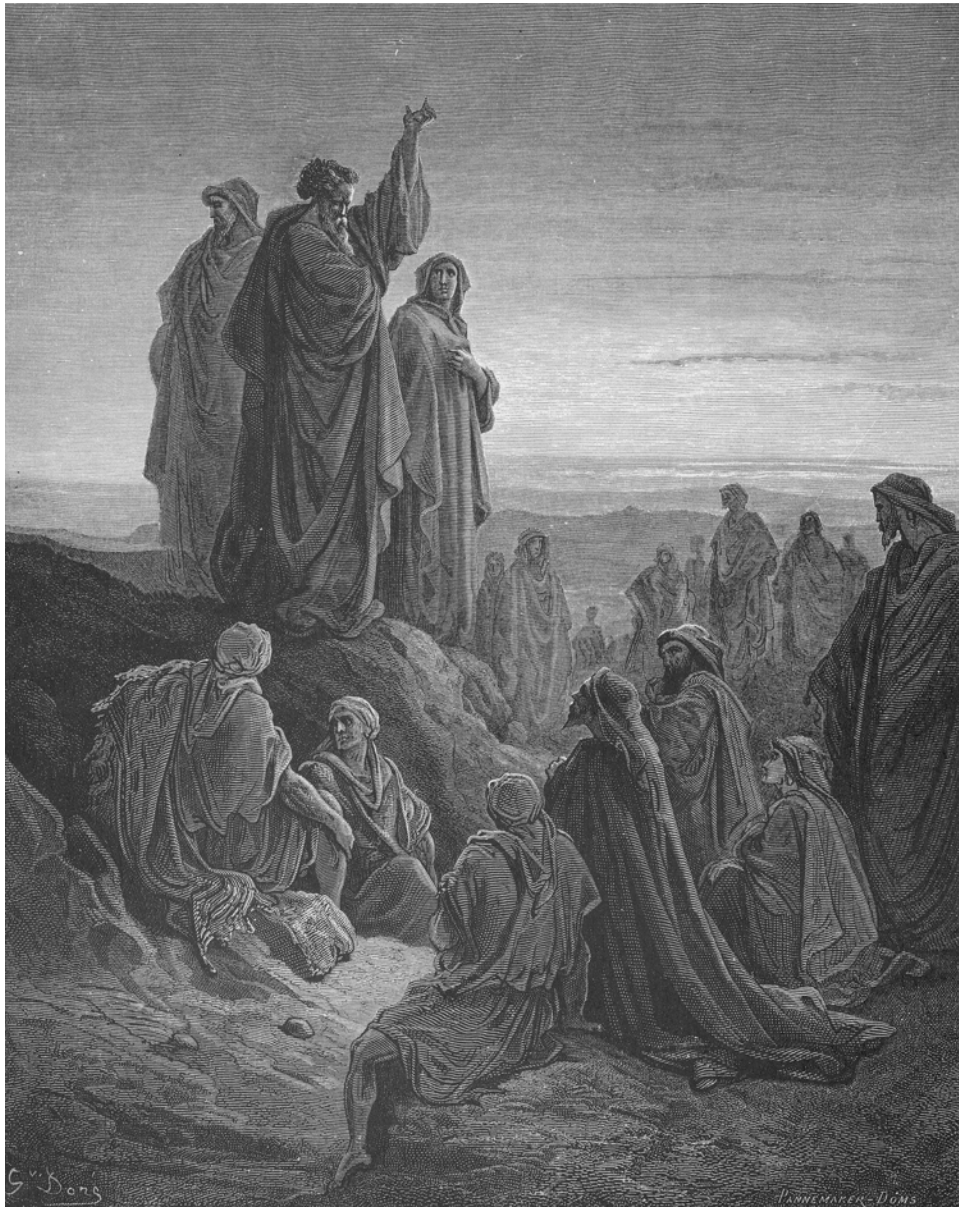


SOUTH WALES Young People's Group

The ACTS of the APOSTLES
Study Notes



“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” Mark 16:15

Introduction

This year the SWYPG committee has decided to do an experiment for the monthly Friday night classes. It is all too easy to turn up to SWYPG without knowing what the talk is on and having thought nothing about the subject, then to listen to a good talk for 45 minutes and soon forget all about it. How many SWYPG talks do you remember?

To get more out of these evenings, SWYPG have provided some study notes to be completed before (and to be brought to) each monthly meeting. The study notes are by no means taxing or exhaustive, they are designed to point out a few things in the chapter under consideration to provide a foundation and prepare our minds appropriately for these meetings.

We hope these notes will be beneficial and will encourage us to search out the scriptures diligently and to practice rightly dividing the words of truth. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word".

Acts 1 – ‘The Ascension and Commission’

Acts chapter 1 describes the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ into heaven and the commission of the apostles to go forth and preach the gospel to the whole world.

Before his death Jesus prophesied of his ascension to the disciples but they were troubled by his words (John 14 v 1) as they contemplated being left alone without their master whom they loved, “yet a little while I am with you...with I go, ye cannot come” (John 13 v 33). However, Jesus comforted them not only with the reassuring promise of his return to the earth (John 14 v 2, 3) but also with the promise of another advocate (John 14 v 16); the Holy Spirit that would come upon them, which was the spirit of truth that would assist them on their great work that was soon to commence, the work of the proclamation of the gospel, which is the subject matter of the Acts of the Apostles. After 40 days Jesus had ascended to heaven and the second of these promises was fulfilled in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter 2.

As witnesses of the resurrection, the apostles were to preach repentance and remission of sins through Christ (Luke 24 v 47). The Holy Spirit gifts were fundamental to assisting this work.

Structure of Acts 1

- Verse 1-2: The subject matter of the ‘former treatise’ (Luke’s Gospel) is defined, as ‘all that Jesus began to do and to teach until he ascended to heaven’.
- Verse 3-8: The apostles as witnesses of the resurrection, and their commission to preach the gospel.
- Verse 9-11: The ascension of Jesus.
- Verse 12-14: The disciples worshipping in Jerusalem.
- Verse 15-22: Peter’s speech regarding Judas and the appointment of another apostle.
- Verse 23-26: The appointment of Matthias by lot.

Acts 1: Questions

Verse 1. The generally accepted author of the Acts of the Apostles is Luke, so the ‘former treatise’ here refers to the Gospel of Luke which was also written to Theophilus (Luke 1 v 1). This verse states that the subject matter of the first treatise (the Gospel) was ‘all that Jesus began both to do and to teach’. Does this mean that the second treatise ‘Acts’, is in some way a continuation or accomplishment of the deeds and teaching of Jesus? If so, in what way?

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Verse 2. What commandments did Jesus give the apostles before his ascension?

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Verse 3. This verse emphasizes the certainty of the disciple’s testimony of the resurrection. They witnessed Jesus alive after his death, who ‘shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs’. For a similar passage see 1 Cor 15 v 1-8. Note the language which establishes the certainty of the resurrection:

- Shewed himself alive. Look up the word ‘shewed’ in Strongs. What does it mean? How else is it translated?

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- Infallible proofs
- Being seen
- Speaking of the Kingdom of God

The credentials of the apostles as witnesses of the resurrection are further established in Acts 10 where we read, not only did they see and speak to Jesus but “did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead” (Acts 10 v 41).

Verse 4. Where in the Gospels did Jesus give this commandment? What is ‘the promise of the father’ and what was its purpose (Luke 24 and John 14 v 16 – cp 16 v 16)? Context (Acts 1v 5) gives the answer. Where else in the early chapters of Acts is this promise referred to? (For an interesting read on this subject see ‘Spirit in the New Testament’ by Carr and Whittaker)

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Verse 5. What does it mean to be baptized with the Holy Spirit? Where in the Gospels is this baptism referred to?

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Verse 8. How many times in Acts does the Greek word translated ‘witnesses’ occur? How else is it translated? How is the apostles’ witness an example to us?

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Verses 9-11. "This same Jesus shall so come in like manner". In what way will the 2nd return of Jesus be like his ascension? Provide evidence in your answer.

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Verses 12-14. Immediately after the disciples witnessed the ascension of Jesus they returned to the upper room in Jerusalem to worship. Luke's Gospel says they "returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God" (Luke 24 v 52-53). Acts 1 v 14 states that they "continued with one accord in prayer and supplication". (a) The English phrase 'one accord' is a single word in the Greek, *homothumadon* which is a compound of which 2 Greek words? (b) 'One accord' is a very interesting phrase that is unique to the Acts of the Apostles. It is often used in relation to the worship of the early ecclesia. What is the meaning/sense of the word and what can we learn from the example of the 1st century Brethren and Sisters?

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Verses 15-22. (a) What Old Testament passages are quoted in this section? (b) Verse 18 states that Judas "purchased a field with the reward of iniquity". What does this refer to? Who else is said to have gained a reward for his iniquity (clue, 2 Peter. Look up 'reward')?

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Verses 23-26. The disciples recognized that it was Gods choice which of Matthias or Joseph Barsabas should become an apostle, so they prayed to God to give an answer putting their trust in him. How should this example guide us when we have difficult decisions to make?

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Acts 2 – ‘Peter’s Speech’

Acts chapter 2 is a pivotal chapter in scripture as it introduces to us a new epoch in the purpose of God. The 1st advent of the Lord Jesus had concluded and within 40 years of his ascension Jerusalem would be destroyed by the Romans and its people taken into captivity (‘the end of Judah’s commonwealth’ in AD70). In the Lord’s Olivet Prophecy, Jesus prophesied that before this end could come, the gospel should first be preached to the whole Roman world (Mat 24 v 14 + Mk 13 v 10). Acts chapter 2 documents the start of this great work of proclamation as one of the ‘keys of the kingdom of heaven’ is used by Peter to open the door of opportunity to the Jews. The second half of Acts has to do with the opening of the door of faith to the Gentiles (Acts 14 v 27). Several years before AD70 this work of proclamation to Jew and Gentile was accomplished; “...the Gospel, which ye have heard, which was preached to every creature which is under heaven” (Col 1 v 23).

In Acts 2 after the dramatic outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Peter begins this great work with a speech to the Jews at Jerusalem. Peter through the Spirit teaches repentance and remission of sins through Christ (Luke 24 v 49 + Acts 2 v 38), using several Old Testament quotations to establish his testimony. The latter part of the chapter gives us an invaluable insight into the early 1st century ecclesia at Jerusalem.

Structure of Acts 2

- Verse 1-4: The dramatic outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles and the miraculous gift of tongues.
- Verse 5-13: The reaction of the Jews to what they witnessed.
- Verse 14-36: Peter’s epic speech and an answer to the accusation of the Jews.
- Verse 37-40: Peter’s speech convinces the crowd, and he instructs them on the need for repentance and baptism into Christ.
- Verse 41-47: The growth of the early ecclesia in numbers and in faith and the enthusiasm of their worship.

Acts 2: Questions

Verse 1. Having received the commandment from the Lord Jesus, the disciples waited in Jerusalem to receive the Holy Spirit which they had been promised. This verse tells us that they “were all with one accord in one place”. The Greek word *Homothumadon* (see Acts 1 notes), translated ‘one accord’ powerfully expresses the enthusiasm of the Apostles’ worship. Literally it means ‘to come together with fierceness/wrath’ (the idea of zeal). They were in ‘one place’, which perhaps gives us an indication of the unity and togetherness of the Brethren and Sisters in Jerusalem at this time. With the perfect unity that is in Christ they met together with zeal for the things of the truth. A great example for us!

Verse 1. The AV says “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come”. Young’s Literal Translation says “And in the day of Pentecost being fulfilled”. The text indicates that the events of Acts 2 were a fulfilment of the day of Pentecost. In what way do you think Acts 2 was a fulfilment of Pentecost? (Lev 23 v 15-21 + Deut 16 v 9-12). Suggestion: The day of Pentecost was 50 days after the presentation of the first barley sheaves of harvest at firstfruits (Lev 23 v 10+15). It was also known as the day of firstfruits (Ex 23 v 16 + Num 28 v 26) since it was the day when the firstfruits of the wheat harvest were presented to God (Ex 34 v 22). This was a harvest feast and the children of Israel were to give thanks and praise to God for the plenty he had given them. The whole household was commanded to rejoice (Deut 16 v 11). This harvest scene is perhaps a foreshadowing of the greater harvest of Acts 2, where the seed sown by the Apostles fell on good ground and yielded much fruit; “there were added unto them about 3000 souls” (v41) and again

“the Lord added unto the ecclesia daily” (v47). The Brethren and Sisters in Acts also rejoiced; “they did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart”.

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Verse 3+4. This is the baptism of the Holy Spirit spoken of in chapter 1, and previously prophesied by John the Baptist in Mat 3 v 11,12. The Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles as “cloven tongues like as of fire”. What do you think the significance of fire is in this context? Is there a contrast to Mat 3 v 16 where the Spirit descends on Jesus like a dove?

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Verse 4-6. The Jews that witnessed the Apostles speaking in tongues were “confounded (Margin: troubled in mind) because every man heard them speak in his own language”. This remarkable event is a dramatic reversal of Babel (Gen 11) where God confounded the language of the children of men “that they might not understand one another’s speech”. Before this the earth was united with “one language and one speech” and in defiance of God. This unity against God also contrasts with the true unity of the Apostles in Acts 2 who were “with one accord in one place”.

Verse 12-13. The gathered Jews at Jerusalem were all amazed at what they had seen. Some accused the Apostles of being drunk. Of course their accusation was completely wrong as Peter goes on to demonstrate (v15-21). Isaiah 28 prophesied of the gift of tongues; “For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to his people” (v11). Perhaps they had incorrectly interpreted the ‘stammering lips’ as speaking of drunkenness. Their accusation was in fact very ironic. It was they, the natural seed of Israel who were ‘full of new wine’, not the Apostles. The very same chapter in Isaiah speaks of “the drunkards of Ephraim” (v1, 3) and again, “they have erred through wine and strong drink” (v7). What is drunkenness indicative of in scripture? How does this contrast with the Apostles in Acts?

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Verse 22-36. After demonstrating (v15-21) that the Apostles were not drunk but rather were fulfilling Joel’s prophecy (Joel 2 v 28-32), Peter begins his witness of the resurrection in earnest (Acts 1 v 22). His speech culminates in verse 36 with a profound statement of truth; “God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified both Lord and Christ”. The preceding verses are a proof that Jesus is both Lord and Christ. To establish this claim of the Apostles, the Spirit through Peter uses several OT quotations (familiar to the Jews) that testify Jesus is Lord and Christ.

Verse 22-24. In verse 22-24 Peter condemns the Jews for their wickedness in crucifying Jesus. However, he reminds them that Jesus' death was always purposed by God; "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (v23). Furthermore, Jesus' resurrection likewise was in Gods plan (v24) "whom God hath raised up having loosed the pains of death". The next few verses go onto to say why it was not possible that Jesus should stay in the grave: The answer - because he was the 'Holy One', and as such would not see corruption.

Verse 25-28. What Psalm is quoted in this section and who is speaking in this part of the Psalm? The passage refers to God's 'Holy One' not seeing corruption. Which aspect of Jesus do you think is being emphasised in these verses, his Lordship or his role as a Christ (Messiah/saviour)?

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Verse 34-35. What frequently quoted (in NT) Old Testament passage is referred to here? What are the 2 Hebrew words designated 'the LORD' and 'Lord' in the Psalm? Can you assign identities to 'the LORD' and Lord? Which title of Jesus is being emphasised here, Lord or Christ?

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Verse 41-47. What can we learn from the example of the early Brethren and Sisters in the ecclesia? Suggest practical ways in which you can begin to follow this example in your life.

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Acts 3&4 – ‘Early Ecclesia in Jerusalem’

After their baptism of the Holy Spirit at the day of Pentecost the Apostles fervently began to preach the Gospel to the Jews in Jerusalem. As part of this preaching effort we are told that the Apostles performed “many wonders and signs” (Acts 2 v 43), but the Spirit chooses to single out just one miracle for particular attention in the record.

In Acts 3 and 4 we read of Peter’s healing of the lame man at the beautiful gate of the temple, and of his subsequent speeches to the Jews to explain “by what power and by what name” (Acts 4 v 7) this miracle was performed (the “name of Jesus Christ” constitutes a major theme in these 2 chapters). The “notable miracle” attracted great publicity in the city such that the Jewish council said that the miracle was “manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it” (Acts 4 v 16).

The first of Peter’s speeches in chapter 3 was to “all the people” (i.e. the normal/common people of the city), and is essentially an answer to their misunderstanding that the miracle they observed was achieved by the Apostles’ own “power and holiness” (v12). Under the shadow of Solomon’s porch Peter convinces the crowd that this man was healed in “the name of Jesus Christ” (v16) and by His power and not their own. With reference to the promises to Abraham and to the writings of their own prophets he declares the truth of the Gospel to them. As with the physical healing, so with the spiritual; the forgiveness of sins comes only through faith in the name of Jesus Christ. The “men of Israel” (v12) are reminded of their profound guilt in the death of Jesus whom they had “denied” (v14). However the great mercy of God is also expounded in that He is able to blot out their sins if they repent. Peter also teaches of the return of the glorified Jesus to restore the kingdom to Israel (v21) at the times of refreshing (v19).

The preaching effort yields 5000 believers (cp 4 v 5), but for their efforts Peter and John (and the lame man! Cp 4 v 14) are thrown into jail. This ‘misfortune’ provides Peter with a platform to preach to the elders and religious elite (4 v 5, 6) of Jerusalem, and whilst conceding the authenticity of the miracle they attempt to dissuade the Apostles from teaching “in the name of Jesus again” (4 v 18). This only serves to invigorate the early believers who were “all filled with the Holy Spirit and spake the word with boldness”.

Structure:

Acts 3

- Verse 1-11: The healing of the lame man and the people’s reaction.
- Verse 12-26: Peter’s speech.
 - Verse 12-18: The means by which the miracle was accomplished and the guilt of the Jews in the death of Jesus.
 - Verse 19-26: The witness of the prophets and fathers to the work of Messiah and to the Kingdom.

Acts 4

- Verse 1-4: Peter, John and the lame man imprisoned.
- Verse 5-7: Questioning of the rulers and elders of Jerusalem.
- Verse 8-12: Peter’s answer and defence of the Lord Jesus.
- Verse 13-22: The elders confess the authenticity of the miracle but command the Apostles to stop preaching.
- Verse 23-36: The boldness and enthusiasm of the believers in the face of this “threatening”.

Acts 3: Questions

Verse 1-11: The healing of the lame man at the beautiful gate of the temple is very prominent in the Acts record. Almost 2 chapters are dedicated to the miracle and its effects. There are several reasons why this miracle is so significant; firstly, it was witnessed by a large number of people (“all the people saw him walking and praising God” v9,10,16), and because of this the Gospel message which was signified in the man’s healing was taught to a large number. The fundamental principle of the Gospel, justification by faith (and not works, as some Jews would have held) was also vividly demonstrated by this man. “The faith which is in him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all” (v16). Furthermore, the man that was lame from his mother’s womb seems to be a type of the nation of Israel as a whole. In the NT parables, physical ailments are often used to symbolise spiritual sickness. In cp 4 v 22 we read “the man was above 40 years old”. This number is often associated with Israel’s wandering in the wilderness, a time when Israel’s spiritual sickness was very severe. In Isaiah the nation which God bore is said to have transgressed from the womb (Isa 48 v 8, 46 v 3). However, Peter reminds them that just as with the lame man, there was hope. The nation was a primary recipient of the promises made to the fathers (v25,26), and by associating with the name of Jesus Christ their sins would likewise be blotted out (v19).

Verse 1: We are told the events took place at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. What other prayers in scripture took place at this hour?

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Verse 1: We saw that the events of Acts 2 (see notes) on the day of Pentecost were a fulfilment of the feast of Pentecost. The ninth hour was the time of the evening sacrifice as recorded in Ex 29 v 41-43, where a lamb was taken for a burnt offering in the evening to sanctify (make clean) Israel. Perhaps the evening oblation in Exodus is also a foreshadowing of the events in Acts 3. The lame man, symbolic of Israel was made whole through the name of Jesus Christ, who was the lamb that was sacrificed at the ninth hour, at the time of the evening oblation (Mat 27 v 46).

Verse 1-12: The miracles of Peter in Acts 3 and Paul in Acts 14 are very similar (see table). Even the reaction of the onlookers is the same. Acts 3 v 12 says the people perceived Peter had achieved the wonder by his “own power”. In Acts 14 v 12,13 the people thought Paul and Barnabas were gods! In contrast to Acts 3 however, the certain man healed by Paul at Lystra was a gentile as was his audience. Thus Paul’s speech to the gentiles uses creation as a witness to the power of a living God, whereas Peter in Acts 3 calls on the witness of the prophets. The Jewish audience would have been familiar with the writings of Moses (v22) and Samuel (v24) and the other prophets.

Acts 3 verse:	Acts 14 verse:
2 ‘certain man’	8 ‘certain man’
2 ‘lame’	8 ‘impotent in his feet’
2 ‘from the womb’	8 ‘cripple from womb’
2 ‘was carried’	8 ‘never had walked’
4 ‘fastening his eyes upon him’	9 ‘steadfastly beholding him’
6 ‘rise up and walk’	10 ‘stand upright on thy feet’
8 ‘leaping, stood and walked’	10 ‘leaped and walked’
16 ‘faith that is in him’	9 ‘perceiving he had faith’
9 ‘all the people saw’	11 ‘the people saw’

Verse 6, 7: The Greek word translated “rise up” is used several times in the early chapters of Acts, likewise the phrase “right hand”. Where are these phrases used and what event is described by these terms in Acts 2, 3 & 4? Could the physical “rising up” of the lame man be a parable of this event, and does it foreshadow the ‘greater rising up’ that will come at the times of refreshing in the future (v19)?

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Verse 8: “He leaping up stood and walked”. These words are an echo of Isaiah 35, which gives a prophetic picture of the kingdom age. Verse 6 of Isaiah says; “the lame man shall leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing”. The leaping and rejoicing of the lame man in Acts 3 was a foretaste of the kingdom and Peter goes on to talk of this time in 19-21.

Verse 11: What other event in the Gospels took place in Solomon’s porch? Are there any connections between the two events?

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Verse 13 & 25: Why do you think the Spirit through Peter chooses to open and close his speech with reference to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and to the promises? Why is such emphasis placed on the writings of the prophets? Consider Peter’s audience.

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Verse 14 & 15: Part of the Apostles’ job in teaching the Gospel was to “convince the world of sin” (John 16 v 8). As in the Acts 2 speech, Peter condemns the Jews for their part in the crucifixion. They first had to recognise their fault before they could “repent and be converted” (v18). Note the great irony in verses 14 + 15; the Jews had given life to a murderer (v14), but had murdered the Prince of life (v15), whom God later raised from the dead.

Acts 4: Questions

Verse 3: “They laid hands on them, and put them in hold”. Was the ‘certain lame man’ also put in prison with Peter and John (see verse 14)?

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Verse 23-36: After the Apostles had been threatened by the council (v21) they returned to their own company and report on what had befallen them. What is the reaction of the early believers to this persecution? How can we learn from the example of the Brethren and Sisters in the early ecclesia at Jerusalem?

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Acts 5 – ‘Ananias and Sapphira’

The harmony, generosity and joyfulness that had characterized the first few years of the ecclesia in Jerusalem was shattered by the events recorded in Acts chapter 5. At the end of chapter 4 we read of how certain brethren and sisters in the ecclesia sold their possessions to provide for the poor. Acts 4 v 34,35 says *“Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need”*. One character in particular stands out in the text; Barnabas is mentioned explicitly for his self sacrificing generosity who *“having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles feet”*.

The first word of chapter 5, ‘But’, strikes a sudden discordant note in the newly formed ecclesia, and signifies a contrast to the joyful and harmonious scene presented in chapter 4. Under the pretence and cover of a sacrificial and righteous act and with the view to gaining popularity in the ecclesia Ananias and Sapphira his wife practice a lie and deception against the Holy Spirit¹. Chapter 5 v 1,2 says *“Ananias with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the Apostles feet”*. A swift judgment is then brought against them by God who demonstrates to the whole ecclesia that transgression and deceit is unprofitable and that sin cannot triumph in the end.

Brother Thomas draws an analogy between the physical Eve of Genesis and ecclesial Eve, who was developed out of the side of her husband, the Lord Jesus Christ. He compares sin's entrance into the world through Eve in Genesis 3 to the entrance of sin into the early ecclesia and sites the events of Acts 5 as the origin of the Apostasy in the ecclesia. He writes² *“The Christadelphian Eve had not been espoused 12 months before it became manifest that iniquity was working within her. The case of Ananias and Sapphira was illustrative of this. The evil manifested through them was the evil principle which generated that ‘mystery of iniquity’ which at length developed the Lawless One or Man of Sin. It was the spirit of falsehood, which Paul styles ‘the deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish’ (2 Thess 2 v 10).”*

Structure of Acts 5

- Verse 1-11: The deception of Ananias and Sapphira and their punishment.
- Verse 12-16: The apostles perform many wonders and signs and the ecclesia continues to grow rapidly.
- Verse 17-28: The imprisonment of the apostles and their subsequent miraculous escape. The confusion of the prison officers and the apostles brought before the council.
- Verse 29-32: Peter's answer to the council's accusation.
- Verse 33-40: Gamaliel's speech to the council.
- Verse 41-42: The reaction of the apostles to persecution and threatening.

Acts 5: Questions

Verse 1-2. *“Ananias with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price”*. The word translated *“kept back”* is an unusual Greek word (Strong's #3357) used just 3 times in the NT. It means to ‘embezzle’ or to ‘withdraw covertly’. In Titus 2 it is used in the section regarding the conduct of servants, who were to be faithful to their masters and not to embezzle their master's possessions.

Verse 3. *“Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land?”* This verse reminds us that no sin we commit is in secret, but all our life is in the full view of the omnipresent God. Psalm 139 v 1,2 says: *“O LORD thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.”* The fact presented by the Spirit through the psalmist serves as a powerful exhortation for

each one of us. Equally the quiet and continual faithfulness of the servant of God is also noticed by the Father. In Matt 6 Jesus teaches his disciples to do their alms quietly and not openly (as the Pharisees did) v4: *“that thine alms may be in secret: and thy father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly”*.

Verse 1-5. Ananias and Sapphira lied against the Holy Spirit and against God by keeping back part of the offering they had promised to give freely to God, and because of this they were punished severely. The story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts is a strong illusion to Joshua 6&7 where Achan was cursed after disobeying God’s commandments concerning the spoil of Jericho. How many similarities between these two events can you find? Apparently (according to the Septuagint) the Hebrew *“took of the accursed thing”* (Joshua 7 v 1) is very similar to the Greek *“kept back”* in Acts 5 v 2.

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Verse 4. In this verse Peter reminds Ananias and Sapphira that they were not ‘commanded’ to give anything away as charity. In fact what they were doing was purely voluntary and therefore they could have given away however much or little that they wanted or could afford. However in an attempt to gain kudos in the ecclesia and being motivated by pride Ananias and Sapphira let it be known openly what price they had given, whilst keeping back part of it for themselves deceitfully. In lying against the Holy Spirit and in *“keeping back”* they were effectively robbing God. Another OT illusion to this NT story can be found in the prophecy of Malachi, where the priests in their voluntary offerings *“kept back part of the price”*, in that they were offering animals that were blemished to God. Malachi 1 v 7,8: *“Ye offer polluted bread...ye offer the blind for sacrifice...ye offer the lame and the sick”*. Mal 3 v 8,9 says *“Ye have robbed me...in tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation”*.

Aside

Perhaps there is also a link between the Levites in Malachi’s day to the disciples in the early ecclesia in Acts chapter 6. In the days of Malachi, because the people did not give freely in tithes and offerings the Levites who depended upon the tithes for survival were forced into work and the service of God was as a result neglected (Neh 13 v 12 & Mal 3 v 10). In Acts 6 v 1-4 we read of the disciples (the spiritual Levites), who were at risk of having to give up their ministry of the word in order to provide for the widows who were neglected (Acts 6 v 1). Acts 6 v 2 says *“...it is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables”*. We are not told in Acts the cause of the widow’s state of impoverishment and we cannot assume it was due to the selfishness of the brethren and sisters in the ecclesia, some of which displayed an overwhelmingly generous spirit (Acts 4 v 31-37).

Verse 1-11. What can we learn from Ananias and Sapphira and how can we implement this in our lives and in the ecclesia?

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References

- 1. Harry Whitaker, ‘Acts of the Apostles’.
- 2. The Christadelphian Expositor series, ‘Acts of the Apostles’.

Acts 6&7 – ‘Stephen’s Speech’

With the establishment of the early ecclesias, members needed to be correctly and wisely led, and the important labour of promoting and upholding the work of the Truth to be continued unimpeded. It sad then to find (Acts 6:1) that in the Jerusalem ecclesia (the first to be established) there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations.

There arose a need therefore to appoint an additional seven brethren to oversee these kinds of affairs in the ecclesia allowing the apostles to continue with their own increasing responsibilities, especially in regard to the education and instruction of new converts. It is here we find Stephen (one of the seven), a brother of outstanding faithfulness, who forthrightly expounded his beliefs, and in so doing found himself before the Sanhedrin.

The Speech he gave (through the inspiration of God – Matt 10:16-20 but certainly not negating his own courage) was truly remarkable and upon hearing his words of Truth the elders, Scribes and Pharisees were ‘cut to the heart’ (Acts 7:54). The outcome of this event saw Stephen as the first recorded martyr and hailed a period of great stress and persecution for the ecclesia.

This incredible act of faith however marvelously catalogues the key events in Israel’s history and presents us with a unique insight into the hope we have in Christ. Let us now consider points from chapters 6 and 7 that we can use to help us on our walk towards God’s Kingdom.

Structure:

Acts 6

- Verse 1-6: The choosing of the seven.
- Verse 7-10: “And the word of God increased”.
- Verse 11-15: Stephen accused.

Acts 7

- Verse 1-53: Stephen’s speech.
- Verse 54-60: Stephen’s death.

Acts 6: Questions

Verse 1-4. “In those days” – it is always important to appreciate the context of a passage of scripture you are reading both historically and textually.

- a) Briefly outline some of the main events which occurred between the death of Christ and this time. (You may wish to consult previous study notes!)

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b) What was the “daily ministraton” and what was the proposed solution to the problem in hand?

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c) Why didn't the apostles oversee the work and what might this mean to us?

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Verse 6. What might the laying on of hands mean? Can you prove this?

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Verse 9. Do you know of any later apostles who came from Cilicia also at Stephen's death? Can you find a scriptural passage (not in Acts 7) to prove this?

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Verse 10. What might the “*wisdom and spirit by which he spake*” be talking of and provide scriptural evidence? Despite what you may have answered to that question, what must we take from this and why? (Support with scripture).

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Verse 11-15. Name 4 things they accused Stephen of. What might verse 15 have reminded them of and provide a scriptural quote.

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Acts 7: Questions

Verse 5-8.

a) What is the significance of this verse and where in Genesis can this be proved?

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b) What did circumcision represent?

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Acts 8 – ‘Spread of the Gospel’

Acts 8 describes the ‘**spreading abroad**’ of the gospel from Jerusalem following the persecution of the faithful by Saul and the Jewish authorities.

Structure of Acts 8

Acts chapter 8 can perhaps be divided into 3 main sections:

- Verse 1-4: The persecution of the believers in Jerusalem and their subsequent dispersion which resulted in the preaching of the gospel being spread to Samaria and abroad. Also recorded is the burial of Stephen by devout men
- Verse 5-25: Philip preaching in a city of Samaria baptises men and women including a man who called Simon who previously had falsely led the people of the town to believe he had special powers. When Simon sees the power of the spirit gifts used by the apostles he seeks to buy it with money, and is rebuked for this by Simon Peter.
- Verse 26-39: Philip speaks to an Ethiopian eunuch about how Jesus’ sufferings were described in the book of Isaiah, and Philip baptises the man from Ethiopia.

Acts 8: Questions

Verse 1-4. Whose death was Saul consenting to?

At the time of Jesus’ death, Jerusalem was a city with a population of around 50,000 people. Approximately how many of its inhabitants had converted to Christianity by the time of Acts **chapter 4**? (See: Acts 2:41 and Acts 4:5).

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From this point in chapter 4 we are told that:

“there were added to the believers multitudes both of men and women” (Acts 5:14).

“And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7).

From these passages it seems reasonable to assume that at least a fifth (probably considerably more) of Jerusalem’s population had converted to Christianity within a short period of time following the ascension of Jesus. It’s perhaps understandable why we are told in Acts 8:3 that “Saul searched **EVERY** house” in his attempt to imprison believers...such was the growth of Christianity within Jerusalem.

What problems do you think would have arisen amongst the believers during the time of mass exodus from the city of Jerusalem described in Acts 8:1?

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Verse 5. Compare v5 with Matthew 10:15. Why had this change come about? (See also Acts 1:8)

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Verse 6-8. Samaria at this time was a Gentile city. In verses 6-8 we read about the people's belief and joy at the miracles performed by Philip. Compare v6 with Matthew 13:14-16, what was the difference in the response between the Jews and Gentiles? Where else are the words of Jesus in Matthew 13:14-16 used in the Old Testament?

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Verse 9-13. Simon was a man who bewitched the people of the Samaritan town in which he lived with 'sorcery'. What conclusions can be drawn from the fact that he was so amazed at the miracles performed by the apostles (v13), and his willingness to be baptised?

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Where else are examples given of God's power being greater than the false powers men claim to possess for their own control of other men?

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Verse 14-19. How were the spirit gifts passed on to the believers in this passage? Give other examples of where we are told about the passing on of the spirit gifts; and how this was done. What conclusions do you think we can draw from this?

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Verse 18-24. Simon in these verses seeks to purchase the ability to pass on the spirit gifts by the laying on of hands from the apostles. Where else in the book of Acts do we read of baptised believers being bewitched by money and as a result belittling the power of God ("tempt the spirit")?

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Why do you believe that Simon's punishment didn't seem to ultimately match that of the other believers in Acts who belittled God's power?

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Verse 21. It appears Peter quotes from Psalm 78:37. Why do you think he does this? (Consider Psalm 78:38)

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Verse 24. The book of James was written to the Jewish Christians spread abroad from Jerusalem and therefore much of its message is relevant to this time in Acts 8 when the believers were scattered. Where in the book of James do we read of a prayer of faith like this one in **v24**?

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Verse 27-30. Philip is directed by God to follow and “join himself” (Greek – “Glue himself”) to the chariot of an Ethiopian eunuch who had come to worship in Jerusalem. When following the chariot Philip was able to hear the eunuch reading the book of Isaiah. What do you think we can draw from this with regard to our own approach to considering God’s word?

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Verse 31-35. From which passage in Isaiah does the eunuch quote?

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Give examples of where Jesus fulfilled the words:

“He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth”

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In Isaiah 53 we are told that Jesus would “See his seed” (Isaiah 53:10). How can this be, seeing Acts 8:33 says: “In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth” (or: “cut off from the land of the living” as Isaiah records it)?

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Verse 36-39. It’s clear from the response of the Ethiopian, that Philip’s explanation of Isaiah and his preaching of Jesus brought many things together in the faith of this man. He was obviously a devout man as he had come up to worship (v27). Under the Law of Moses would the fact that he was a eunuch have any impact on his worship? (See Deuteronomy 23:1)

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Perhaps this is why the eunuch asked: “what doth hinder me to be baptized?” - because under the law he was separated from some worship.

Consider Isaiah 56:4-5:

“For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose *the things* that please me, and take hold of my covenant; Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off”.

Here in Isaiah those who were ceremonially unclean were promised that one day they would enjoy everlasting life in God’s house. And their entrance would not be dependent on whether they were clean by birth, but whether they had belief.

The Ethiopian did belief and was baptised, rejoicing in the promise of life eternal now open to him.

Acts 9 – ‘Conversion of Saul’

Acts chapter 9 describes the conversion or transformation of Saul as he travelled to Damascus.

Prior to this event Saul was a Pharisee; he was a member of the strictest sect of the Jewish religion along with his father. He was born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, but he was brought up in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel, and was taught to be zealous in his service to God, ‘*according to the perfect manner of the law*’ (22:3). Because of this strict upbringing, along with the illusion that he was serving God in the correct way, it would have been severely shocking to hear Christ voice as he walked along say: ‘*Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*’ (9:4).

Saul had set about to ‘purge’ Israel from the new teachings of Christ. He ‘*made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.*’ (8:3) He persecuted and consented to the death of Stephen as well as many others within the ecclesia, particularly those in Jerusalem. (8:1).

Saul had had a very different and contradictory life to the life he was about to now lead. The members of the ecclesia at the time were utterly shocked at Saul’s conversion and said: ‘Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?’ (9:21).

Structure of Acts 9

- Verse 1-3: Saul, after receiving permission from the high priest, travelled to Damascus with the intent of binding any found at the synagogues, bringing them back to Jerusalem.
- Verse 4-9: Christ speaks to Paul on the road to Damascus, declaring that Saul was in fact persecuting Christ. He is made blind and is instructed to continue to Damascus.
- Verse 10-19: Ananias, after his initial shock, appears to Saul who receives his sight and the Holy Spirit. Saul spends ‘certain days’ with the disciples.
- Verse 20-22: Saul preaches Christ in the synagogues, much to the surprise of those who heard him.
- Verse 23-25: The Jews seek to kill Saul, who flees over the city walls with the aid of the disciples.
- Verse 26-28: Saul arrives in Jerusalem, but the disciples are afraid, unconvinced of his conversion. Barnabus takes Saul to the apostles who he joins in preaching in and out of Jerusalem.
- Verse 29-30: The Grecians seek to kill Saul, so the brethren brought him down to Caesarea, sending him to Tarsus, Saul’s home town.
- Verse 31: The ecclesias grow in faith and number.
- Verse 32-35: Peter heals a man sick of the palsy at Lydda.
- Verse 36-43: Peter raises Tabitha, a disciple at Joppa.

Acts 9: Questions

Why was it more appropriate for Christ to use the Hebrew name of Saul as opposed to Paul?

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Christ states that Saul had persecuted him, even though Saul had never directly persecuted Christ. Which verse in the gospel is this alluding to?

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What implication does this have on our lives today?

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What does the phrase 'kick against the pricks' mean? From where does it originate?

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It has been suggested that these 'pricks' were referring to the section in Stephen's speech concerning Moses and Joseph. Can you see any parallels with Christ?

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In another account of the same event in Acts 26:18, Saul was commanded to do certain things for the Gentiles? What were they?

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What does it mean to have your eyes opened? What other passages can you find to support this?

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What were the results that would come from these things?

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How can we see these things taking hold in our own lives?

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Acts 10 & 11:1-18 – ‘Cornelius’

Acts 10 is a momentous chapter, as it signifies the beginning of a new era in the plan of God with mankind. From this time onwards the gospel would be preached openly to the Gentiles as well as to Jews.

Just prior to this chapter Peter raised Tabitha, a woman *“full of good works and almsdeeds which she did”*, in Joppa (Acts 9:36-42). He then tarried many days at Joppa with Simon a tanner. The occupation of a tanner was to handle dead animals and treat the skins. Inevitably, he would have come into contact with unclean animals.

The trade of a tanner was abhorrent to strict Jews and we know that Peter had problems with issues to do with ceremonial uncleanness (Acts 10:14). Although Peter would not eat anything unclean, he was happy to stay at the house of a tanner for some time.

Cornelius was *“a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway”*. He was a Gentile who believed in the God of Israel, but was not yet part of the Household of Faith. He is an excellent example for us in that he *“feared God **with all his house**”*. He set the character and atmosphere of his household.

In verse 3 he saw a vision from God where he was instructed to send for Peter, who was staying with Simon the tanner. Maybe it would have been of some assurance to Cornelius to know that Peter would be more ready to speak to him, given that he was staying with a tanner? Either way, Cornelius immediately sent for Peter as instructed.

Peter then saw a vision from God where a sheet was let down from heaven containing all manner of unclean beasts and creatures, and he was instructed to *“kill and eat”*. This happened three times. Peter was then taught a spiritual lesson from what he saw – *“what God hath cleansed, that call not thou common”*. He was soon to learn that God was not talking about animals, but people! He was sent to preach to the Gentiles; something that was not yet done at this time.

Peter had his understanding transformed and uttered the words *“Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him”*. This was the point at which the barrier of preaching to the Jews only was broken down. From here on the Truth would be spread abroad to the Gentiles.

When Peter returned to Jerusalem he was faced by *“they that were of the circumcision”* who contended with him (Acts 11:2-3). Peter explained the course of events and after their discussions they *“held their peace and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life”*.

Structure:

Acts 10

- Verse 1-8: Cornelius' vision. He is directed to seek the help of the apostle Peter.
- Verse 9-18: Peter's vision. Peter whilst praying is shown a vision to prepare him for the important mission ahead.
- Verse 19-23: Peter meets the messengers from Cornelius.
- Verse 24-29: At the house of Cornelius.
- Verse 30-33: Cornelius makes a personal request.
- Verse 34-43: Peter's fifth address – God is no respecter of persons.
- Verse 44-48: Peter baptizes Cornelius.

Acts 11: 1-18

- Verse 1-3: Controversy in the ecclesia.
- Verse 4-17: Peter explains the circumstances.
- Verse 18: Opposition is temporarily silenced.

Questions

List the 8 virtues which Cornelius possessed (See verses 2, 3, 22 and 30). Was this enough for him to be saved? What else was needed?

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What else can we learn from Cornelius?

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It has been supposed by some that Cornelius was either the centurion in Luke 7:2 or the centurion on duty at the crucifixion. Do you think this is the case? Can you find any links between either of these men with Cornelius to support these views?

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In Acts 8 an Ethiopian was converted (a son of Ham). The Jews had already been preached to (sons of Shem). Then there was Cornelius of the Italian band. Which son of Noah would he have descended from? Why is this relevant?

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What can we learn from Peter?

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Why did the sheet come down from heaven 3 times? What does '3' symbolize in Scripture?

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What can we learn from Peter in Acts 11:4? (See 1 Peter 3:15)

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Acts 11:19-30 & 12 – ‘Peter’s Mission and Imprisonment’

Acts 11:19-30 describes the dispersion of believers after the death of Stephen and the preaching of the gospel first to the Jews and latterly to the Greeks in the region of Phenice, Cyprus and Antioch. Barnabas hears of the great numbers turning to God in these areas and goes to exhort those at Antioch. Later we read how the brethren in Judaea are helped by relief from fellow believers due to a famine throughout the land, which was prophesied by Agabus.

Acts 12 speaks of the persecution of the Christians by Herod and the subsequent imprisonment of Peter. We read of his miraculous escape through the assistance of an angel, and his appearing to the fellow believers at the house of Mary the mother of John. Later the record describes the death of Herod – he was smitten by the angel of God and consumed of worms as he “*gave not God the glory*” when the people called him a god.

Structure:

Acts 11:19-30

- Verse 19-21: The Gospel spreads to Antioch.
- Verse 22-26: Barnabas sent to supervise the work.
- Verse 27-30: Famine predicted: relief is sent to Jerusalem through Barnabas and Saul.

Acts 12

- Verse 1-2: Martyrdom of James, the first of the apostles to be executed.
- Verse 3-5: Peter is imprisoned.
- Verse 6-11: Peter’s remarkable escape.
- Verse 12-17: The ecclesia taught the power of prayer.
- Verse 18-19: Confusion and anxiety among the prison guard.
- Verse 20-23: The death of Herod Agrippa.
- Verse 24-25: Continued proclamation of the Truth.

Questions:

Acts 11:19-30

Verse 20. The Grecians referred to in v 20 are likely to have been Grecian Jews – as most of the older translations render the word.

Verse 23. Look up the word “*cleave*” in a concordance to find its meaning. What does this tell us about the relationship we should have with our God?

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Verse 23. What are the meanings of Barnabas' name? Why does this seem fitting to his works in v23?

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Verse 24. Barnabas was known by another name before he was given the name of Barnabas by the apostles. What was his other name, and why does it appear fitting to the content of verse 24? (See Acts 4:36)

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Verses 25-26. Barnabas was working hard in Antioch doing an important work in exhorting the believers there. But he did not consider himself too high to go all the way to Tarsus to find Paul and bring him back to help with the preaching in Antioch.

Verse 26. In verse 26 we are told of the first use of the word 'Christians'. The record seems to suggest that people in the city there "called" them by this name. What does the word "called" in this verse mean? And how is it used in other passages (e.g. Acts 10:22 and Luke 2:26)? What do you think this suggests about how the name 'Christians' began to be used?

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Verse 28. Agabus came with other believers from Jerusalem to Antioch. He prophesied of a dearth (famine) in the land of Judaea. How is the meaning of his name relevant to those things he spoke about?

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Verses 29-30. The generosity of the brethren and sisters to the believers in Judaea is spoken of – in them giving as they had ability.

Acts 12

Verses 1-3. The Herod spoken of here is likely to be Herod Antipas the grandson of Herod the Great (Herod at the time of Jesus' birth). He perhaps shows some similarities with his grandfather – Herod the Great acted in killing John the Baptist because he knew that it would please Herodias (Matthew 14). Likewise Herod Antipas killed James and continued persecuting the disciples because it pleased the Jews.

Verse 4. This verse tells us of the imprisoning of Peter by Herod. From verse 4 onwards it seems the chapter draws a number of allusions between Peter's imprisonment and the time of Christ's sufferings. What are some of the similarities in these two events?

Acts 12	The suffering of Jesus
Time of Passover (v 3, 4)	Time of the Passover (John 19:14)
	Jesus Prays for Gods help (Luke 23:46)
Peter asleep (v6)	
	Helped by an angel to escape the tomb (Matthew 28:2)
Peter figuratively raised from the dead (v 7 angel "raised him up")	
The giant iron gates Peter had to pass through were not a barrier (v 10)	The stone before the tomb was rolled away (Matthew 28:2)
	Disciples believed not for joy (Luke 24:21)

Verse 5. Prayer without ceasing was made by the ecclesia about Peter. What does this teach us about the way we should pray?

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Verses 6-8. When the angel rescues Peter from prison the language used is similar to that of the language used by God in his instruction to the children of Israel as they left Egypt at the time of Passover. What similarities can you see?

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Verses 21-23. There is perhaps another similarity with this passage and the Passover. In that the destroying angel in Egypt killed the oppressor of his people (the firstborn of the Egyptians) and here in Acts 12 the oppressor of his people (Herod) is killed by an angel. Herod should have known that the gold belonged to God. Which Psalm tells us this?

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Verses 24-25. While the household of the Herod's was becoming weaker, in contrast the word of God was spreading more and more. Barnabas and Paul had now finished their work in Jerusalem and took John Mark with them to further the spread of the gospel.