for all peoples.*

*Thus says the LORD God,  
who gathers the outcasts of Israel,  
I will gather others to them  
besides those already gathered”  
(Isaiah 56.3-7)*

Philip encounters the eunuch from the heart of Africa. He heard him reading from Isaiah 53. Perhaps the eunuch identifies with the text because it describes a person that “*in his humiliation justice was denied him*” (Acts 8:33, quoting Isaiah 53:7-8). As a eunuch he, too, was a man that was “*despised and rejected*” and as a slave he often was “*silent*” like a lamb (Isaiah 53:7). Is this why he responds to Philip’s inquiry if he understood what he was reading. “*How can I unless someone explains it. Is he speaking of himself or another?*” (Acts 8:34).

Does the prophet know the pain and ache of one brutalized by others? It is from that very passage often called, the Suffering Servant, Philip shared the good news of Jesus to a lover of God who was *excluded* from full participation with the people of God. The eunuch joyfully embraces the One who so identifies with him. He enters into the water with Philip and is baptized (Acts 8:38).

Salvation has restored him, like the lame man at the Beautiful Gate, he goes on his way rejoicing and worshiping God. The hope of Israel, the Jubilee mission of the Messiah to change the world, is being realized.

## Acts 10-11: Messiah Preached to the Nations #6

### Acts 10:1-46, Two Men

There is something about being devoted to prayer. Not just prayer in general but a set time when all God's people break the daily grind and submit to an alternative clock. Luke stressed that the disciples adhered to a liturgical rhythm: the hour of prayer at the temple. Zechariah, Peter and John, the whole community (Acts 2:42) and now two men both are praying at the "hour of prayer" one at three o'clock (Acts 10:3,30) and one at "noon" (Acts 10:9; cf. Psalm 55:17). One, Cornelius, is visited by angel and the other, Peter, was confronted by a strange vision. God's reality can come crashing into our own, if we but pray.

Cornelius is not the first Gentile follower of Jesus. We actually do not know who was. Luke knew of them before Cornelius. In Acts 11:19-20, Luke gives his hearers a "flashback to aftermath of Stephen's death. The believers were scattered. They took the word of Messiah Jesus with them. They spoke to Jews, except some from Cyprus and Cyrene. They went to Antioch and *"spoke to Greeks proclaiming the Lord Jesus. The hand of the Lord was with them and a great number became believers"* (Act 11:19-20). Like the lame man, Luke lingers on Cornelius. Luke tells the story twice.

Cornelius is not the first gentile for Luke. Rather he is the model of gentile that Luke believes Paul will gather into the kingdom of Israel as God's ambassador to the nations. But it is Peter, not Paul, nor nameless believers in Antioch that Luke will focus on (and Luke may have known who they were).

Cornelius is presented by Luke as a gentile who already worships Israel's God. He, like Peter himself, keeps the hours of prayer – he orders his life according to the rhythm of the temple – and most of all he offers *"alms"* which have *"ascended as a memorial before God"* (Acts 10:4). And though Cornelius is a Roman he is *"well-spoken of by the whole Jewish nation"* (10:22). Cornelius is essentially a Jew without being circumcised on the eighth day. He is not some raw, half-baked, pagan.

It is this *"righteous man"* (10:22) with whom God himself intervenes. During his hour of prayer an angel told him to send for Peter.

Peter, also in the hour of prayer, is on the roof in Joppa and has a vision or dream (Acts 10:9-10). What is in a dream often represents something else. In the vision Peter sees “*all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air*” and a voice commands him to “*eat*.” Three times this happens, each time Peter refuses. The music playing in the background is Ezekiel 4:9-15. There the prophet is commanded to eat bread over human dung but says “*LORD, I have never defiled myself from my youth up until now*” (Ezekiel 4:14). It was to be a symbolic act, Ezekiel refused, God relented. Peter’s protest is that of the prophet. God tells him “*what God has made clean, you must not call profane*” (Acts 10:15). Peter never eats any unclean food.

Suddenly the doorbell rang and men from a Gentile was there to see Peter. They told Peter about the righteous man, a Roman Centurion, that God of Israel had appeared to (in the angel). Peter’s dream is not about animals, it is not about eating, it is about human beings.

Peter got the vision, “*God shows no partiality.*” Peter travels to the home of a Roman, not any Roman. The Roman soldier approved by all the Jewish nation. Peter tells the story of Jesus, sent by God to the people of Israel, bringer of “*peace*.” He delivered those oppressed by the devil. He was crucified but God raised him from the dead. And to the representative of the Roman Empire, Peter declared that Jewish king, the Messiah, “*is Lord of all.*” Forgiveness was to be preached in Jesus’s name (Acts 10:36-43).

As Peter preached to the Roman, something like Pentecost happened. The falling of the Spirit was like another Pentecost. Israel’s “Pentecostal” music had been play since the time of Moses. At Pentecost, the Festival of Weeks, not are we presented with the hope of gracious renewal but the reminder of *Israel’s mission* to be a blessing. Specifically, Pentecost created time and space for the world to be a picture of creation and the world to come, a world with no social, economic, gender fractures. Moses had taught,

“*And you shall make the Festival of Weeks for YHWH your God, contributing a freewill offering of your hands which you shall give just as YHWH your God blesses you. And you shall **rejoice before YHWH your God, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female slave and the Levite who is in your gates, and the alien/stranger/foreigner and the orphan and the widow** who is among you ... And*

*you shall remember that you were slaves in Egypt and you shall diligently observe these statutes” (Deuteronomy 16.10-12, BV).*

The foreigner is explicitly invited to come and sit, and be welcomed, at the table of the Lord with Israelites. Not only them but the poor and powerless. The covenant of love compels us to be a blessing. The story of Ruth, the quintessential gentile – a Moabite – takes place during Weeks and is read by modern Jews on Pentecost.

The Spirit confronts Peter with a vision. Don’t call *human beings* unclean who have been invited by God to sit at his table. Peter directly links what happened at the Centurion’s house to Pentecost. God is accomplishing his purposes even when we are blind.

The king poured out the Spirit forcing Peter’s hand. The Holy Spirit, the very mark of God’s people, fell on Cornelius and company. God welcomed those seeking him based on his grace. So, Peter “*ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ*” (10:42).

### **Acts 11:1-18 Trepidation Leads to Praise**

Gentiles are part of the story of God with Israel from the beginning. Abraham is promised that the nations will be blessed through him (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:15-18). God blessed the whole world through Abraham’s seed in Joseph. Moses told Israel the nations would praise God for the good gracious *torah* (law, instruction) given to them (Deuteronomy 4:5-8). In the Exodus itself, Egyptians were welcome in the moment of salvation (Exodus 12:37). Rahab, Ruth the Moabite, Jonah to the Assyrians, the Psalms routinely call the nations to come join Israel in worship of Yahweh. In Luke’s day there were many stories of gentiles not only joining Israel but welcomed. In the Deuterocanonical book Judith Achior embraces Israel (Judith 6). In Tobit, gentiles are called to come to the temple and worship the God of Israel (Tobit 13). Cornelius himself was held in high regard, as Luke said, “*by the whole Jewish nation*” (10:22). Throughout the Book of Acts we are confronted with “God-fearers” like Cornelius who are welcomed in Jewish synagogues.

Though we can cite the texts and we sing the songs with gusto we still do not quite get it. We tell stories of God’s astonishing surprises – we believe them – we include them in our prayers of thanksgiving. But we fall into the blindness trap. We

talk about what God did but do not have eyes to see what God is doing. We become a victim of what Willie James Jennings calls “the cult of the familiar.”

Many Jews, not all, were more than happy to welcome gentiles. The God of Israel is the God of all they cheerfully affirm. But sometimes “we” welcome “them” on the basis that they become like “us.” This, it seems, is the crux with Cornelius and the issue for both Jews and Gentiles in the Book of Acts. Do Jews have to become like Gentiles? Do gentiles have to become like Jews? Or will the Empire of the Son of David have room for many nations under the banner of the Israelite Messiah?

So, Peter is confronted by believers in Jerusalem. They are understandably disturbed because Peter had such intimate fellowship with *uncircumcised* men of the nations (11:2). They had not become one of us.

This is such a big moment that Luke has Peter repeat what those gathered to hear Acts read already heard. He relates the dream with its strange animals. The command to eat. His refusal to do so. After three times the cloth with animals was pulled to heaven it was “*at that very moment three men from Caesarea*” arrived (11:11). The “*Spirit told me to go with them and not make a distinction between them and us*” (11:12). The vision was not about food but about human beings. Peter testifies that the Holy Spirit fell “*upon them just as it had us at the beginning*” (10:15).

How do you argue with the grace of God? Luke wants us to know that the Jewish believers in Jerusalem “*praised God*” (11:18) for God’s generosity. The word of the Lord had gone out from Zion and the nations are now coming to praise the God of Israel *as the nations*. The restoration of Israel proclaims Yahweh’s never-ending love for the gentiles. And the promise to Abraham will remain. As the apostle Paul will write about it in his Epistle now to the Romans and Ephesians, Gentiles are grafted into Israel and will become “*fellow citizens*” of Israel. Non-Jewish citizens of kingdom of the son of David (Romans 9:11-24; Ephesians 2 19-21). Luke ends his story of the model Gentile with worship, with praise: Jewish praise for Gentile believers.

God’s people will have diversity. They do not become “us.” And we do not become “them.”

## **Acts 11:19-29 Antioch**

Luke now tells us that the word of the Lord has pushed far north out of Jerusalem, far to gentile lands. The Messianic community in Syrian Antioch has roots from the Jewish refugees following the persecution with the death of Stephen. Though this takes place before Cornelius, Luke tells us that story first. The issue of circumcision, not merely gentiles, will be contentious. So, Luke paints a picture, addressing fears and prejudices, of gentiles coming into the kingdom of God. It is this group of believers that will play a vital role in the life of the Pharisee named Saul or Paul.

As a side note, and that is how Luke presents it, Luke says “*it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called ‘Christian.’*” (11:26). In the Book of Acts, Luke has a number of terms that he uses to designate the followers of Messiah Jesus. He acknowledges those followers were labeled “messianics” but he never calls them such. His terms come from the long history of Israel.

### **LUKE’S DESIGNATIONS FOR BELIEVERS**

- The Brothers
- The Disciples
- The Saints
- The Church/Gathered People
- The People (of God)
- The Way

## Acts 9 & 13: Apostolic Pharisee is a Light to the Nations #7

### Finding the Way: “I am Jesus”

*“I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is God’s saving power for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” (Romans 1:16).*

The story of Saul, also called Paul, is a complex one in Luke’s narrative. Luke tells us how Saul became a follower of Jesus three times (9:1-25; 22:3-16; 26:9-18) and each is different. This tells us that our author is not just telling “naked” history. How an author tells a story reflects his or her own point of view. Luke introduces him to his hearers as a young man involved in the violent death of Stephen that resulted in Saul dragging men and women to prison (7:58-8:3).

Luke pulls some surprises for us. Saul is colluding with the high/chief priests (9:1,14) to terrorize disciples in the “*synagogues at Damascus*.” How did people come to accept Jesus in Damascus? These disciples, like those in Judea, remain practicing faithful Jews. They are in the synagogues (more than one apparently). The High Priest has no authority in the slightest over anyone, anywhere, that is not connected to the temple or a synagogue. These Jewish believers are called “*the Way*.”

*“[Saul] asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way ...” (Acts 9:2).*

*“speaking evil of the Way before the congregation ...” (Acts 19:9).*

*“About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way” (Acts 19:23).*

*“I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets” (Acts 24:14).*

*“But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way, put them off ...” (Acts 24:22).*

The term has deep roots in Israel’s scriptures. The Psalter opens with a blessing on those who walk in the “way” of righteousness (Psalm 1:6; the word is used many times in the Psalter). Isaiah speaks of “*Come, let us go up to the mountain of the*



*Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths [ways]” (2:3) which is “the way of the LORD” (40:3). The Way is this claim that “we” are following “the God of our fathers” as Saul will later put it (24:14).*

But Saul never gets to persecute the Way in Damascus. Luke puts it like this,

*“Now as he was going along, and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? He asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ The reply came, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what to do. The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing: so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank” (Acts 9:3-9).*

As Luke relates, Saul has a life-shattering experience. It evokes many traditional lyrics in Israel’s music. Encounters with God, called “theophanies” are often traumatic on the receiving end. One thinks of Isaiah (6:1-13) or Ezekiel,

*“such was the appearance of the splendor all around. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell on my face and I heard the voice of someone speaking. He said to me: O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I heard him speaking to me. He said to me, ‘Mortal, I am sending you to ...” (Ezekiel 1:28-2:2).*

When the risen, and exalted, Jesus (who has ascended to throne after) confronts Saul, as in the case of Isaiah or Ezekiel, it is not condemnation but functions as a *call*. Moses encounters God and is called. Isaiah believes he is undone but is called. Ezekiel is witless but is called. Or as the voice said, *“I am sending you ...”* (Ezekiel 2:2).

That is what Messiah Jesus does to Saul. He sends him to *“bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel. I myself will show him how much he must suffer for my name’s sake”* (9:15-16). Luke eloquently paints the fulfillment of Jesus’s words in the remainder of his story of Saul, also known as Paul.

But why does Luke say this here? Luke does not place all his cards on the table at

once. But here we see that calling of Saul has deep resonances with how God has called powerful prophets from Moses, Miriam, Huldah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and others. They have a life altering encounter with God that calls them to specific missions. At the very beginning of telling Saul's story Luke is characterizing Saul/Paul as a faithful Jew; he is not an apostate. To put it in modern terms he did not change religions. Some of his most challenging words will be in the tradition of Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. Luke saves the greatest surprises of for Saul himself when he says in his own defense, "*I am a Pharisee*" (23:6). He is commissioned to go to gentiles while also bearing witness to Jews.

Saul did not find the Way. The Way, because of the direct intervention of the exalted Messiah Jesus, found and called Saul. Luke places the story of Cornelius after Saul's call. As we learned there the gentile did not become a Jew to be part of the Empire of King Jesus. But Luke is also at pains to show that man most associated with gentiles is not only Jewish but so Jewish he remains a Pharisee. Saul in himself becomes the embodiment of Israel's original *calling*, they are a light to the nations (13:47; Isaiah 49:1-7). The restoration of Israel holds within itself, preserving and sanctifying, the glorious diversity of the creator God, the God of our fathers, the God of Israel. God is honoring the words of Simeon when he prophesied,

*"my eyes have seen your salvation,  
which you have prepared in the presence of all the peoples/nations,  
a light to the Gentiles  
and for glory to your people Israel."* (Luke 2:31-32).

## **Acts 13-14: Light Breaks Forth**

### ***Cyprus***

Once again, our author grounds a major turning point in gathered worship. The church at Antioch is blessed with prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon, Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, and Saul. Antioch will become a major base for Saul's mission but Luke has noted its roots are from Jerusalem and its leaders are Jewish. Indeed, two of the leaders are a Levite (Barnabas, cf. 4:36) and a Pharisee (Saul). We should probably understand Acts 13:1-4 not as a single worship gathering but discernment resulting from a period of prophetic and teaching activity in the context of gathered worship.

*“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.” (13:2-3).*

The Holy Spirit points back to the words of Jesus. Paul was called by the Messiah to a work. Though Luke has told us in his “flashback” there are already believers in Cyprus (11:19), Barnabas and Saul, accompanied by John Mark (13:5) choose head to Cyprus from where Barnabas came (Acts 4:36). *“When they arrived as Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues to the Jews” (13:5).* The party runs into a “false prophet named Bar-Jesus” who opposed them. Paul called him a “son of the devil” and he was struck blind. The fruit of this encounter was that a Roman official, Sergius Paulus, embraced a Lord other than Caesar (13:12).

Luke hardly offers a play-by-play account of Barnabas and Saul. Brief vignettes usually highlight the mission team going first to synagogues and then some other interesting things. Now called Paul (13:9), Saul often finds his most fruitful harvest from God-fearers, gentiles like Cornelius.

### ***Antioch of Pisidia***

Of all the messengers of King Jesus Luke lingers longest on Paul’s time in Antioch of Pisidia in modern day Turkey. From this we what Paul preached. If we recall from our first lesson that Luke tells the story from and through the scriptures of Israel, then Paul’s sermon is no surprise. The Way believes, teaches and lives according to those scriptures according to Luke. Barnabas and Paul honor the sabbath day by attending the service. They listen attentively to the *“reading of the law and the prophets” (13:15).*

Barnabas and Paul are invited to preach a sermon by the rulers of the synagogue (13:15, cf. Hebrews 13:22). Leaders of the synagogue do not invite just anyone to preach a sermon any more than modern elders in a local congregation. These two men are recognizably Jewish, a Levite and a Pharisee, with their tzitzit and phylacteries. Paul becomes the designated speaker. He addresses himself to both “Israelites” and “God-fearers” (13:16, 26). The sermon may be outlined in this way:

- History of Israel (13:16-22)
- Summary of Jesus’s mission and crucifixion (13:23-29)
- God bodily raised Jesus from the dead (13:30-41)

The sermon is about “the God of this people Israel” (13:17) has done. He chose our ancestors; he made them great in Egypt; he led them out; he “put up with them” in the wilderness; he destroyed the nations of Canaan; he gave the land; he gave them judges; God gave them Saul; he removed Saul; he made David king. And “from this man’s posterity God has brought to Israel, a Savior, Jesus, as he promised” (13:17-24).

Sadly, Paul notes that the leaders did not “recognize him or understand the words of the prophets” (13:26). Paul is not an outsider looking in; he is an insider addressing insiders. We need to hear Paul’s words with lament. Luke has just told his hearers that Jesus himself said to Paul, “why do you persecute me?”

But Paul’s sermon is not a sermon of defeat. The God of Israel will not be and cannot be defeated. Jesus prayed “Father forgive them for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). This God who has directed the history of Israel to this point, knew the people would act in ignorance and be misled by the powerful. Rejection was fulfilling prophecy! (13:27). But the God of this people Israel “raised him up from the dead.” Like Peter on Pentecost, Paul stresses the physicality of the bodily resurrection, even citing the same lyrics from Israel’s music (10:35; cf. 2:25-28; Psalm 16:10). “You will not let your Holy One see corruption” (13:35,37). Every time resurrection is mentioned in Acts, Luke is pointing back to Jesus standing before the disciples holding out his hands and feet saying, “touch me and see, do ghosts have flesh and bones as you see I have” (Luke 24:38-39).

But God not only raised Jesus from the dead but exalted him as king. Just as Peter quoted Psalm 110 on Pentecost, Paul the Pharisee quotes the enthronement announcement in Psalm 2 where the Davidic king is declared to be God’s son and will inherit the nations.

Paul’s sermon was favorably received according to Luke. The preaching duo was invited to stay in town and preach next sabbath. Luke notes “many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed them” and were urged to “continue in the grace of God.” (13:43).

Here we find the fruit of Paul’s work to renew of Israel with both ethnic Jews and non-Jews.

But Barnabas and Paul’s time in Antioch of Pisidia ends with a foreboding. Some Jews later get angry and cause trouble. This is clearly not all Jews because, Luke just told us “many Jews” embraced the message of God. But we have a

foreshadowing of some dire days ahead. Paul quotes Isaiah 49:6 which has deep creational and missional significance to the identity of Israel. Even when some Jews resist – that is part of the story after all – the purposes of God cannot be defeated. Israel’s mission will be fulfilled. That is why God called a Pharisee.

“I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles,  
so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth” (Acts 13:47).

Trouble is brewing though. Luke’s theme really is God’s renewal his people Israel through his Messiah Jesus and the Spirit he poured out. This renewal will redeem the nations through Israel. But the son of David’s Empire will include both Jews and the nations. Together they will bend the knee to King Jesus Israelites and Gentiles all bending the knee to Jesus whom God raised from the dead. Just how this works out remains to be seen.

## Acts 15: Messiah's Diversity (Diverse Kingdom) #8

### The Story Thus Far

Luke's story is how Jesus of Nazareth, a man crucified by the Romans, became king of Israel and Lord of the nations. That message focuses on the resurrection and how the hope of Israel is proclaimed in the city of Caesar himself, Rome. There are many insights we would like to have that Luke decides not to tell us. But we know that when gentiles believed in the Lord Jesus in Antioch, there is no indication that any of the Jewish believers insisted they become circumcised (11:19-24).

Luke likes to linger on events that are important to him. We have seen this with the saved lamed man (Acts 3-4). We observed it with the call of Saul (9:1-19; 22:3-16; 26:9-18). We noticed it with Cornelius (Acts 10-11; 15:6-11). And we will see it with the so called "Apostolic Decree" the contents of which Luke relates not once, not twice, but three times (15:19-20; 15:23-29; 21:25).

After Peter defended his action of receiving Cornelius as essentially another Pentecost rather than insisting Cornelius be circumcised, the Jewish believers "praised God" (11:18). Throughout chapters 13 and 14, Luke related Barnabas and Paul's mission to Jews and gentles, especially God-fearers. But in Antioch, "certain individuals" came from Judea and insisted that "unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved" (15:1). In a classic understatement Luke declares "no small dissension" broke out.

### Decision in Jerusalem (15:1-15)

The church in Antioch respond to the crises by deputizing Paul, Barnabas "and some others" to go up to Jerusalem to confer with the Jerusalem church. Most New Testament scholars believe Paul wrote his Letter to the Galatians insisting that *gentiles* are not to be circumcised just prior to the events in Acts 15. Looking back on this matter millennia later we may be surprised that Galatians did not settle the matter, and according to Luke, it was not Paul nor even Peter who crafted a solution the church embraced.

“Great joy” is the response of most of the Jewish believers in Phoenicia and Samaria at the reports of gentile conversion. Some believers, Pharisees, insisted that gentiles must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses (15:5). Modern readers are taken aback learning that Pharisees believed that Jesus was the Messiah and that he was raised from the dead. The issue as Luke frames it is “Can people like Cornelius be citizens of Israel?” Four lead the discussion: Peter, Barnabas, Paul, and James.

After brief accounts by Peter, Barnabas and Paul, Luke focuses upon James. We first met James at 12:17 with no introduction. He has no introduction here. Biblical scholar Jacob Jervell noted James “is the only character in Acts whose authority no one questions.” James “the Lord’s brother” (Galatians 1:19) was not a believer during Jesus’s ministry but, like Paul, encountered the resurrected Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:7; cf. is among Jesus’s family in the 120, Acts 1:14).

### **David’s Dynasty Returns (15:12-17)**

In Luke’s account, James has heard, and grasped, the music of Israel. Yahweh has “taken a people for his name” from among the gentiles. As Luke has stressed repeatedly the scriptures of Israel interpret the present, and this is true for James. Rather than a threat, the coming of the gentiles is a blessing because this means the God of Israel has at last kept his promise, that is, God has *restored David’s empire*. Amos provides the answers for James,

“After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David which has fallen;  
from its ruins I will rebuild it, and I will set it up,  
so that all other peoples may seek the Lord--

## **Important Dates**

4 BC Birth of Jesus of Nazareth

30 AD Crucifixion and  
Resurrection of Jesus

33 AD Resurrected Jesus calls  
Saul

AD 36 Paul’s first Jerusalem  
visit (Acts 9:26-30; Galatians  
1:18-24)

AD 36-46 Barnabas and Saul in  
Antioch

AD 47-48 First Missionary  
Journey

AD 48 Peter in Antioch

AD 48 Galatians

AD 48 Jerusalem Council (Acts  
15)

AD 49 Claudius expels Jews  
from Rome

AD 49 Second Missionary  
Journey

AD 52/3 Third Missionary  
Journey

AD 53 First Corinthians

AD 56 Second Corinthians

AD 57 Romans

AD 57-59 Paul in Jerusalem for  
Pentecost and Imprisoned

AD 60-62 Paul in Rome

AD 62 Death of James

AD 64 Death of Paul

even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called.” (Acts 15:16-17, citing Amos 9:11-13 in the Septuagint).

The God of Israel promised to rebuild the “tent,” the house or “dynasty” of David from the rubble it had fallen. In an act of gracious faithfulness to the promise to David, God will act, “I will rebuild it.” James interprets the text in light of the reality of the gentiles believing in Jesus as the Messiah of Israel attested by Cornelius and the ministry of Paul and Barnabas. David was not just king of Israel; David was Lord of an empire that included many non-Israelites. Now, just as scripture had promised gentiles are “turning to God” (15:19). The gentiles, in Amos, do not become Israelites in David’s restored kingdom. Jesus is Israel’s Messiah and Lord of the nations. There must be nations for him to be Lord of. The church is the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, to David, in the person of his son, Jesus of Nazareth.

### **Restored Israel is Creation Healed (15:19-21)**

Jewish believers will not become gentiles. Likewise, gentiles do not need to be circumcised (become Jews) to be citizens of the kingdom of King Jesus. But something is required. Under the leadership of James, the church decided on diversity within unity. Salvation means healing; Luke showed that with the lame man in Acts 3-4. Luke highlighted that cultural diversity at Pentecost when the healing reign of God was embraced by people who heard the message in their own, not the same, language.

James accepts that gentiles are saved since through faith in King Jesus. Salvation is healing God’s world not just a personal relationship. A divided Israel cannot be the picture of the world to come. Thus unity, a fellowship of difference within unity, is James’s goal. Paul agreed. In another letter Paul will say that gentiles have become “fellow citizens” (not replacement citizens) of Israel with the “saints” (Jews). And the church, under Messiah Jesus, is the place on earth where the creator God’s rich creational diversity is brought together into shalom. Jews remained Jews and gentiles were gentiles yet one in king Jesus (Ephesians 2:18; 3:6,9-10).



How can Jewish believers and gentile believers have table fellowship? Gentiles must abstain from four practices that, interestingly enough, come from the law of Moses.

- Things defiled by idols
- Sexual immorality
- Meat improperly killed
- Blood

Three of the four are related to food, idolatry and taking life. Avoiding sexual immorality is a deeply rooted concern with paganism. These are often interrelated in the Roman Empire. The background for these rules is found in Leviticus 17-18 where the law regulates the behavior of resident aliens that live in the land with Israel (cf. Leviticus 17:8-9; 18:6-23,26; 17:10,12-13; 17:8-9).

James explicitly grounds, as Luke has done all along, the requirements on believing gentiles in Moses. “For in every city, for generations past, Moses has had those who proclaim him, for he is read aloud every sabbath in the synagogues” (Acts 15:21). Only what the law itself binds upon gentiles will be bound upon them. Given their faith in Israel’s king and their living like Cornelius is sufficient for fellowship; even for *some* Pharisees who go beyond the text with their interpretations.

### **A Letter and Circumcision (15:22-16:5)**

The Jerusalem Council was a remarkable gathering. Through prayer, seeking God’s will and Bible study the Way discerned the music in Israel’s songs. They knew Jesus had been bodily raised and exalted. They could not deny the experience of the Holy Spirit given by the king. As the disciples in Acts 4 found themselves in the story in Psalm 2, so now at a fresh crossroads Luke tells us the disciples gathered and did the same. Israel’s scriptures were, in the words of Hebrews, “living and active” and the Spirit was speaking “today” (cf. Hebrews 4:7,12).

Though led by Peter, Barnabas, Paul, and most of all James this was a communal decision. “The apostles and the elders, with the consent of the whole church” chose representatives to travel to Antioch, bearing a communal letter, with the *church’s* position. The letter repeats the contents of James’s speech (15:23-29). Judas and

Silas are chosen to accompany Paul and Barnabas; they carried the letter and would read it to the assembly. Antioch would model unity within diversity.

But God's people, whether before Jesus or after, remain enmeshed with the forces of the world that vandalize God's world. Division is the surest sign of cancer in the camp. This is what we find in the aftermath of the council. Not in Antioch but between Barnabas and Paul themselves.

The two apostles (cf. 14:14) had decided to return to the fields and encourage the gentile believers. They too may have been concerned about the issues discussed in Jerusalem. Luke does not sugar coat it. "There was a huge row, which resulted in them splitting up" (15:39, NTFE). Barnabas took John Mark back to Cyprus and Paul took Silas through Syria and Cilicia.

While on this trip modern Turkey's interior, Paul encounters a gifted young man named Timothy. Timothy, according to 2 Timothy, came from a devout line of Jewish women who had taught him the scriptures from his youth (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-16). But Timothy's father was a gentile which left Timothy's status an open question. Was he a Jew? Was he a gentile? For disciples, at least since Martin Luther, Paul's decision to settle the matter by circumcising Timothy has been troubling. This is fueled by antisemitic ideas projected onto the biblical text and distorted readings of Galatians.

According to Luke, the Council had just ruled, agreeing with Galatians, that gentiles are not to be circumcised. Galatians is read as if Paul rejects circumcision and thus ethnicity. But this is a highly selective even distorted reading of Paul. The Jerusalem Council did not remove circumcision from Jews. This is why Luke relates the contents of the decree three times. Timothy's mother being Jewish made Timothy Jewish. Growing up with a Greek father simply made him an uncircumcised Jew, an anomaly. Paul the rabbi, the Pharisee, agreed with the Jerusalem Council. Thus, he circumcised Timothy for the reason he states in Romans, not Galatians, "Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way" (Romans 3:1-2).

Luke tells this story of Timothy to anticipate charges leveled against Paul. The rumor was that Paul taught Jews not to circumcise their sons. Luke destroys the claim; James tosses it as a false charge (Acts 21:20-26).

## **Messianic Diversity**

Luke is adamant that the Messiah is a Jew, he is the son of David. The very faithfulness of God is at stake. The Messiah belongs to Israel, and there is not and never can be a Messiah that is not Israel's. The Messiah is the King of Israel. He reigns in David's restored empire. In the God of Israel's purposes, he was mysteriously crucified only to be raised and exalted to the throne. The mission of the Peter and Paul – everyone in the Way – was to proclaim the king to the ends of the earth so now the nations would come and acknowledge the true God and his king. This work of “universal restoration” to which the church is a harbinger is not the obliteration of the rich variety of creation but its unification under a Jewish king. The church – the assembly of Israel – embrace gentiles without becoming Jews. And Jewish followers of the king remain as Jewish as he himself.

Such diversity is always a challenge. Such diversity comes not only in languages but in expressions of worship and other rituals. Circumcision was not a small matter. James, Paul, and certainly Luke experienced the challenges of unity rather than uniformity, just as we do today.

## **Reflections**

- 1) How can communal prayer, worship and Bible study help us discern our place in God's story?
- 2) What kind of challenges do the Jerusalem Decree present modern-day disciples?
- 3) Does the Holy Spirit still work in God's world to open they eyes of Christ followers?

# Acts 21-28: Messiah's Pharisee to Jerusalem and Rome #9

## The Story So Far

“I was glad when they said to me,  
‘Let us go to the house of the LORD!’  
Our feet are standing  
within your gates, O Jerusalem”  
(Psalm 122:1).

Luke tells a Jewish story of the Messiah's people, The Way. It is Israel's story after all. Even in the gentile mission the leadership is Jewish. Scholar Brad East noted “there is not a single gentile leader of the church, anywhere, in any city, with what you might call (like a drama or film) ‘a speaking part.’” Put differently, in the book of Acts, the only named “speaking role” leaders of the church are Jews – whether apostles, deacons, prophets, missionaries, evangelists, teachers, elders or other.” Those with Greek sounding names like Stephen, Philip, Silas or Apollos “were to a man Jews and Luke is keen to ensure we know it.” In the last third of Acts we learn that the engine behind the gentile mission is not only a faithful Jew but a Pharisee. Luke is telling the story of Israel's God and Israel's mission to be a blessing to the nations.

The last third of Acts focuses on an unusual defense of Paul. We find ourselves back in Jerusalem for Pentecost. We hear the words of the Jerusalem Decree again. The music of Israel, the scriptures, are prominent. Paul recalls his calling by Jesus. Ultimately, Paul sails to Rome and meets Jews rather than Caesar.

## Pentecost (Acts 21)

Paul is in Jerusalem for Pentecost because of his deliberate decision. “Paul resolved in the Spirit to go ... to Jerusalem” (19:10). Luke withholds Paul's motivation until the apostle by passes his beloved church in Ephesus for lack of time, Paul “wanted to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost” (20:16).

Paul's entourage arrived in Caesarea where he connected with Philip for several days. We can only imagine the conversations Paul had with the women prophets there. Luke reminds us of Peter's Pentecostal promise that young women and old

men would be prophets, Philip “had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy” (21:9; cf. 2:17-18; Joel 2:28-29).

Paul, and Luke himself, arrived in Jerusalem and “the brothers welcomed us warmly” (21:17). There is no controversy over the gentile mission of Paul and his coworkers. Rather, praise and thanksgiving results. “Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. When they heard this, they praised God” (21:19-20). Pentecost is, as we have previously seen, about God graciously giving himself in Jesus, God renews the people of Israel and blessing the nations. The oneness of God’s renewed people is important.

But rumors fly around about Paul. There are always rumors but the rumors are not about the gentile mission. They are about what Paul has taught *Jews*. Reading Acts 21-28 we search in vain for criticism of the gentile mission. What did Paul teach Jews in the Diaspora?

“You see brother how many thousands of believers there are among the Jews and they are zealous for the law. They have been told about you that you teach all the Jews living among the Gentiles to forsake Moses and that you tell them not to circumcise their children or observe the customs” (21:21).

James and the leadership dismiss the rumors. Luke’s story has given the lie to the rumors. However, rumors led to disunity among God’s people. Neither Paul nor James will be party to division among the people. Paul, after all, had just written his magnificent letter to the Romans where he waxes eloquently on two themes important in Acts, that is Israel still matters (Romans 9-11) and diversity within unity (cf. Romans 14-15). The rumors are false.

“We have four brothers who are under a vow. Join these men, go through the rite of purification with them and pay for the shaving of their heads. Then all will know that there is nothing to what they have heard about you but that you yourself observe and guard the law” (21:23-24).

Paul gladly joins. He “took the men the next day having purified himself, he entered the temple with them, making public the completion of the days of purification when the sacrifice would be made” (21:26).

Many modern disciples have been troubled by Paul's actions (without commenting on James and the Jerusalem church). But according to Luke this is nothing unusual for Paul. Paul always observed the sabbath (17:2). He had a habit of taking Nazarite vows (18:18). He purposefully "in the Spirit" determined to attend Pentecost (19:21; 20:16). He circumcised Jewish men living among gentiles (16:2-3). Luke leaves the biggest surprises not to his narrative but from Paul's own lips, "I am a Pharisee, a son of a Pharisee" (23:6). Paul does not say "I used to be a Pharisee." As Luke tells the story, James's evaluation of Paul was spot on. Paul always goes to the temple when he is in Jerusalem. That is also, Luke has informed us where the Way has met all along.

According to Paul's own testimony, the apostle as Luke had made clear in the narrative, had come to Jerusalem for the purpose of worship. "As you can find out, it is not more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship ... I came to bring alms to my nation and to offer sacrifices" (24:11, 17).

Acts 21 is no anomaly. Rather James and Paul demonstrate the profound unity within the "rebuilt house of David" (15:16-17). And the music of Israel is playing for Luke. At the original Pentecost, Sinai, Yahweh graciously invited the redeemed slaves into a covenant of love and promised them "the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom" (Exodus 19.1-5). Paul, not only a son of Israel but a Pharisee no less is the embodiment of Israel's mission to be a kingdom of priests and light to the nations (Isaiah 49:1-7).

Paul, defending Jewish and gentile liturgical diversity (Romans 14-15,) clearly understood his mission as the embodiment of Israel's priestly task. Luke could be looking at Romans 14-15 as he composed this magnificent section of Acts. Paul told the Romans,

"I have written boldly by way of reminder of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Messiah Jesus to the Gentiles in *the priestly service of the gospel, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit*" (Romans 15:15-16).

As Luke sees it, Paul, as the Jewish representative of the gentiles in the kingdom of God brings on Pentecost, alms – the collection of the gentiles – and sacrifices, to

worship God. What James suggested as a matter of unity is what Paul had planned all along. That is why he wanted to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.

### **Arrest and Defense (Acts 21-26)**

While Paul was offering his sacrifice in the temple trouble erupted. The trouble is not with Jewish believers. The scuffle was not started by local Jews. It was “Jews from Asia,” (21:27; 24:19). These folks “seized Paul” because of their previous encounters with him (cf. Acts 19). These Asian Jews charged Paul with four things: teaches against Jews; the law; the temple; and brought Greeks into the sanctuary (21:28). These charges are repeated to Felix by the chief priests and their lawyer Tertullus in 24:4-5.

The charges sound like the false rumors James acknowledged. New Testament scholar Jacob Jervell has noted that, surprisingly, “none of the charges allude to the Gentile mission (Jacob Jervell, *The Theology of the Book of Acts*, p.91). Paul is essentially charged with being an apostate. He attacks Moses, the temple, tells Jews not to circumcise their children and dares to bring a gentile into the inner courts (gentiles were welcomed into the Court of the Gentiles in Herod’s temple). The Roman overlords of Judea could not care less about the issues of Jewish faith and practice. This was a Jewish matter.

Paul defends himself in a series of speeches designed to refute the charges. The hearers of Acts already know the charges are false – Paul is no apostate; he is a Pharisee. In these speeches, Theophilus and his fellow believers learn surprising facts about Paul previously unrevealed in the Acts.

- Paul received his religious education in Jerusalem under the tutelage of the legendary Pharisee Gamaliel and became an expert in the law.
- Paul zealously persecuted the Way.
- Paul’s encounter with the resurrected and exalted Jesus who called him to service as the King’s emissary to the nations.

As we listen to Paul we learn the charges are not only false but bogus.

- Paul comes from a line of Pharisees and is still a Pharisee
- Paul believes everything that is written in the law, the prophets, the psalms and worships “the God of our ancestors.”

- Paul expressly denies the charges “I have in no way committed an offense against the law of the Jews, or against the temple, or against the emperor.” Rather than being against the temple, Paul reveals a new detail through the music of Israel’s scriptures. Paul bears witness to the crowd that in the sacred space of the temple, where his false accusers stood that he experienced a vision like Isaiah himself in which the exalted Lord, not Yahweh but Messiah Jesus commissioned him to “Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles” (Acts 22:21; cf. Isaiah 6:1-13). Sending Paul from the temple to the nations is but another truth of the story of Israel, “For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.” The result being “many nations shall stream to it” (Isaiah 2:1-4).

Why was Paul on trial then, according to Paul? Here Luke ties the story back to first Pentecost in Acts 2. The crux of the matter is the resurrection of the dead.

- “I am on trial concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead” (23:6).
- “It is about the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today” (24:21).
- “I have belonged to the strictest sect of our religion and lived as a Pharisee. And now I stand here on trial on account of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors, a promise that our twelve tribes hope to attain as they earnestly worship day and night. It is for this hope ... I stand accused by Jews!” (26:5-7).

The resurrection of the dead is nothing more and nothing less than “the hope of Israel” (28:20).

### **The Ends of the Earth (Acts 27-28)**

A murderous plot is revealed to kill Paul, and after some time, he appeals to Ceaser. After an exciting narrative worthy of Homer’s *Odyssey* filled with storms, snakebites and shipwrecks Paul’s entourage arrives at the ends of the earth, Rome. Disciples in Rome came to greet him at “the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns” (28:15). Paul is treated surprisingly well. He is allowed to live by himself. There is no hint that he is chained to a Roman soldier as is often imagined. He entertains guests.



Paul appealed to Caesar but his voyage to Rome brings him not to the emperor but to Jews (28:17ff). The Jewish leaders have heard nothing of Paul from Jerusalem. As throughout his defense in Jerusalem, Paul bears witness to the Jewish leaders “I had no charge to bring against my nation.”

Paul proclaimed the hope of Israel, the salvation of God and the kingdom of God and of the “Lord Jesus Messiah.” Here the Messianic Pharisee is preaching, as he did in the opening of his epistle, that there was “another king” who was the “descendant of David” as he had told the Philippians (17:7; Romans 1:1-3). Ceaser is not king, and his empire is not his. The kingdom is the God of Israel’s and his Messiah, the Lord Jesus.

Some Jews believed according to Luke’s testimony, some did not. And Paul quotes from Isaiah’s call in the temple, which Paul’s own call echoed, God’s people are ever hearing but often never understanding (Acts 28:26-27 citing Isaiah 6:9-10).

Luke’s ending of his two-volume story of the restoration and renewal of Israel strikes many as a mystery. He just sort of leaves us with a cliffhanger. But this is likely shaped also by the scriptures of Israel.

Luke tells his story as part of the ongoing story of God in, with and through the law, the prophets and the psalms. Paul is a major character in Luke’s story, but the story is not about Peter, James or Paul. It is like Star Wars. It is easy, especially when the story is read piecemeal, to think it is about Luke Skywalker and he is the hero. But the story is about Anakin and his redemption. Every character has meaning in relation to that purpose. The story Luke tells from Luke 1 to Acts 28 is the story of what the God of Israel is doing to keep his promises to Abraham, David, and Israel. Peter, James and Paul have important roles in bringing about the renewal of God’s people and the mission for which they were called.

The story is not over. The endings of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles seem to shape Luke’s ending. Jehoiachin, exiled son of David in the Babylonian Empire, is suddenly sat at the emperor’s table and treated kindly. The narrative ended with hope. God was not done with his people as the Chronicler and Luke’s audience well know. Second Chronicles ends with a remembrance of the word of the prophet Jeremiah. Cyrus, king of another empire, is stirred by the Lord bears witness to the God of Israel who told him to “build him a house at Jerusalem.” And

the invitation is given “Let him go up” (2 Chronicles 36:22-23). We are left hanging in both Kings and Chronicles, but God’s purposes testified in the prophets will come to fruition. Acts ends in the heart of another empire and the real king is being proclaimed. Hope, the hope of Israel, is how Luke ends. God is never done with his people. His people have a mission. And the nations are invited to confess the king and join the mission. Luke affirms:

- The Same God, *the God of Israel*.
- The Same Promise, *the Promises to Abraham, David & Israel*.
- The Same Mission, *the Mission for which Israel was created*.
- The Same People, *Renewed*.

## **Reflections**

- How could Paul’s sacrifice in Acts 21 speak to arguments about worship in our contemporary setting?
- How does Luke’s story help us think about the faithfulness of God?
- What is the significance of Paul being a Pharisee and an apostle for Messiah Jesus?
- Why do you think Luke ends Acts as he does?

## Resources for Reading Luke-Acts

Jacob Jervell, *Luke and the People of God*

Isaac W. Oliver, *Torah as Praxis after 70 CE: Reading Matthew and Luke-Acts as Jewish Texts*

Mark S. Kinzer, *Jerusalem Crucified, Jerusalem Risen*

N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Acts*

Carl Holladay, *Acts: A Commentary* (New Testament Library)

William H. Willimon, *Acts, Interpretation Commentary*

Willie James Jennings, *Acts: A Theological Commentary*

These works will provide the most current views on Luke-Acts. They likewise offer different perspectives from one another.

THE RESTORATION INITIATIVE

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