



Charles Nicolas Cochin II, The Coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, red chalk over black chalk, 7.6 x 16.3 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

ACTS 1–5

THE CHURCH HEALS, PREACHES, BAPTIZES & LIVES IN UNITY

LYNNE HILTON WILSON

The Acts of the Apostles

After writing the story of Christ’s life, Luke wrote a second text with accounts of the early history of the apostolic church. His second volume acts as a companion to the first and shares its message, style, and size. Both volumes demonstrate the author’s reverence for the Lord’s anointed (referring to both Jesus and the Apostles).

Both volumes were initially untitled, but some early Christian leaders from around the second century used the name Acts of the Apostles.¹ Other biographies of famous men used the title “Acts of . . .” (for example, Acts of Hippolytus, Acts of Peter). These early Christians and others identified Luke, the companion of Paul, as the author of the Gospel of Luke and of the Acts of the Apostles. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland suggested an alternate title to focus on the book of Acts’ central theme: “The Acts of the Resurrected Christ Working through the Holy Spirit in the Lives and Ministries of His Ordained Apostles. Now, having said that, you can see why someone voted for the shorter title.”²

Who was Luke?

The name Luke appears three times in the New Testament, each in a letter attributed to Paul:

- “Luke, the beloved physician” (Col 4:14)
- “And Luke, my fellow worker” (Phm 1:24 NIV)
- “Only Luke is with me” (2 Tim 4:11)

These passages suggest that Luke served as a companion to the Apostle Paul. Furthermore, in the last half of Acts, the author joins the text as he describes Paul’s journeys, moving from third person to first person and using the plural *we* four times.³

The text also provides evidence that the author was not a Jew nor from Palestine but was probably a Greek convert to Christianity raised in the diaspora.⁴ Luke’s characteristic writing style set him apart. He wrote the best Greek prose in the New Testament, and he adapted his writing to the characters. His Greek is even better in Acts than in his Gospel (probably because this text is freer—he no longer followed Mark or Matthew).⁵

Combining this information with the biographical information in the epistles from Paul, we see that the thematic literary styles and textual analysis add evidence that the books share the same author. Furthermore, literary style, vocabulary, and stylometry statistically give conclusive data of single authorship.⁶

In the second century, a manuscript of the Gospel of Luke included an extra prologue that read:

Luke was a Syrian of Antioch, by profession a physician, the disciple of the apostles, and later a follower of Paul until his martyrdom. He served the Lord without distraction, without a wife, and without children. He died at the age of 84 in Boeotia, full of the Holy Spirit. Though gospels were already in existence, that according to Matthew, composed in Judea, and that according to Mark in Italy, he was prompted by the Holy Spirit and composed this gospel entirely in the regions about Achaia. He made very clear in the prologue that other [Gospels] had been written before him, but that it was necessary to set forth for Gentile converts the accurate account of the (new) dispensation that they might not be distracted by Jewish fables or deceived by heretical and foolish fantasies, and so miss the truth itself. From the very beginning [of his Gospel] we have received as of no little importance [the story of] the birth of John, who is the beginning of the Gospel. He was the Lord’s precursor, the one who shared in the articulation of the good news, in the ministering of baptism, and in the company of the Spirit. Of this dispensation a prophet among the Twelve makes mention. Later the same Luke wrote the Acts of the Apostles.⁷

In addition to being a theological historian, Luke is identified in the JST of Lk 1:1 as a “messenger of Jesus Christ.” A fourth-century source lists Luke as a member of the Seventy.⁸

When did Luke write Acts?

Since Acts does not mention the martyrdom of Paul, the book probably ended before then (ca. AD 64–79).

Themes

- Jesus has changed locations from earth to heaven—but He is still in charge (Peter and the Apostles continue to do His work). Acts bridges the life of Jesus and the teachings of the Apostles by giving examples of the Apostles performing the same miracles and teaching the same messages.
- The Spirit became the vehicle of revelation. Many Christians refer to the apostolic church as the beginning of the “Dispensation of the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:8 AMPC).
- Christians are law-abiding citizens that are worthy of legal recognition. Luke is writing during the first century AD, a period of Christian persecution. During that time, Christianity vied for legal status as a religion in the Roman Empire, which allowed only ten legal religions. Judaism was not only one of the ten but was also one of the six largest religions in the empire. The population of Rome was about 10 percent Jewish; Antioch, the third largest city, was 20 percent Jewish.⁹ Luke (and Paul) labored to prove that Christianity was and is a natural extension of Judaism. As both volumes present a positive view of Christianity for literate Greeks, it appears that Luke wanted to demonstrate that Jesus and early Christians were honorable and law-abiding people.
- Witnesses of Jesus as the Son of God and Redeemer of humanity.
- All (Jew and Gentile) may receive the Gospel.
- Delayed Second Coming of Jesus as King.

Outline

In the book of Acts, Luke follows Jesus’s teachings and miracles that were first introduced in the Gospel. He first shares parallel miracles by Peter and then Paul. This validates their apostolic authority and provides a second and third witness to the truths Jesus taught.

- I. Acts 1–12 is centered in Jerusalem and on Peter as chief Apostle
 - i. Chapters 1–5: Peter’s miracles and preaching
 - ii. Chapters 6–10: Miracles and preaching of Stephen, Philip, Saul, and Cornelius
 - iii. Chapters 11–12: James killed, Peter imprisoned
- II. Acts 13–28 is centered in Antioch and the diaspora, with Paul as main figure
 - i. Chapters 13–21: Paul’s preaching and miracles during three missions
 - ii. Chapters 22–28: Paul’s trials and imprisonment

Table 1. Comparison of Lk 1:1–4 and Act 1:1–3 (Berean Study Bible)

Lk 1:1–4 BSB	Act 1:1–3 BSB
<p>Many have undertaken to compose an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by the initial eyewitnesses. . . . [It] seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know.</p>	<p>In my first book, O Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach. . . . After His suffering, He presented Himself to them with many convincing proofs that He was alive. He appeared to them over a span of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.</p>

Acts 1

The prologue—Act 1:1–5

Act 1:1 (NIV). *“In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about.”* Both Luke and Acts are addressed to Theophilus, a name meaning “lover of God.” Perhaps Luke wrote to all disciples or lovers of God. Or, more in keeping with the time, he perhaps wrote to one patron. Authors often dedicated their books to a single person who contributed the costs of making the book available for public use. Theophilus may have been a Greek-speaking patron or Roman official. In the two books’ openings, we find parallels and can see Luke’s consistency.

Act 1:2 (NIV). *“he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles.”* Just as He had done before, even after His death and Resurrection, Jesus continues to communicate with His Apostles. But now, He communicates through the Spirit. The agent is still the Lord; the Spirit is relaying His instructions to those chosen. The verse demonstrates that the gift of the Holy Ghost was functioning before Pentecost. Unlike with the Gospels, discussion about and evidence of the Spirit fills the book of Acts and the Epistles.

Act 1:3. *“being seen of them forty days.”* The forty-day ministry literature is filled with teachings, miracles, rites, ordinances, and prophecies of persecution that lay ahead for the Apostles.¹⁰ Remember that from the time of the law of Moses, forty days was a period of purification, and further back, it was a learning and teaching period.¹¹ During this time, Jesus demonstrated “convincing proofs” (Act 1:3 ISV) that He was indeed alive and that the disciples needed to learn to follow Him.

Act 1:4–5 (NIV). *“while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift’ . . . you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”* Luke includes the command to wait in Jerusalem (although John has the Apostles returning to Galilee). John the Baptist’s prophecy of the Messiah’s role to baptize with fire was about to come to pass (Lk 3). The baptism of fire is when the Spirit purges one’s soul. Elder David A. Bednar explained, “The Holy Ghost is a sanctifier who cleanses and burns dross and evil out of human souls as though by fire.”¹²

Delayed Second Coming—Act 1:6–11

Act 1:7. “*It is not for you to know the times or the seasons.*” This phrase acts as a bridge between Luke and Acts. Notice the similarities with the closing remarks in the four Gospels. Especially in Mt 24:36 and Mk 13:32, we find Jesus repeating the same message with different words. The Apostles repeated this same idea as recorded throughout the book of Acts and several epistles. It became a theme as the apostolic church had to grapple with their disappointment of the Lord’s delayed Second Coming.

Act 1:8 (BSB). “*you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes.*” The disciples received power as the gifts of the Spirit were poured out. Luke wrote previously about this when the disciples stood beside Jesus at His Ascension on the Mount of Olives (Lk 24:48–51). Jesus told the group to stay in Jerusalem “until ye be endued [or *endowed*] with power.” Most English translations use “clothed with power” (NIV, ESV, BSB, for example). What was this endowment of power? Jesus had already taught the Apostles much of our modern endowment in the Sermon on the Mount. The three Apostles had received keys on the Mount of Transfiguration. This endowment was connected with clothing. It would also prove to be an outpouring of the gifts of the Spirit (Act 2). These gifts are available to all seeking believers. Joseph Smith also connected the gifts of the Spirit with the priesthood—offering the overarching definition that God’s priesthood is the power of God.¹³ The early Apostles’ goal was to witness of and serve the Lord. God knew they could not set up a long-term, pure church at that point.

Act 1:8 (BSB). “*be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*” This verse foreshadows Peter’s vision in Act 10.

Act 1:9–10 (NIV). “*he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him. . . . They were looking intently up . . . when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.*” The two angels who came after Jesus and ascended in a cloud are unnamed, but they gave the disciples additional instructions. They looked like men, which is consistent with other descriptions of angels in Restoration literature as beings who will be or have been mortal: “No angels . . . minister to this earth but those who do belong or have belonged to it” (D&C 130:5; also JS—H 1:31). Some Jews at the time, including the Pharisees, accepted the concept of angels as personal, intermediate beings, but others, like the Sadducees, did not. Across the Gospels, angels are only found in the birth and death narratives, but in the second half of the New Testament, we find many angels’ interactions with the early Saints of the apostolic church.

Act 1:11 (BSB). “*Jesus . . . will come back in the same way you have seen Him go.*” The angels’ message reinforced the reality of the Second Coming; however, by the time Luke wrote the book of Acts, that event was delayed longer than the early Saints had expected. Coming to grips with the fact that the delayed eschatology was part of God’s plan was very challenging, and it was important to keep the Saints’ faith—hence Luke uses this as a theme throughout Acts.

120 disciples meet, and Matthias called as new Apostle—Act 1:12–26

Act 1:12. “Then returned they unto Jerusalem . . . a sabbath day’s journey.” A Sabbath day’s journey was just over a half mile (one kilometer). For the Old Testament derivation, see Ex 16:29 and Num 35:5.

Act 1:13. “they went up into an upper room.” Is this the same room where the Last Supper was eaten? Or could it have been in John Mark’s mother’s home, where the Saints gathered in Act 12:12? The list of eleven Apostles is consistent with the lists found in Mt 10, Mk 3, and Lk 6, but without Judas Iscariot.

Act 1:14 (NIV). “all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.” Luke highlights Jesus’s mother as the only named women traveling and working alongside the Twelve. Previously, Luke named other women traveling with Jesus since His early ministry (Lk 8:2–3). For the first time, Jesus’s half-brothers are listed with the

Table 2. Lists of Apostles in the Gospels compared to list in Act 1:13

Mt 10:2–4	Mk 3:13–19	Lk 6:14–16	Act 1:13
Simon called Peter	Simon surnamed Peter	Simon Peter	Peter
Andrew his brother		Andrew his brother	
James the son of Zebedee	James the son of Zebedee	James	James
John his brother	John the brother of James	John	John
	Andrew		Andrew
Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip
Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	
Thomas			Thomas
Matthew the publican	Matthew	Matthew	
	Thomas	Thomas	
			Bartholomew
			Matthew
James the son of Alphaeus	James the son of Alphaeus	James Alphaeus’ son	James the son of Alphaeus
Lebbaeus surnamed Thaddaeus	Thaddaeus		
Simon the Canaanite	Simon the Canaanite	Simon called Zelotes	Simon Zelotes
		Judas the brother of James	Judas the brother of James
Judas Iscariot, betrayer	Judas Iscariot, betrayer	Judas Iscariot, traitor	

believers: “James, Joseph, Simon and Judas” (Mt 13:55). This addition makes me wonder if Mary and Joseph’s daughters may have also been included with the women. Previously in Jn 7:5, we learned that during Jesus’s ministry, “even his own brothers did not believe in Him” (BSB). The Apostles welcomed Mary’s other children to join in their prayers.

Act 1:15. “Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples.” Peter spoke to a gathering of 120 Saints in Jerusalem. The number of Jesus’s disciples after the Resurrection was a far cry from the thousands that had thronged Him at His Triumphal Entry only six weeks earlier. Jesus’s death had a devastating effect on many followers. Yet, the unified group gathered in faith and prayer were “persons known by name,” as the Anchor Bible translates this verse. Peter’s leadership is clear.

Act 1:16 (NIV). “Brothers and sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled . . . concerning Judas.” Even though the KJV speaks of only men in this verse, the Greek *adelphoi* refers to all believers. If you want to gain clarity on gender in the Bible, the NIV translation is helpful. It consistently mentions women when the Greek text suggests it. When the KJV translates “brethren,” the Greek often refers to both women and men who have covenanted to become part of God’s family.¹⁴

We imagine that it was difficult for the disciples to grasp Judas Iscariot’s treachery. Peter refers to at least three psalms that prophesied of the betrayal.¹⁵ This assurance of God’s foreknowledge comforts the disciples and builds their trust and faith. The Psalms were cited more often than any other scripture in the New Testament. Peter refers to the Spirit inspiring David, and perhaps Peter, too, found these scriptural references through the Spirit’s inspiration. Or perhaps, as we learn in Lk 24:27, the resurrected Lord “expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.” Sometime during Jesus’s forty-day ministry, whether through revelation or their own searching, disciples found many prophecies that testified of Jesus as the Messiah, which they then used when writing the New Testament.

Act 1:19. “The field of blood.” The author Luke was not present, but he quoted eyewitnesses (Lk 1:2–3). Yet, this story differs from that in Mt 28:3–10. Both accounts explain why the field was nicknamed “field of blood.”

Act 1:22. “must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.” Luke outlines the requirements for apostleship, including being a special witness of Jesus’s Resurrection and calling. However, the Apostles are not Jesus’s successors. “There is only one successor to the Lord mentioned in the Bible and that is the Holy Ghost. . . . A successor is one who comes after and takes the place of another . . . one must hold his identical office . . . the scriptures never call the apostles Christ’s successors.”¹⁶ Jesus describes His successor during the Last Supper as the Comforter and Spirit of Truth (Jn 13–16). After the Quorum of the Twelve was complete again, the Lord sent an outpouring of the Holy Spirit as described in Act 2:2–6.

Act 1:23. “they appointed two, Joseph . . . and Matthias.” With a small pool to choose from and with the rigorous demands of the calling, only two names were considered to fill the open calling in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. I believe the Spirit directed the prayerful selection of these two even

before the group cast lots to determine the Lord's final choice. Ancient Israelites cast lots as a means of receiving revelation and learning the Lord's will.¹⁷

Act 1:24–26 (NIV). *“they prayed . . . which of these two you have chosen . . . the lot fell to Matthias.”* The answer to the group's prayer witnesses that Jesus continues to run the Church, just from the other side of the veil. Luke uses the word *apostle* far more often than the other New Testament authors: six times in his Gospel and twenty-five times in the book of Acts.¹⁸ In contrast, Matthew and Mark use it only once each (Mt 10:2; Mk 6:30). Luke also writes with great respect when he refers to the important position of an Apostle. There are many apostles, meaning “those sent,” in the New Testament sent out to serve, but they may not all be included in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Acts 2

Pentecost—Act 2:1

Act 2:1. *“when the day of Pentecost was fully come.”* The first Pentecost celebrated Moses's return to Mount Sinai with the children of Israel after they left Egypt. The word comes from the word for “fifty” since the holiday is celebrated on the fiftieth day after Passover. The feast is also known by two other names:

- Feast of Weeks, because there is a week of weeks (that is, seven weeks, or forty-nine days) between Passover and Pentecost, the fiftieth day
- Feast of First Fruits of Labor, since the first barley harvest came in late May or early June (Lev 23:16–21; Deu 16:10)

Since the time of the Solomon's temple, Pentecost was one of the three main weeklong feasts each year that brought Jewish pilgrims from around the Roman Empire to the temple.

Act 2:1 (BSB). *“they were all together in one place.”* “They” probably refers to a group of disciples beyond just the Twelve—possibly the whole group of 120 disciples (Act 1:15). It may be a group gathered in the same upper room in Jerusalem (1:13). Luke says they sat in a house, not the temple (2:2). (Nor is it the “house of the Lord” because Luke consistently uses a different word for “temple.”) The Saints gathered possibly to worship and pray or to partake of the sacrament, if it were Sunday (Act 1:14–15; 20:7). Pentecost, like Passover, fell on different days of the week.

Gift of the Holy Ghost—Act 2:2–3

Act 2:2 (ISV). *“a sound like the roar of a mighty windstorm.”* In both Hebrew and Greek, one of the words translated as “wind” is the same word for “spirit” (Hebrew *ruach*, Greek *pneuma*), which occasionally results in confusion, but not here. Luke uses *pnoe*, “breath, wind.” The Prophet Joseph

asked the Lord to send the Spirit as a rushing wind in the dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland Temple too (D&C 109:37). Rather than a violent raging tempest that would have interfered with the Saints' work, it sounds more like a physical manifestation of the God's power.

Act 2:3 (BSB). *“They saw tongues like flames of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.”* When the Holy Spirit came, it was a baptism of fire as promised. English translations describe it differently, including “dividing tongues as of fire” (BLB) and “cloven tongues like as of fire” (KJV). This powerful gift of the Spirit enabled the disciples to speak with the gift of tongues. Latter-day Saint scholar Hoyt W. Brewster Jr. explained:

Some spiritual outpourings, which evidently is manifested in a physical, visible form, is what has been described as “cloven tongues as of fire.” It occurred on the day of Pentecost. . . . Similar manifestations are mentioned in the Book of Mormon, although the term cloven tongues is not used (Helaman 5:22–24, 43–45; 3 Nephi 19:13–14). An official declaration of the First Presidency has stated that “the cloven tongues of fire were the sign of His [the Savior’s] coming.”¹⁹

A similar description is also part of the inspired dedicatory prayer for the Kirtland Temple. The Prophet asked the Lord for “cloven tongues as of fire” to bless the dedication as they had on Pentecost (D&C 109:36). That same day, the Apostle Brigham Young and others spoke in tongues, and from the outside, the temple appeared to be on fire.²⁰

Gift of tongues—Act 2:4–13

Act 2:4. *“they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues.”*

During His Last Supper, the Savior had promised His disciples a farewell gift.²¹ That gift came in abundance just fifty-one days later, on the day of Pentecost. The gift of the Holy Ghost was a greater endowment of power than the witness and fruits of the Spirit that had been experienced up until that time. Because the gift of the Holy Ghost is confirmed by the higher priesthood and that priesthood had been removed from the general population of Israelites living in the biblical world between Moses and Jesus, only a few received the gift of the Holy Ghost.²² Even so, during that time, God sent His Spirit in the form of several fruits, including peace, love, faith, and hope (D&C 20:26).

The Prophet Joseph Smith spoke about this day of Pentecost when the early Christians experienced an outpouring of the Spirit. His scribe recorded his spontaneous sermon: “At one time God obtained a house where Peter washed [*sic*] and ano[*inte*]d & c [*sic*] on the day of Pentecost.”²³ This implies that Peter and the early Saints may have also experienced the ordinance of anointings. Some even suggest the Apostles received their endowment.²⁴

The gift of tongues is one of many gifts of the Spirit listed in the scriptures. Each book of canonized scripture includes a similar list, though none are exhaustive.²⁵ Joseph spoke most often about the need to seek the gift of discernment.²⁶ He also taught that when one receives the Holy Ghost one has received revelation.²⁷

Joseph Smith experienced the gift of tongues for the first time when he met Brigham Young in the fall of 1832.²⁸ The Prophet encouraged the outpouring of the gift in 1836 at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple; but by June 15, 1842, he wrote an editorial for the *Times and Seasons* warning against glossolalia: “The gift of tongues is the smallest gift perhaps of the whole, and yet it is one that is the most sought after. . . . Be not so curious about tongues, do not speak in tongues except there be an interpreter present; the ultimate design of tongues is to speak to foreigners.”²⁹

Act 2:5. “there were dwelling at Jerusalem.” It seems that the location has changed from the house of Act 2:2 to either a crowded area in Jerusalem or somewhere at the temple. The text suggests that after the Spirit and gift of tongues rested upon the disciples, they went out to preach. For over five hundred years since the diaspora that followed the Assyrian and Babylonian captivity, Israelites (all of whom are called Jews in the New Testament) had moved across the world. The pilgrimage feast of Pentecost brought them to Jerusalem to worship at the temple.

Act 2:5 (NIV). “God-fearing Jews.” This is a term used specifically for male converts who believed in the teachings of monotheism and the law of Moses but did not undergo circumcision since it was often a fatal operation for adult men.³⁰ These men were not considered Gentiles because they worshipped and lived most of the laws of Moses. (The gospel was preached only to Israelites until Act 10.)

Act 2:5. “every nation under heaven.” This phrase references the entire Roman Empire or civilized world.

Act 2:6 (NIV). “a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language.” This is extraordinary because almost everyone in the Roman Empire spoke and understood Greek. News of the linguistic phenomena was noised abroad, in part because it was an extraordinary event and in part because of the extraordinary message.

Act 2:7 (BSB). “Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?” The Anchor Bible translates this question differently. Instead of communicating that the disciples were Galileans, their translation speaks of the audience’s awareness that these men were “followers of the Galilean.” We know that Jesus had caused quite a stir six weeks earlier. The heated debates over His death and Resurrection were still probably going on. We also know from Mt 26:23 that the locals at the high priest’s palace accused Peter because his accent set him apart as a Galilean. Now that same voice was clearly speaking foreign languages and defending Jesus’s divinity with a powerful, strengthened witness.

Act 2:8 (BLB). “how do we each hear our own language.” Fifteen different peoples or countries are mentioned. By looking at a map of the Roman Empire, we find these pilgrims had traveled from Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Arabian Desert. Palestine was known as the crossroads of the East. Thus this event fulfilled part of the charge to take the gospel to the world. Did the witnesses to this miracle understand the significance of how and why God interacted in this manner with His children? It gives one pause to think of how many miracles are around us.

Peter's sermon—Act 2:14–36

Act 2:14. “Peter, standing up with the eleven.” Peter spoke as the mouthpiece, but all eleven of the Apostles were together and speaking in tongues.

Act 2:15. “not drunken . . . it is but the third hour.” The third hour was 9 a.m. (The day was measured from 6 a.m. until 6 p.m., and the night was divided into four watches.) Traditionally, the people would not have eaten their first meal of the day yet, let alone have become drunk.

Act 2:16–17. “spoken by the prophet Joel; . . . I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.” Peter quoted Joel 2:28–31 (see Act 2:16–21). The prophecy was fulfilled in part, although Moroni told Joseph Smith four times that it still was “not yet fulfilled” (JS—H 1:41). However, scripture can be fulfilled in many ways and times. Early Christians saw themselves living in the last days and expected the end because Jesus had instructed them to watch until the end.³¹ The Apostles could not meet their end (that is, their death) until the gospel was witnessed to the world. Paul taught in 2 Thes 2:1–3, Heb 9:26–28, and Act 20:29 that there would be a falling away and an apostasy. Peter also predicted the Apostasy in 2 Pe 3:3–9. After Peter's death came the anti-Christ of 1 Jn 2:18.

Act 2:19. “wonders . . . and signs.” Luke repeats this phrase from Joel 2:30 nine times between Act 2 and 15 but does not use it again afterward.

Act 2:20 (NIV). “The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood.” Peter finished quoting Joel with a prophecy of the Judgment Day.³²

Act 2:22–24. “Jesus of Nazareth . . . ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified . . . God hath raised up.” This is the core belief of Christianity. (Paul elaborates on it in 1 Cor 15:3–4.)

Act 2:23 (BSB). “He was delivered up by God's set plan and foreknowledge.” Peter also testified of a premortal existence and the “foreknowledge of God” (KJV). God's “set plan” is also translated as “deliberate plan” (NIV), “definite plan” (ESV), and “predetermined plan” (NASB).

Act 2:25–26 (BSB). “David says . . . ‘I saw the Lord always before me . . . dwell in hope.’” After quoting Joel, Peter quoted Ps 16:8–11, written by the beloved King David. That verse references God restoring the spirit and body to hope.

Act 2:27 (JST) “thou wilt not leave my soul in **prison, neither . . . thy Holy One to see **corruption**.”** The JST changed “hell” to “prison” (just a few months after Joseph received the revelation on the three degrees of glory, known as D&C 76).

Act 2:29 (CSB). “Brothers and sisters.” The KJV “brethren” in the NIV is “fellow Israelites” (compare Act 1:16).

Act 2:29. “the patriarch David . . . his sepulchre is with us.” Peter referred to David's tomb to prove that the scriptures were not fulfilled in David's lifetime. At the time of Jesus, there was a great interest in tombs of Old Testament kings and prophets.³³ Peter referred to David as both a patriarch and prophet. These are loose titles not applied to David in the Old Testament but added in the New Testament to mean that he was a noble ancestor who spoke prophetically and testified of the coming Messiah (for example, see Ps 132).

Act 2:32 (AB). *“of that [fact] we are all witnesses.”* In Greek “witnesses” here can refer to eyewitnesses or earwitnesses, including the Twelve and, perhaps, the five hundred eyewitnesses to Jesus’s Resurrection (Act 1:3, 1 Cor 15:6). What set the Twelve apart from the other witnesses were that Jesus called them to testify of their experience with the resurrected Lord and be a witness of Him by their lives. They were now carrying out Jesus’s assignment from Act 1:8: “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem” (NIV).

Act 2:33 (BLB). *“received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father.”* The disciples have received the great promise of the Spirit that cleanses, enlightens, heals, and gives one a new tongue. The entire crowd could now become witnesses of the works of the Spirit in the disciples’ lives.

Act 2:34 (ABPE). *“THE LORD JEHOVAH said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand.’”* Peter cited Ps 110 and explained that it did not refer to David because his bones were still in the tomb. Rather the verse was messianic.³⁴ Earlier, Peter heard Jesus ask the same question about this psalm (Mt 22:41–46). Jesus silenced His Pharisaic questioners, and Peter explained that Jesus is the One who is exalted at the right hand of God.

Three thousand believe—Act 2:37–41

Act 2:37. *“they were cut to the heart . . . what shall we do?”* The crowd of international Jewish pilgrims gathered for the feast also felt the Spirit and wanted to follow the disciples. Luke emphasizes their belief: “What shall we do?” meaning, “What is next, and how do we join you?”

Act 2:38. *“Repent, and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.”* Repentance is more than stopping bad behaviors; it is turning toward Jesus for His redeeming forgiveness and sanctification. That returning requires a change of heart, mind, and behaviors. The Spirit then becomes the cleansing agent enabling the Savior’s Atonement to work in our souls. Peter’s message extends to believers who need continued sanctification as we grow line upon line, precept upon precept (2 Ne 28:30). We keep coming back to repentance over and over again. President Russell M. Nelson taught, “Nothing is more liberating, more ennobling, or more crucial to our individual progression than is a regular, daily focus on repentance. Repentance is not an event; it is a process.”³⁵

Act 2:40 (BSB). *“Be saved from this corrupt generation.”* I prefer this translation because it highlights God as the source of our salvation. Most other translations share the KJV language, “Save yourself,” which encourages active individual accountability for our actions and salvation. Yet, I never want to lose sight of the source of that salvation, “for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do” (2 Ne 25:23). Peter’s counsel was repeated in a revelation through Joseph Smith to our generation (D&C 36:6). *Untoward* means “crooked, perverse, or wicked.”

Act 2:41. *“they that gladly received his word were baptized . . . three thousand souls.”* It makes sense that these converts had already been followers of, or at least interested in, Jesus prior to hearing Peter. Nevertheless, the Spirit’s witness had a powerful impact.

The fellowship of believers—Act 2:42–47

Act 2:42 (BSB). *“They devoted themselves to.”* The devoted disciples maintained a fourfold focus:

- Teaching the “apostles’ doctrines” (which we trust were the Lord’s teachings)
- Fellowship, or “participation, sharing in, or spiritual fellowship”³⁶
- “Breaking of bread,” a phrase used to refer to the sacrament as well as to shared meals
- Prayer—the examples of prayers in the New Testament are not recited but spoken spontaneously from the heart

This faith-filled lifestyle enabled manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit to bless the Saints. It appears the Saints prayed for the gifts of the Spirit because they received “many wonders and signs.”

Act 2:44. *“all that believed were together, and had all things common.”* The Saints in Jerusalem lived the law of consecration, meaning they all worked and shared what they had under the direction of the Church leaders. After they “sold their possessions and goods,” everyone’s needs were met. The Greek word behind “parted them” is also translated as “distributed, sharing, gave.” The Lord restored the same law in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1831 under the principles of stewardship, agency, and accountability.³⁷ We too must live this law to fulfill temple covenants, create a Zion society, and prepare for the Lord’s Second Coming.

Act 2:46. *“from house to house.”* The early Saints met for worship and possibly for meals in members’ homes known as “house churches.”³⁸ The key to the Saints’ harmony was their “singleness of heart.” The Apostles may also have been having the sacrament daily in different houses, but more likely they “shared their food” (JB) or “ate together” (NIV). The temple was a central part of the early Saints’ worship, as is described next.

Acts 3

Peter and John go to the temple at the hour of prayer—Act 3:1

Act 3:1. *“into the temple at the hour of prayer.”* The hour of prayer was 3:00 p.m.³⁹ This was the same hour as the evening sacrifice and second lighting of the incense, which developed from Ex 30:7–8.⁴⁰ In that passage, God instructed Aaron to burn incense “every morning . . . [and] at even . . . a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations.”⁴¹ This time became the most reverent hour at the temple each day. The incense symbolized Israel’s continual prayers.

The hour of prayer began once the priest lit the incense. The rising smoke from the sanctuary signaled to the priests that it was time to line up in front of the Holy Place to recite or sing the priestly prayer from Num 6:24–26. As the priests gathered in a line, Jewish worshippers in the Court of the Women reverently bowed down and spread their hands on the ground in silent prayer. Alfred Edersheim describes the special priestly prayer:

Priests . . . lifted their hands above their heads, spreading and joining their fingers in a peculiar mystical manner. . . [A] priest repeated in audible voice, followed by the others, the blessing from Num 6:24–26 “Jehovah bless thee, and keep thee; Jehovah make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: Jehovah lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.” To this the people responded, “Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting.”⁴²

Luke includes Peter’s worship at the temple to communicate to his readers that the temple was central to the Apostles’ worship, prayer, miracles, and teachings.

Peter heals a lame man—Act 3:2–10

Act 3:2 (ESV). “**a man lame from birth . . . laid daily at the gate of the temple . . . to ask alms.**” Having just described the earliest Saints sharing all they had with each other, Luke now adds the contrasts of a crippled beggar relying on the mercy of temple worshippers. Most ancient Jews misunderstood birth defects and blamed them on sin.⁴³ In addition to the challenges of living with disabilities in the ancient world, this cultural baggage added emotional and spiritual scars.

Act 3:3–4. “**Peter and John about to go into the temple . . . said, Look on us.**” The lame man seems to have requested money from everyone he could. It appears that he did not know enough about the Apostles to ask for healing. However, Act 4:22 and 3:10 let us know he was over forty years old and came regularly enough to the temple that people knew him. If that were the case, I presume he had heard about Jesus of Nazareth and possibly had developed faith. The Spirit inspired Peter to heal this man. God wanted him to witness His power and open up a wonderful missionary opportunity.

Act 3:6. “**Silver and gold have I none; . . . In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise.**” Again, Peter emphasized that the power of healing comes from the Savior. Peter was not the source of power, Jesus was. When we honor our Lord and exert our faith, His name has power. Peter exemplified President Russell M. Nelson’s counsel to “minister in His name, with His power and authority, and with His loving-kindness.”⁴⁴

Act 3:7. “**he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up.**” The right hand was the ritually clean hand and was used to perform clean functions. Everywhere in holy writ, the right hand is the covenant hand.

Act 3:8 (CSB). “**he entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God.**” The man’s joyful entrance attracted plenty of attention, and the onlookers were “filled with wonder and amazement.” The Court of the Gentiles covered about thirty-three to thirty-six acres, and with all the Pentecost pilgrims much of that space would have been filled with people. Peter and John went straight into the more sacred space in the Court of the Women, where a crowd gathered around them.

Peter preaches at the temple in Solomon's Porch—Act 3:11–26

Act 3:11 (NET). *“the man was hanging on . . . all the people, completely astounded, ran together to . . . Solomon's Portico.”* The happy healed man “clung to Peter” (BSB) as the group moved into the area known as Solomon's Porch, a covered area with four rows of marble columns on the eastern side of the Court of the Women. Solomon's palace stables once stood on the spot.

Act 3:12 (NIV). *“Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?”* Peter made completely sure that everyone understood that he was not the source of the healing; it was God's power administered through faith on Jesus's name (Act 3:16).

Act 3:14–15. *“Holy One and the Just . . . Prince of life.”* Luke uses unique titles that are also translated “Holy and Righteous One,” “Author of life,” “Source of life,” and “Ruler of Life” (NIV, CSB, ABPE).

Act 3:17 (NIV). *“fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders.”* Peter referred to his audience in a gentle manner that opened the way to repentance for those who agreed to kill Jesus. The New Testament refers several times to forgiving the people who enabled Jesus's death.⁴⁵

Act 3:18–19 (NIV). *“God fulfilled . . . all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God.”* The early Christians found signs of Jesus all over the Old Testament (see 1 Cor 10:1–6). The typology was later communicated in the artwork in their churches by placing Old Testament stories on top of New Testament stories of Jesus (for example, Noah's ark paired with Jesus's baptism, Adam and Eve's Fall with the Good Samaritan).⁴⁶

Act 3:19 (NIV). *“Repent, then, and turn to God . . . that times of refreshing may come.”* This is the only use of the word *refreshing* in the entire New Testament. It is also translated as “the times of rest” (ABPE) and “when the Lord will give you fresh strength” (CEV). It is similar to the idea mentioned in Mt 19:28: “The regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory” (also see Articles of Faith 1:10). Peter had great hope that the Jews would turn around, repent of their sins, and receive Jesus as their Messiah. He heard Jesus testify that His gospel must be preached to all the world before the messianic age.⁴⁷ And Peter's firsthand experience with repentance must have given him even greater hope and appreciation of the gift. Repentance is the way God established for Jesus to blot or wipe away our sins. Jesus was appointed for that very purpose (NIB, RSV, NEB, rather than the KJV “preached” [Act 3:20]).

Act 3:21 (BSB). *“Heaven must take Him in until . . . the restoration of all things.”* The KJV has “restitution of all things”), and the NIV has “the time comes for God to restore everything.” Early Christians found the timing of the Lord's Second Coming especially confusing. In hindsight we realize “a restoration of all things” was needed because an apostasy occurred first.⁴⁸ We see a fulfillment of this prophecy by Peter in the spring of 1820, when God and His Son came down from heaven, called a young prophet, and began the restoration of all things.

Act 3:21. “since the world began.” Wilford Griggs pointed out that “this phrase could just as well have been translated ‘from eternity.’ Should we understand the text to mean that holy prophets should speak only those things that they learned ‘from eternity,’ or in heavenly councils?”⁴⁹

Act 3:22–23. “A prophet . . . like unto [Moses] . . . every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed.” The parallels between Moses and Jesus are numerous. Like Moses, Jesus was the law giver and taught a new, higher law (Mt 5–7); fed the masses (Mt 14:21; 15:38); offered living water (Jn 4:14); and led a way for all God’s children to enter the promised land—Moses led Israel up to the promised land, while Jesus had led them to kingdoms of glory with immortality and eternal life.⁵⁰

These two verses have special significance to our dispensation. On September 21, 1823, when the angel Moroni visited Joseph Smith, he quoted these two verses precisely as they are here. Moroni explained, “That prophet was Christ; but the day had not yet come when ‘they who would not hear his voice should be cut off from among the people,’ but soon would come” (JS—H 1:40). That day is soon, as President Nelson warned: “Time is running out.”⁵¹ We share the assignment to prepare disciples for that day.

Act 3:24. “all the prophets . . . have likewise foretold of these days.” Both the Jews and early Saints searched their scriptures to find prophecies of their Messiah.⁵² The Pharisees and many other Jews believed in a resurrection. Jewish rabbinical writings affirm that “all of the prophets prophesied only concerning the days of the Messiah.”⁵³

Act 3:25. “Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant.” Jesus explained what this meant when He visited the Nephites. The covenant seed is not necessarily determined by birth lineage. It includes those who believe God, live His commandments, and spread His gospel blessings (3 Ne 20:25–27). In the ancient world and now, those who follow in the footsteps of the prophets and strive to follow Jesus as they did are the children of the prophets (D&C 84:33–34).

Act 3:26. “God, having raised up his Son Jesus.” The KJV is unique in this translation. Most English translations change “Son” to “servant.” (The Greek word is used ten times in the New Testament. In the KJV, eight of those are translated “servant.”) When servant has a capital *S* it points to Jesus, but when lowercased, the meaning broadens to include God’s prophets and disciples. Jesus is our great exemplar as the Servant of servants, and those who follow Him join in servitude.

Acts 4

Peter and John testify to the Sanhedrin—Act 4:1–21

Act 4:1. “as they spake . . . the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came.” The exuberance of the healed man along with the large crowd of five thousand men that gathered to hear Peter preach after the miracle must have created enough of a stir to draw the attention of the temple police. The temple guard and police were Levites.⁵⁴ Luke also mentions that priests (or descendants of Aaron), a captain of the temple (usually a close friend and family member of the reigning high priest),

and Sadducees (politically tied to the temple, but not necessarily priesthood holders) all came out in force to check out the situation. These men would have all been part of, or at least aware of, Jesus's trial and concerned that more problems would arise because of the teacher from Nazareth.

Act 4:2. "Being grieved that they taught . . . Jesus." It is interesting that the Sadducees are mentioned among those angry about Peter and John's evangelizing because they did not believe in the Resurrection—which is exactly what Peter preached. In addition to the Levitical temple police who watched over the sacred spaces, Roman soldiers also kept law and order in the Court of the Gentiles and throughout Jerusalem.

Act 4:3 (CSB). "they seized them and took them into custody." Peter, John, and possibly the healed man (see Act 4:14) were arrested and thrown into prison for the night. What do you think Peter and John taught the healed man that night in prison? The reference to evening suggests that Peter preached for at least an hour, if not two.

Act 4:4. "many of them which heard the word believed . . . about five thousand." The number five thousand may be the number of people who crowded into the Court of the Women to hear Peter or the total number of Christians (at that time referred to as followers of "The Way" or "Sect of the Nazarene").

Some scholars question whether these remarkable numbers are exaggerated because Paul reports that "[the Jews] persist in their unbelief" (Rom 11:23). Yet, Paul did not convert and begin his preaching until after the first fruits were harvested or baptized. The numbers are consistent with the size of crowds that followed Jesus.

Act 4:5. "on the morrow." It seems that the leaders were worried about what had happened and pulled together a portion of the Sanhedrin for Peter and John's trial. A similar group is listed as Jesus's accusers (adding in elders and scribes).⁵⁵ The Sanhedrin met within the precincts of the temple in a stone chamber on the south wall of the priest's court.

Act 4:6. "the high priest . . . the kindred of the high priest, were gathered." Annas had reigned as the high priest from AD 6 to 14. From AD 18 to 37, his son-in-law, Caiaphas, served, followed by Annas's son John in AD 37. (Five of Annas's sons acted as high priest.) Alexander's position is unknown to modern readers.

Act 4:7. "By what power, or by what name . . . ?" Nearly the same question had been asked of Jesus by the same group just seven weeks earlier (Mt 21:23). Modern disciples also answer that question each week as they partake of the sacrament and renew their baptismal covenant.

Act 4:8, 10 (NIV). "Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said . . . It is by the name of Jesus." Peter had the opportunity to testify of Jesus the Christ in front of many of those who had plotted to kill Jesus just weeks earlier. His testimony now carried a stronger power not only from His experiences and knowledge but also from the power of God's Spirit.

Act 4:11 (NIV). "the stone you builders rejected." Peter quoted Ps 118:22. This is the most frequently mentioned psalm in the New Testament, and it applies to the Messiah. Pilgrims sang this

as they walked up the mountain to Jerusalem. Cornerstones were usually the foundation and principal corner of a building.

Act 4:12. “*Neither is there salvation in any other . . . name.*” Again, Peter emphasized the name of Jesus as the key word given by heaven for salvation. God bound our universe together by an oath from the foundation of the world. The ancient rabbis who wrote the Hekhalot literature recorded, “The name through which the heaven and the earth were created, and all the orders of creation of the world . . . were sealed by it.”⁵⁶

Act 4:13. “*when they saw the boldness of Peter and John.*” The leaders knew these men had been Jesus’s disciples and were amazed by the strength of their convictions since they were “unlearned in the Law and laymen” (AB). This does not mean they were illiterate, as most Jewish boys learned to read and write starting at age five.⁵⁷

Act 4:16–17. “*What shall we do to these men? . . . let us straitly threaten them.*” The council decided to threaten Peter and John to stop talking about Jesus. But that did not go over very well with bold Peter and John.

Act 4:19 (NIV). “*Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him?*” Peter no longer feared the Sanhedrin’s position or threats. His intimidation at Passover is completely gone by Pentecost. All disciples need to pay more attention to God than to cultural norms or what is socially correct. We also need to examine the way we think, act, speak, and keep the Sabbath to make sure it is in keeping with God’s will, not a social norm. (Luke includes Peter repeating the same message in Act 5:29.)

Act 4:21 (JST). “*for many glorified God for that which was done.*” Just as they had in the Lord’s trial, the leaders debated about how to punish Peter and John for healing. This is one of Luke’s many examples of parallels between Jesus and the Apostles to demonstrate that the men were carrying on the same work.

Believers pray for wonders and receive an earthquake—Act 4:23–31

Act 4:24. “*they lifted up their voice to God with one accord.*” Once the elders released the Apostles, the group joined the disciples and prayed or sang with the Holy Spirit. They were filled with gratitude—not even complaining about their unfair imprisonment. Their grateful attitude decreased the pain of the night’s punishment. Their prayer confirmed their belief and eternal perspective that all would be well because Jehovah, their Creator, is Jesus.

Act 4:25. “*Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?*” Ps 2 (which is royal because it was used at Solomon’s coronation) was quoted in part. This psalm as well as many Old Testament scriptures have at least two meanings. This one applies to Peter and John’s experience, to Jesus’s trial, and to now. (Remember the word *Christ* in verse 26 means “anointed one” and may apply to those anointed to serve God.)

Act 4:29. “grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word.”

In addition to asking for confidence to declare God’s word, the group prayed for other gifts of the Spirit, including miracles and wonders. Later, Paul, Mormon, and Joseph Smith directed the Saints to seek the best gifts of the Spirit, “with all the energy of heart” (Moro 7:48).

Act 4:31 (CEV). “the meeting place shook. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Whether the room alone or the region as a whole shook, the Saints saw it as a sign of God’s power. Earthquakes were common in that region, but this followed a prayer asking for signs and wonders and was accompanied by the Spirit of God. We know that God uses natural laws to accomplish all His great works. The miracle was in the timing of the shaking (just like the earthquakes that Saul and Alma the Younger felt).

Second reference to living in financial unity—Act 4:32–37

Act 4:32–34 (NIV). “the believers were one in heart and mind . . . they shared everything . . . no needy persons among them.”

Luke repeats the wonderful unity the believers shared as they lived the law of consecration, adding that their financial generosity empowered them to preach and receive God’s grace. This higher law requires hard work and supreme economic selflessness. It is the consummation of the laws of obedience, sacrifice, and loving God and our neighbor.⁵⁸ The challenges of living the laws of chastity and sobriety fade, but the challenge of being generous remains. The bulk of the Old Testament is filled with economic obligations. The New Testament contains stories with similar messages, such as the rich young man who could not leave his wealth to follow Jesus (Mk 10:21). President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “The law of consecration [was] not done away with and is still in effect.”⁵⁹ In an earlier general conference Mark E. Peterson said, “The Law of Consecration is the most important, specific and sacred law.”⁶⁰

Act 4:34–37 (NIV). “those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money . . . [like] Barnabas.” The Church is still small enough in Acts that the Apostles are taking care of all its financial responsibilities. A Levite, Joseph Barnabas, is Luke’s example of a generous homeowner who donates his land and money to the Church. He is singled out because he will become Paul’s companion and is referred to as an Apostle in Act 14:14.

Acts 5

Ananias and Sapphira—Act 5:1–11

Act 5:1–2 (BSB). “sold a piece of property. With his wife’s full knowledge, he kept back some of the proceeds.”

In contrast to the generous example of Barnabas, we now have the premeditated greed of Ananias and Sapphira (both common names at the time). Even though Sapphira did not sell the property, because she knew about it and later lied, she is equally responsible (NIV, RSV, NEB). To understand the depth of this problem, it helps to realize that when we live the law of consecration, we do not

claim anything as our own. All is God's, and therefore keeping back some is stealing from God as well as breaking a very serious covenant. The story echoes Jos 7:1, in which Achan and his family were likewise unfaithful to "devoted things" and were killed (BSB).

Act 5:3 (NIV). "*Peter said, 'Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit . . . ?'*" The selfish nature of Ananias initiated the problem, but his sin was far greater. By lying under a covenant, he has lied to God. Lying after promising to be honest multiplies one's sin. Our actions are judged on a different level after making sacred promises and knowing what we know. "For of him unto whom much is given much is required; and he who sins against the greater light shall receive the greater condemnation" (D&C 82:3). Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught, "Unrepentant liars will be damned."⁶¹ Yet, when Ananias "lied to the Holy Spirit," it was not the same as the unpardonable sin of perdition, as outlined in Mt 12:31–32.⁶²

Act 5:5 (NIV). "*When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all.*" His immediate death did not leave Ananias time for repentance. Luke recorded this story as a warning to all who have made covenants and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. He also used the story to show "how God works through the apostles, and especially through Peter."⁶³ The text says that Ananias was immediately carried out to be buried. This was a common practice so one could be in the tomb before the body began to decompose.

Act 5:7–8 (NIV). "*his wife came in. . . 'Yes,' she said, 'that is the price.'*" Just three hours later, Peter questioned Sapphira about the sale price, and she too answered, "Yes." Luke included the story to teach that covenanters have the responsibility to honor their promises to God.

Act 5:11 (NIV). "*Great fear seized the whole church.*" Luke's account added to the impact of the story, providing shock value that demonstrates the seriousness of covenant making, sin, the law of consecration, and Peter's prophetic leadership. This is the first time in the New Testament that the word *church* is used. As the chief Apostle, Peter received the gift of discernment to eradicate the impurity in the Church. But it was God's judgment that came upon Ananias and Sapphira and shortened their lives.

Apostolic healings—Act 5:12–16

Act 5:12 (BSB). "*The apostles performed many signs and wonders.*" The Apostles and disciples continued to meet in the temple regularly—even in Solomon's Porch—where Jesus had taught and Peter had been arrested (Jn 10:23; Act 3:11). The stern threat from the Sanhedrin did not slow them down, especially from performing healings and other miracles.

Act 5:13 (JST). "*the rulers durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.*" The JST changed "rest" to "rulers" to clarify the two groups of people: the Jewish leaders who worked in opposition to the Apostles and "the people [who] magnified them." Unfortunately, the leaders kept their distance for only a short time, and then they returned to persecute the Saints (Act 5:18).

Act 5:14 (NIV). *“more and more men and women believed.”* The Saints’ immediate missionary success was phenomenal. The Apostles continued to do Jesus’s work, following the pattern Jesus set—healing and preaching. God’s power is manifest through His servants.

Act 5:15 (NIV). *“people brought the sick into the streets . . . so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some.”* These Jews exerted great faith in the Lord’s power to heal through Peter and were richly rewarded. Peter had already taught that he was not the source of healing; rather, it was God’s great power. A similar outpouring of healing came on two separate days when the resurrected Jesus visited the Nephites (3 Ne 17:7; 26:15) and when the Prophet Joseph Smith healed hundreds of the Saints who were encamped as refugees on either side of the Mississippi River and suffering from malaria on July 22, 1839.⁶⁴

Apostles imprisoned again—Act 5:17–28

Act 5:17 (NIV). *“The high priest and all his associates . . . were filled with jealousy.”* The leaders’ envy led them to imprison all the Apostles this time. Most English translations use the phrase “common prison” or “public jail” in verse 18, avoiding too precise a definition.

Act 5:19 (NIV). *“an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out.”* That the Apostles were released by angels is all the more ironic since the Sadducees did not believe in angels (Act 5:17). The angels instructed the Apostles to return to the temple courtyards to preach “about this new life” (NIV). Undaunted by the leaders and empowered by the angels, the Apostles returned to the courtyards—the very place of their two previous arrests. These Galilean Apostles had no fear of the Jewish leaders.

Act 5:21–23. *“the officers came, and found them not in the prison.”* The high priest had gathered the Sanhedrin to discuss the Apostles’ preaching, but when they returned to find them, they were nowhere to be seen. The high priest and leaders “doubted” or were “perplexed,” “wondered,” “baffled,” or “puzzled” (KJV, BSB, NIV, HCSB, NET). Their anger probably blinded them from believing.

Act 5:25 (NIV). *“Look! the men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching.”* A report that the Apostles were preaching again in the temple was confirmed by an important figure in the Sanhedrin, the captain of the officers (one of the chief priests who was over the temple police or Levites). Just as with the arrest of Jesus (Lk 22:6), the officers took care not to arouse the crowd who honored the Apostles. We get a better feel for how deep that honor went in the next verse: the guards took care because they “feared lest they should have been stoned” by the people for taking the Apostles.

Act 5:28. *“Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name?”* The Lord’s name had powerful implications. This second attempt of the Sanhedrin to silence the Apostles was in vain.

Peter’s defense—Act 5:29–32

Act 5:29. *“We ought to obey God rather than men.”* Peter gave the same answer that he did at his first hearing (Act 4:19). Luke mentions that the other Apostles joined Peter in the defense. If we modern

disciples can internalize this rebuttal, it can become a source of strength in refuting the world's constant temptations to compromise faith and obedience. Regarding all God's commandments, we can always remember, "We ought to obey God rather than man."

Act 5:30. *"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew."* Peter directly attacked the high priest and Sanhedrin for their part in condemning and killing Jesus, which probably put them on the defense. But there was no question in Peter's mind who was to blame for Jesus's death. Peter said Jesus died by "hanging on a tree"—an interesting phrasing since the law of Moses states that "he that is hanged is accursed" (Deu 21:22–23). Yet, hearing that Jesus was exalted to the right-hand position to God must have been offensive to the Sanhedrin. Luke may be connecting the first Adam, who ate from the forbidden tree, with the second Adam, who hung on a tree to free us from sin (see 1 Cor 15:45).

Act 5:32 (NIV). *"We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit."* Peter testified powerfully with wonderful promises of the Spirit's inner witness. He also taught that God will give His Spirit to all who obey Him. The Spirit acted as a second witness to the Apostles' testament that Jesus is the Savior of the world.

Gamaliel's advice—Act 5:33–42

Act 5:33. *"cut to the heart."* This is also translated as "enraged" (RSV) or "furious" (NIV) or "infuriated" (JB). Some of the leaders became so angry they wanted to kill the Apostles.

Act 5:34. *"Gamaliel, a doctor of the law."* The hero of the hour was Gamaliel (Saul's previous teacher [Act 22:3]). Gamaliel was a Pharisee, a distinguished member of the Sanhedrin and grandson of the famous rabbi Hillel. Gamaliel had a tradition of being tolerant, kindhearted, and of emphasizing the humanistic considerations of the law (including supporting the humane treatment of women in divorce laws, relaxing the demands of the Sabbath, and so forth). This is also the first time a Pharisee has been mentioned in Acts. Since the Lord's death, no Pharisees have been listed in the groups opposing the followers of Jesus. Here it is just the opposite—a Pharisee advocated tolerance for them. This may have been another battle between the Sadducees and Pharisees.

Act 5:38–39 (BSB). *"if their purpose or endeavor is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop them."* Luke recorded Gamaliel's advice. Jewish history recorded that Theudas persuaded a large crowd to follow him to the Jordan promising them that he would divide the waters, but he was killed and his supporters dispersed.⁶⁵ This leader became the father of the political group the Zealots (who opposed Roman rule in Palestine).⁶⁶

Act 5:40 (NASB 1995). *"They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them."* Gamaliel's advice carried the day. But his cautionary tone did not stop the angry leaders from having the Apostles scourged, just as Pilate punished Jesus a few months earlier (Lk 23:16–22; Jn 19:1).

Act 5:41–42. *"they departed . . . rejoicing . . . to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple . . . ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ."* The Apostles' ability to see their

pain in an eternal perspective allowed them to rejoice through their sufferings. Fortunately, the tacit Sanhedrin ignored their continual efforts to carry out Jesus’s commission to preach the good news. The Apostles felt the best spot to do that was in the temple.

Notes

1 Paul J. Achtemeier, *Harper Collins’ Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1996), 629. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1998), 49–50. The church fathers included Irenaeus of Lyons, France; Clement of Alexandria; Origen of Alexandria; and Tertullian of Carthage.

2 Jeffrey R. Holland, “Teaching, Preaching, Healing,” *Ensign*, January 2003.

3 Act 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–37; 28:1–16.

4 Luke is given away as a foreigner by his faulty knowledge of Palestinian geography and customs. He makes minor mistakes when describing some traditions or temple customs—for example, confusing Mary’s required forty-day purification offering at the temple (Lev 12:2–6) with presenting the firstborn (Ex 13:2; Num 18:15) in Lk 2:22–24.

5 Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*.

6 Achtemeier, *Harper Collins’ Bible Dictionary*, 583; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 36; John L. Hilton, unpublished stylometry studies (in author’s possession).

7 Fitzmyer, *Luke I–IX*, 38–39.

8 Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion*, 2.51.11. He claims that both Mark and Luke were members of the Seventy.

9 Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Understanding Paul* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1983), 10. The religions in the Roman Empire included traditional pagan, mystery religions, Stoicism, Epicureanism, Judaism, and Judaic sympathizers.

10 Hugh Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1987), 10–167.

11 Gen 7:17; Ex 34:28; Lev 12:2–6; Num 14:34.

12 David A. Bednar, “Always Retain a Remission of Your Sins,” April 2016 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

13 Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1980), 5:555. “The Holy Ghost is God’s messenger to administer in all those priesthoods” (A reciprocal relationship between the workings of the Spirit and Priesthood is also found in 1:85; 3:384; 4:610; 5:30–31; 6:74). This phrase is only in the edited version and is not found in the *Joseph Smith Papers*.

14 Act 6:3; 11:29; 12:17; 16:40; 18:18, 27; 21:7, 17; 28:14, 15.

15 See Ps 41:9; 69:25; 109:8.

16 Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, 273; see Jn 14:26; 16:7–15.

17 Lev 16:8; Jos 18:6–10; 21:8; Neh 10:34; 11:1; Jn 1:7. Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple, Its Ministry and Services, as They Were at the Time of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1881), 132, 137. Priests cast lots in Herod’s temple each morning for the Lord to select at which station they would serve.

18 Lk 6:13; 9:10; 11:49; 17:5; 22:14; 24:10.

19 Hoyt W. Brewster Jr., *Doctrine and Covenants Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2012). 89.

20 “History, 1838–1856, volume B-1 [1 September 1834–2 November 1838] [addenda],” pp. 3–4 [addenda], *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-b-1-1-september-1834-2-november-1838/306#X8F3A43A7-2C36-45A6-BDD2-D42F84166DFD>: “President Brigham Young gave a short address in tongues, and David W. Patten interpreted, and gave a short exhortation in tongues himself, after which I blessed the congregation in the name of the Lord, and the assembly dispersed a little past four o’clock, having manifested the most quiet demeanor during the whole exercise. . . . George A. Smith arose and began to prophesy, when a noise was heard like the sound of a rushing mighty wind, which filled the Temple, and all the congregation simultaneously arose, being moved upon by an invisible power; many began to speak in tongues and prophesy; others saw glorious visions; and I beheld the Temple was filled with angels, which fact I declared to the congregation. The people of the neighborhood came running together (hearing an unusual sound within, and seeing a bright light like a pillar of fire resting upon the Temple), and were astonished at what was taking place.”

21 Jn 14:26; 16:7–15; also see Act 1:8.

22 The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that all prophets had the higher priesthood and their endowment. We also see examples of the witness and fruits and gifts of the Spirit scattered throughout the Old Testament and Gospels, even without the higher priesthood confirming the gift on most people.

23 See Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Smith* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1990), 285. Joseph’s sermon was given years after he administered the first washings and anointings in January 1836.

24 Donald W. Parry, ed., *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1994), 56–57.

25 1 Cor 12:3–8; Moro 10:8–18; D&C 46:10–29; Articles of Faith 1:7.

26 Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 21. “There was no point upon which the Prophet Joseph dwelt more than the discerning of Spirits.”

27 Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:58.

28 Larry E. Dahl and Donald Q. Cannon, *Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith’s Teachings* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2000), 669–670. When Joseph Smith met Brigham Young, Brigham spontaneously spoke in tongues for his first time, then Joseph did. “Brothers Brigham and Joseph Young and myself [Heber C. Kimball] went to Kirtland, Ohio. We saw Brother Joseph Smith and had a glorious time, during which Brother Brigham spoke in tongues, this being the first time Joseph had heard the gift. The Prophet rose up and testified that it was from God. The gift then fell upon him, and he spoke in tongues.” Dean C. Jessee found the following in Joseph’s handwritten journal from October 25, 1835: “The Lord poured out His Spirit, and some glorious things were spoken in the gift

of tongues and interpreted concerning the redemption of Zion.” Dean C. Jessee, *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1984), 64–65, also 139.

29 “History, 1838–1856, volume B-1 [1 September 1834–2 November 1838] [addenda],” p. 3 [addenda], The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-b-1-1-september-1834-2-november-1838/306#X8F3A43A7-2C36-45A6-BDD2-D42F84166DFD>; spelling and punctuation silently modernized: “All the congregation simultaneously arose, being moved upon by an invisible power; many began to speak in tongues and prophesy; others saw glorious visions; and I beheld the Temple was filled with angels.” “Times and Seasons, 15 June 1842,” p. 825, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-15-june-1842/11>.

30 Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1990), 105. W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1980), 121. “Now the process by which a man was made a proselyte was threefold: it consisted of circumcision, immersion in water (i.e., baptism), and the presentation of an offering in the temple. Of these rites baptism assumed a growing importance.”

31 Mt 24:14; 28:19–20; Lk 21:32; Act 2:17.

32 Joel 2:31; see D&C 29:14; 34:9; 45:42; 88:87; Rev 6:12.

33 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 7.392–394; 1 Kng 2:10. As mentioned previously, weeks before every Passover, the grave sites were whitewashed so pilgrims could easily avoid them to remain clean for the Passover.

34 For more information on David’s eternal status, see “Wilford Woodruff journals and papers, 1828–1898; Wilford Woodruff Journals, 1833–1898; Wilford Woodruff journal, 1843 January–1844 December”; Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/09e6d1b1-cd59-41d4-bc46-e3d74899ceac/o/222>.

35 Russell M. Nelson, “We Can Do Better and Be Better,” April 2019 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

36 “*Koinónia*,” *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, available online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/2842.htm>.

37 D&C 42; 105:29; Mose 7:18.

38 Act 1:14; 9:36; 16:1, 36; 17:4, 12, 34; Rom 1:8; 1 Cor 16:19; Phil 4:3. In the New Testament, four house-churches are mentioned by the women’s names who opened their homes for regular worship: Mary the mother of John Mark (Act 12:12), Lydia the seller of purple (Act 16:14, 40), Chloe in Corinth (1 or 1:11), and Priscilla or Prisca, the wife of Aquila (Act 18:2–3, 18–19, 26; Rom 16:3–5; 1 Cor 16:19; 2 Tim 4:19).

39 Jewish days started with the dark hours (since the Genesis Creation account began with darkness before light). The hours of 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. were divided into three or four watches (depending on region and era). The twelve daylight hours began at 6:00 a.m., and twelfth hour was 5:00 p.m. The hour of prayer was 3:00 p.m.

40 Each day at the temple a sacrifice was offered and incense lit at sunrise and at 3:00 p.m. This became incorporated into a twice-daily ritual of temple service. It was also known as the “time of incense.” The priests met together and cast lots for the Lord to assign a certain priest to lay the incense on the golden altar. Priests were only given this responsibility once in their lives.

41 This hour is found in the Old Testament as an important time for other prophets. The angel Gabriel visited Daniel “about the time of the evening oblation,” or 3:00 p.m. (Dan 9:21). At the same time, “at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice” Elijah prayed for fire to come down from consume his burnt sacrifice on Mount Carmel before the priests of Baal (1 Kng 18:36; also see Judith 9:1).

42 Edersheim, *The Temple*, 141.

43 Jn 9:2; Lev 21:21, 17–23; Avraham Steinberg, ed., *Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics* (Jerusalem, Israel: Feldheim, 2003), 34: “Any illness may result from sin.”

44 Russell M. Nelson, “Ministering with the Power and Authority of God,” April 2018 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

45 Lk 23:34; Act 13:27; 1 Cor 2:8.

46 John W. Welch, “The Good Samaritan: Forgotten Symbols,” *Ensign*, February 2007.

47 Mt 24:14; Act 1:8; 2 Th 2:6–7.

48 Act 20:29; 2 Th 2:3; 1 Tim 4:1.

49 Wilford C. Griggs, *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1986), 193.

50 Jn 14:6, 2. For more see Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Gospel Symbolism* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1985).

51 Russell M. Nelson, “Come, Follow Me,” April 2019 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org. The full quote reads, “Do the spiritual work to find out for yourselves, and please do it now. Time is running out.”

52 One collection of prophecies of the coming Messiah is the *Psalms of Solomon*, but it does not include any scripture about a Suffering Servant or Messiah like is found in Isa 42:1–7; 49:1–6; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:1.

53 Max Kadushin, *The Rabbinic Mind* (Binghamton, NY: Global Publications, Binghamton University, 2001), 363.

54 By the time of the late second temple, the priesthood holders were all descendants of Levi and Aaron and were divided into the following offices:

- a. The one reigning high priest (After King Herod I, this became more political and was no longer lifelong nor assigned by lineage. Roman and Jewish leaders chose who and how long one held that office.)
- b. The chief priests: The captain of the temple, director of weekly course, director of daily course, temple overseer, treasurer
 - Cultus: The leaders of the twenty-four weekly divisions, or “courses”
 - Custody of the temple: temple overseers
 - Temple finances: three treasurers
- c. The priests: twenty-four weekly courses, each of four-to-nine daily courses with about 7,200 priests
- d. The Levites (about 9,600): twenty-four weekly courses, each divided into:
 - Singers and musicians
 - Temple servants and guards

55 See Mt 26:3. After the temple's destruction in AD 70, scribes became known as rabbis.

56 Parry, ed., *Temples of the Ancient World*, 457.

57 Mishnah, *Avoth* 5:21.

58 Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1989), 422–485.

59 *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1997), 640.

60 Mark E. Peterson, “The Last Words of Moroni,” October 1978 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

61 Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1965), 2:58.

62 “History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844],” p. 1976, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-e-1-1-july-1843-30-april-1844/348>: “What must a man do to commit the unpardonable sin? He must receive the Holy Ghost, have the heavens opened to him and know God, and then sin against him . . . he has got to deny Jesus Christ when the heavens have been opened unto him and to deny the plan of salvation with his eyes open to the truth of it. . . . many apostates.”

63 Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 317.

64 Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ*, 4:18. Wilford Woodruff recounted a day of miraculous healings: “Joseph . . . commenced to administer to the sick in his own house and door-yard, and he commanded them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to arise and be made whole; and the sick were healed upon every side of him. Many lay sick along the bank of the river; Joseph walked along up to the lower stone house, occupied by Sidney Rigdon, and he healed all the sick that lay in his path. . . . After healing all that lay sick upon the bank of the river as far as the stone house, he called upon Elder Kimball and some others to accompany him across the river to visit the sick at Montrose.”

65 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.97–98; Theudas lived in AD 44.

66 Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 2.118.