



Luca Giordano, The Conversion of Saint Paul, 1690, painting, Museum of Fine Arts of Nancy, Nancy. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

ACTS 6–9

THE CHURCH GROWS IN THE MIDST OF PERSECUTION

LYNNE HILTON WILSON

Introduction

The early disciples used the same teaching patterns that Jesus had in His ministry—teaching, healing, and striving to create a Zion society. In Act 6–9, Luke includes examples of Stephen, Peter, and Saul teaching how Jesus fulfilled the law of Moses. Luke also includes examples of the Holy Spirit accompanying the Apostles’ efforts to reenact God’s miraculous healings and to teach the same message. As the disciples did this, persecution against them grew, which ironically also grew the Church membership.

The Book of Mormon authors share the same witness the disciples give in these chapters—“For this end hath the law of Moses been given; . . . [for] the typifying of him” (2 Ne 11:4). In both books, disciples testified that God gave “a type and a shadow of things which are to come” (Mosi 13:10).

Acts 6

The seven are called—Act 6:1–7

Act 6:1. *“the number of the disciples was multiplying.”* Conversions continued through the Spirit’s witness of the Apostles’ preaching and healing. Those Israelites who accepted Jesus as their Messiah and were baptized in His name and were referred to as disciples of the Way (Act 19:9; 24:14, 22). At that point, all converts were Jewish and thus used the word *Messiah* rather than the Greek *Christ*. Thus the title *Christian* was not used until after the Greek-speaking Gentiles began to receive the gospel (see Act 11:26).

Act 6:1 (NIV). *“the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews.”* The KJV does not clarify that all the disciples were still Jewish as the NIV translation does. Israelites lived all over the Roman Empire but were identified by different names. The Hellenistic or Grecian Jews were Greek-like in their culture, manners, customs and language (though educated Jews in Jerusalem spoke Greek too). “Hebraic Jews” may refer to a group of disciples who spoke Hebrew.¹ In the Gospels, the word *Hebrew* most often refers to the language, not the people. Here and in two epistles Paul identifies himself as Hebrew (2 Cor 11:22; Phlp 3:5).

A quarrel arose between these two factions of Jews because Greek speakers felt that the Hebrew-speaking widows were being “overlooked in the daily distribution of food” by the Hebrew speakers (NIV). Previously in Act 2:44–45 and 4:32–33 Luke described the disciples living together in Jerusalem and sharing all things in common (probably governed by the law of consecration). This may have been a matter of resource management.

Act 6:3 (NIV). *“Brothers and sisters, choose seven men . . . full of the Spirit and wisdom . . . [to] turn this responsibility over to them.”* The Twelve needed to delegate their ministering in order to focus on preaching. This event echoes Jethro’s advice to his son-in-law Moses to find others to help him (Ex 18:13–27). The Twelve set out the requirements for the new assignment. The seven also needed to be honest, wise, and full of the Spirit. Notice the differences in callings for the seven and Twelve. Both groups were needed and important to grow the kingdom.

Act 6:5 (BSB). *“This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose.”* The disciples practiced common consent. Interestingly, the calling of the seven came about when the Hellenistic Jews voiced their concern, and each of the seven men chosen had Greek names: Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas. (The latter is mentioned as a proselyte, or convert, to Judaism before converting into a disciple of Christ.) Perhaps, Luke writing in Greek, recorded their names in Greek.

Luke includes this as the first example of callings or positions of responsibility besides the apostleship in the early Church. These Saints were able to live in a united order because they were willing to work together as well as work toward financial unity. We have the same call now (D&C 42).

Act 6:6. *“when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.”* Priesthood ordination was involved in the calling of the seven. This became an important part of the Restoration, as the Prophet

Joseph highlighted in the fifth article of faith: “We believe that [all] must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority.” These seven were not Melchizedek Priesthood holders, though, as we learn in Act 8.

Act 6:7. “a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.” “Priests” here refers to descendants of Aaron (a subset of the tribe of Levi). Luke features them as a large group who were baptized into the Church. This may have been assisted by the fact that Peter and the Apostles (and Jesus before them) taught in the temple courtyards, where priests could have heard them and seen their miracles. In Act 4:36 we learned that one of those priests was Barnabas, Paul’s first companion.

Stephen preaches and is arrested—Act 6:8—7:1

Act 6:8. “Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles.” The first of the seven, Stephen, exemplified a disciple who magnified his calling. In addition to his sensitive service to the widows, he was a great missionary. The Lord also blessed him to perform miracles and wonders. His short service was a blessing to the early Church. He appears only in one episode in Acts, but it is a significant example of the theological and historical growth of the Hellenistic Jewish Christians.

Act 6:9 (NIV). “Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen.” In some cities, Jewish men who shared a common station or common values often created a synagogue for themselves. These groups met either in homes or separate buildings, depending on their number and wealth. Luke describes a group of freed slaves who lived in Jerusalem. Male Jewish slaves were given their freedom after seven years of work (Ex 21:2), and the Romans released their slaves at age thirty or thirty-five.² (Female slaves usually served for life as they became the owner’s concubines and bore his children [Ex 21:7–11]). The KJV uses the Latin word *Libertines* even though the freed slaves were initially from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and Asia and all spoke Greek.

Act 6:9–10. “disputing with Stephen . . . they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.” The synagogue of freedmen did not receive Stephen’s preaching. Yet the Spirit confounded them so that they resorted to lies and false witnesses. Just as we saw with Jesus’s trial, a few Jews spread rumors about Stephen until he was seized and taken to the Sanhedrin, or council.³

Act 6:14. “For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place.” Three charges stood against Stephen: (1) committing blasphemy against God and Moses, (2) attacking the law of Moses, and (3) saying that Jesus would destroy the temple and the Mosaic customs. Even though the Sanhedrin had grudgingly tolerated Christians, they would not tolerate any attacks against their temple.

Act 6:15. “[Stephen’s] face as it had been the face of an angel.” The Spirit of the Lord shone through Stephen’s face as he testified. Consistently, Matthew described an angel with a countenance “like lightning, and his raiment white as snow” (Mt 28:3). Luke added that angels looked like “two men [who]

stood by them in shining garments” (Lk 24:4). Joseph Smith described angel Moroni thus: “His whole person was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightning” (JS—H 1:30–32).

Acts 7—Stephen’s Defense: The History of Israel

Act 7:1. “Then said the high priest, Are these things so?” Stephen was allowed to defend himself on the charges of blasphemy against the temple and Mosaic law. The question asked of Stephen was very similar to those questions asked of Jesus, but the Spirit inspired Stephen to speak rather than to remain silent.

From Abraham to Moses—Act 7:2–17

Act 7:2. “Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham.” The first instance of “fathers” here refers to older authority figures, like elders. The second “father” connects Stephen to Abraham as either an Israelite or some other close connection. Throughout his defense, Stephen distinguished between their righteous ancestors as “our fathers” ten times and the less noble “your fathers” twice.⁴

Similarly, in Jesus’s conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well we find references to “our fathers” (Jn 4:12, 20.) Comparing these two references to “our fathers” adds evidence to the early tradition that Stephen may have been part Samaritan.⁵ Furthermore, the text Stephen recited is closer to the Samaritan scriptures than the Hebrew ones (for example, the different spelling of *Charran* for *Harran*). Jesus started an early branch in Samaria where “many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him” (Jn 4:39–41). The first recorded branch of Jesus’s disciples grew in Samaria during the three days that Jesus taught there. It appears that many of these Samaritan disciples joined the Jerusalem church since Jesus instructed His Apostles, “Be witnesses unto me . . . in all Judea, and in Samaria” (Act 1:8). Likewise, Act 8–9 explores missionary work among the Samaritans. Yet, Stephen also cites Judean prophets—Amos and Isaiah—that were not included in Samaritan scripture (which focused on the Torah).

It appears Stephen knew his scriptures well. He cites many scriptures throughout his defense, including:

- Gen 12:1, in Act 7: 3
- Gen 15:13–14, in Act 7:7
- Ex 1:8, in Act 7:18
- Ex 2:14, in Act 7:28
- Ex 3:6, in Act 7:32
- Ex 5, 7, 8, 10, in Act 7:36
- Deu 18:15, in Act 7:37
- Ex 32:1, in Act 7:40
- Amos 5:25–27, in Act 7:43
- Isa 66:1–2, in Act 7:50

Act 7:6. “*God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land.*” Stephen recounted God’s prophecies showing His omniscience and emphasizing “the covenant of circumcision” that Abraham passed down through the patriarchs. By speaking of God’s covenant to Abraham, Stephen demonstrated his respect for the Jewish customs. He reviewed the biblical history of salvation as a witness that he had not blasphemed the law. These examples of God’s dealings with the covenant people are significant to Christian history as well.

Act 7:9. “*sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him.*” Stephen continued with the Israelite history, now emphasizing Joseph, the son of Jacob. Samaritans claimed to be part of the northern tribes, descendants of Joseph or Ephraim (just as the southern tribes at this time were generalized as Jewish or from Judah). In his recounting of the history, Stephen included seventy-five members of Jacob’s family who had come to Egypt (which is consistent with the Septuagint), but our text of Genesis claims only seventy. The location for Jacob’s burial is Sychem, Samaria’s capital (and the location of the woman at the well in Jn 4). All these details point to Stephen being from a Greek or northern city and possibly from Samaria.

From Moses to the promised land—Act 7:18–43

Act 7:20–21. “*Moses was born, and . . . Pharaoh’s daughter took him up.*” Stephen continued to show his allegiance to the Mosaic tradition by retelling the story of Moses’s call to be a prophet. Even though political changes in Egypt “exploited” (JB) the children of Israel, God raised up another prophet.

Act 7:23. “*when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren.*” The first time Moses tried to redeem the Israelites from slavery, they did not understand, and they rejected him. The number forty may be literal here, but it is also used in the Old Testament for periods of purification.⁶ Stephen referenced forty years four times in recapping Moses’s history (Act 7:23, 30, 36, 42).

Act 7:27. “*Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?*” Just like the Israelites rejected Moses’s first attempt to help them, Jesus was rejected too in His first coming. His peers questioned His judgment, but Jesus taught, “The Father . . . hath committed all judgment unto the Son.”⁷ Jesus also connected His experience with Moses’s: “For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me” (Jn 5:46). The lives of the prophets were similitudes, or types of future events, many of which foreshadowed the Messiah (Hos 12:10). Stephen intentionally recited stories when Israel was unwilling to follow God’s plan to connect the ancient and modern experience with Jesus (Act 7:27, 39).

Act 7:29–30 (NIV). “*Moses . . . fled to Midian . . . forty years.*” During the next period of purification, Moses fled to the land of Midian because the Israelites feared his intentions. There the priest of Midian, Jethro (also known as Reuel), took him into the family, and Moses married his daughter Ziporah. The couple were blessed with two sons, Gershom and Eliezer (Ex 2:22; 1 Chr 23:15). The Midianites were descendants of Abraham and Keturah’s fourth child (Gen 25:2). We learn in D&C 84:6–7 that Jethro held the Melchizedek Priesthood and ordained Moses with the same higher power of God.

Act 7:31–33. *“the voice of the Lord came unto him. . . . Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground.”* The KJV records that an angel was in the flame, coinciding with the light-filled fiery appearance of other angels.⁸ After seeing the angel and the flaming bush, Moses heard God’s voice call him, and he obeyed God and reverently and humbly took off his sandals.

Act 7:35–36. *“Moses . . . brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years.”* God called Moses to go back to Egypt and try again to redeem Israel from bondage a second time. Stephen referenced Israel in exile as a transition to Jesus, as He too tried to bring Israel from a place of spiritual bondage to a state of freedom.

Act 7:37 (NIV). *“God will raise up for you a prophet like me.”* Stephen drew on several parallels between Jesus and the history of Israel and also included this prophecy Moses gave of Jesus. Stephen carefully crafted the history to highlight these parallels with Jesus.

Act 7:39–42 (ISV). *“our ancestors refused to obey him . . . ‘you didn’t offer me slaughtered animals and sacrifices those 40 years in the wilderness, did you?’”* Stephen quoted two Old Testament passages—the first half of verse 42 is from Ps 81:12, and the second half cites Amos 5:25–27. Stephen described the children of Israel’s apostasy, including the worship of the golden calf (but he does not include their fear and rejection to enter the promised land). He explained that because of this apostasy, the Israelites had to wait for another purification period of “forty years in the wilderness” (Act 7:36, 42 WEB).

From captivity in Babylon—Act 7:44–50

Act 7:44–45 (BSB). *“Our fathers had the tabernacle of the Testimony . . . [and] brought it in with Joshua.”* The name Jesus is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Joshua. Stephen moved through Israel’s history to tie Joshua entering the promised land with Jesus, who will take all the children of the covenant to an eternal promised land. In one quick phrase Stephen covered four hundred years until Solomon’s temple.

Act 7:47–48. *“Solomon built him an house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands.”* Stephen next confronted the falsehood taught by the Sadducees that one must worship God in the temple. This anti-temple theme would have enraged these Jews who lived in Jerusalem to be near the temple. Any kind of attack on the temple was blasphemy to Jews.

Act 7:49 (BSB). *“Heaven is My throne. . . . What kind of house will you build for Me?”* Stephen recited Isa 66:1–2, which also echoed Solomon’s prayer at the temple’s dedication (1 Kng 8:27). Many Old Testament scriptures speak of the vastness of God’s creation and responsibilities, helping the Israelites to keep their perspective in the context of humanity’s need for a temple (Ps 68:33; 2 Chr 2:6).

Act 7:51 (NIV). *“just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit!”* After Stephen’s short summary of the history of Israel from Abraham to Solomon, he reiterated his theme. The

Israelites have been “stiff necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears.” Their fathers rejected the prophets, and they have rejected their Messiah, the Son of God Himself.

Act 7:52. “Just One.” This phrase, also translated “the Righteous One” (BSB), was a title used often in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms. But it is not found in the Gospels. Luke repeats it twice in Acts, and it is found four times in the Epistles. It is another beautiful and meaningful title for Jesus.

Act 7:54. “When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him.” Stephen honored the law of Moses by saying it was “ordained by angels,” but attacked the high priest, Sanhedrin, and anyone else in his audience with the charge that they “have not kept it.” This infuriated them. *Cut to the heart* means “enraged and found guilty.”

Stephen’s vision—Act 7:55–56

Act 7:55. “he, being full of the Holy Ghost, . . . saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.” The Sanhedrin’s counterattack on Stephen was interrupted by his vision of God’s glory, or a throne theophany. This scripture describes two separate beings of the Godhead. That Jesus took His place of honor on the symbolic right hand of God is consistent with Joseph Smith’s First Vision.⁹

Act 7:56. “Son of man.” This was the title Jesus used when identifying Himself as the Messiah in Jn 1:5 and Mk 2:10. The Gospels use it eighty-eight times to refer to Jesus, but the rest of the New Testament only records it in four places.¹⁰ The Old Testament uses this title for nonmessianic people such as Daniel and Ezekiel (ninety-two times). In Moses 1:12, Satan calls Moses a “son of man.” Also in the book of Moses we learn more about this title for the Father and Son: “In the language of Adam, Man of Holiness is his name, and the name of his Only Begotten is the Son of Man, even Jesus Christ” (Mose 6:57).

Steven is stoned—Act 7:58–8:2

Act 7:58 (BSB). “They dragged him out of the city and began to stone him.” The law of Moses prescribed stoning for blasphemy (Lev 24:11–16). Stephen had been charged with blasphemy (Act 6:11–13), but he was stoned for saying he had seen a vision of God. The Sanhedrin stoned him without a Roman trial or consent. This brings up the question, could Jesus have been killed by the Jews in a similar manner if they had wanted to take credit for his death?¹¹ In the Old Testament, most crimes against God (like blasphemy, Sabbath breaking, and idolatry) were punished by stoning. Yet the legality of Stephen’s stoning is questionable because Roman authorities usually controlled capital punishment.

The Jews had a prescribed custom for stoning. Accusers dragged victims from the judgment hall at the temple out of the city gate. Outside of Jerusalem, victims were bound and thrown off a cliff or ramp (built about twice a man’s height) so that they fell on their back. If victims fell on their face, the first witness had the responsibility of turning them over. If victims were still alive, a second witness would throw a large rock at their heart. If the blow did not kill the victims, then other men took off their outer cloaks and threw more stones until the victims died.

Act 7:58. *“laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet, whose name was Saul.”* Luke recorded that the witnesses of Stephen’s stoning took off their outer cloaks as a sign of their participation. The role of guarding the cloaks was given to someone too young to be in the Sanhedrin (under fifty) but who aspired to have a position there someday.¹² The phrase “young man” is frequently used to refer to someone younger than thirty or forty.¹³ This is how Luke introduces his beloved missionary companion.

Introduction of Saul (Paul)

In this scene, Luke introduces the next central figure in the book of Acts. We have no evidence that Saul acted as an eager listener to Stephen’s testimony (as Alma the Elder listened to Abinadi), especially because he is grouped with the persecutors. Saul is the Hebrew equivalent for Paul in Greek. Paul was a Benjaminite—his parents named him after the star of the tribe of Benjamin and the first Israelite king (Phlp 3:5). Between Act 7 and 13, Luke uses the name Saul seventeen times. After that point, Saul is always called Paul.

Later in the text, we learn that Saul was born in Tarsus as a Roman citizen who studied under the great rabbi and Sanhedrin member Gamaliel of Jerusalem (Act 22:3, 25). As a member of the Sanhedrin, Gamaliel would have been aware of Jesus’s and Peter’s preaching too; but it appears that Paul never heard Jesus during His ministry. Saul was a “Hebrew of Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee” (Phlp 3:5). Thus we assume that his family would have joined the annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem.

Act 7:59 (NIV). *“While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’”* Stephen became the first Christian martyr (although John the Baptist and Jesus were also killed for testifying). Jesus warned the disciples in Mt 24:9 that some would suffer martyrdom, and ten of the Twelve and many others did. From this point on, Jerusalem is described as an enemy of the early Christian Church.

Act 7:60 (BLB). *“And having fallen on his knees, he cried in a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not place this sin to them.’”* Luke includes Stephen’s request for God to forgive those who have killed him. Interestingly, Luke alone had included Jesus saying, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Lk 23:34). Luke concludes with the euphemism “he fell asleep.” For Christians, this is an expression of faith in the afterlife and of God’s plan of salvation.

In Luke’s parallel structure—both in his Gospel and the book of Acts—he emphasizes that the Apostolic Church carried out the same things that Jesus did. Just as the Old Testament prophets typified the promised messiah, the Apostles’ and early disciples’ lives were patterned after their Master’s.

Acts 8—Missions in Samaria and Judea

Accounts of the missions in Samaria and Judea begin in Act 8 and continue through chapter 12.

Act 8:1. “*Saul was consenting unto his death.*” Luke adds a second statement in his account to make sure that his audience knew that Saul was among those who persecuted the early Christians.

Act 8:2. “*devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.*” Other disciples were allowed to honor Stephen’s body with a burial. Luke’s brief description implies that the Saints’ mourning practices were similar to the ritualized Jewish lamentations—including days of elaborate wailing, putting ashes on one’s head, and tearing one’s clothes to dramatize their sorrow.¹⁴

Further persecution in Jerusalem—Act 8:1–4

Act 8:1 (NIV). “*On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem.*” The early persecutions were local, centered in Jerusalem. In a couple of decades (AD 54–68), Nero would attack Christians across the empire.

Act 8:1 (NIV). “*all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.*” This brings up the question of why the Apostles were not scattered with their flock. Perhaps only the Samaritan and Greek Christians were persecuted, not the Jewish Christians. Or perhaps the Apostles were unaffected because the local Jewish leaders were frightened of their power to work miracles. In any case, the scattering would have affected the group’s ability to share all things in common for a time.

Act 8:3 (NIV). “*Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.*” Saul is no longer portrayed as a young silent witness but now is the chief persecutor of the Jerusalem disciples. Later in his letters, Paul verifies this description:

- “Beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it” (Gal 1:13)
- “As for my zeal, I was a persecutor of the church” (Phlp 3:6 ISV)

Act 8:4. “*they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.*” The Jews who tried to stop the followers of Jesus instead ended up helping spread the good news. God’s hand appears to have been directing the scattering as a means of spreading the gospel to allow more of God’s children to learn of His Son and build trust in Him. This exemplifies how the Lord uses affliction to bring about His purposes. As the Saints endured their hardships—their faith, hope, and determination became strengthened. As a result of the persecution, Jesus’s saving message spread across Judea and Samaria.¹⁵

From this point on, Luke does not speak of proselytizing in Jerusalem. The city is the location only of councils and stories of prisons and martyrdoms. Luke moves on to describe the Spirit leading missionaries to Samaria (contrasting Mt 10:5, which described Jesus’s instructions to not preach to the Samaritans; yet Jn 4 shows Jesus teaching there). Apostles preached in Samaria after the Lord’s Resurrection: “You shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Act 1:8 MEV).

Missionary work helped by the Roman Empire

As missionary work extended beyond Jerusalem, two things in particular helped it spread: the ease of travel and the unity of language. Romans built and maintained new roads that connected their empire across the Mediterranean. They patrolled waterways and collected taxes at each port. This safety was unique in the ancient world. The relative political security and good roads enabled travel from one end of the Roman Empire to the other.

The Greek language began spreading as early as 325 BC, when Alexander the Great began his conquering spree across the Mediterranean and beyond. By the time of the New Testament, all educated people throughout the Roman Empire spoke Greek (even though each province also spoke their own local language—for example, Aramaic in Judea and Latin in Rome). With Greek so universally understood, missionary work could spread without a language barrier.

Phillip evangelizes Samaria—Act 8:5–8

Act 8:5. “Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ.” Philip was a common Greek name. This Philip was probably one of those called and ordained help to ensure food and care were given to the widows (Act 6:1–6). Just as his colleague Stephen did, Philip served as a missionary or an evangelist. We learn later that he had four daughters who had the gift of prophecy and that he was a companion to Paul on his third apostolic mission (Act 8:14–15; 21:9–15).

Act 8:5. “went down.” This phrase is always used when traveling away from Jerusalem, regardless of the altitude. Even though Mount Moriah is not the highest mountain in the region, no place is holier to a Jew, so it is figuratively the highest place on earth.¹⁶

Act 8:5. “to the city of Samaria.” The Greek suggests that Philip went either to a chief city of Samaria or to his native city. This opens the possibility of Philip being a Samaritan too. Luke may be paralleling Jesus’s two-day visit to the capital of Samaria, the city of Sychar, as recorded in Jn 4:39–42.

Act 8:6–7. “the people . . . gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, . . . seeing the miracles . . . unclean spirits . . . palsies, and . . . lame, were healed.” Signs again accompanied preaching, but now the Spirit enabled the same miracles that Jesus had performed. Healing physical and spiritual maladies coincide.

All these miracles come as gifts of the Spirit and are available through the power of God for all who seek “earnestly the best gifts, always remembering for what they are given.”¹⁷ Women and children are counted in those to whom God pours out the gifts of the Spirit, which include healing, visions, faith, hope, and charity. Our modern beloved prophetess Eliza R. Snow recorded, “Prest. [Joseph] Smith continued the subject by adverting to the commission given to the ancient apostles ‘Go ye into all the world’ &c.— no

A brief history of the animosity between Jews and Samaritans. The Samaritans and Jews had been archenemies ever since the political split of Israel and Judea after King Solomon. In 538 BC, animosity flared up worse than ever when the Jews returned from Babylon. The Samaritans offered to help the Jews rebuild their temple, but the Jewish leader Zerubbabel refused their help because they had no proper Levitical genealogical evidence (Ezr 4:1–4; Neh 2:19–20). In retribution, the Samaritans used violence and politics to stop the Jews from rebuilding the city of Jerusalem, the wall around it, and the temple. In the fourth century BC, the Samaritans built a temple on Mount Gerizim near their capital city, Shechem. In 128 BC, acting under orders from the high priest, Jewish activists climbed Mount Gerizim and destroyed the Samaritan temple. The Jews then captured the Samaritan city of Shechem for a few years. Over a century later, the Samaritans still considered the Jewish demolition of their temple as reprehensible.¹⁸ By the time of the New Testament, Jews accepted a Samaritan as a Jewish convert “if they denied Mt. Gerizim [as the temple site], and if they acknowledged Jerusalem and the resurrection of the dead.”¹⁹ The Samaritans had six main beliefs—all based on the Pentateuch—that helped open their hearts to the good news of the coming of the Messiah:

1. There is one God.
2. Moses was the greatest and final, or “seal,” of the prophets.
3. The Five Books of Moses (Pentateuch or Torah) are the word of God—all other scripture is rejected.
4. Mount Gerizim was the chosen place for God’s temple.
5. At the end of time a “Restorer” or Messiah will usher in a new dispensation, teach the law, and restore proper modes of worship.
6. A final day of rewards for the righteous and punishments for the wicked will come.

For more on these beliefs, see Jesus’s conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well in Jn 4.

matter who believeth; these signs, such as healing the sick, casting out devils &c. should follow all that believe whether male or female.”²⁰

As a Hellenist Christian, Philip was ideally suited to evangelize Samaria. We assume the cultural antagonism between the Jews and Samaritans would have been less of a problem for those from the diaspora (not Jerusalem). Whatever country the missionaries came from, the Spirit of Truth was strong enough to overcome the cultural baggage that had separated the Samaritans and Jews for a millennium.

Act 8:8. “there was great joy in that city.” The joy stemmed not only from the healing and preaching of the Samaritans but also from the missionaries finding success in their labors.

Simon the Sorcerer—Act 8:9–25

Act 8:9. “*Simon . . . used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria.*” Justin (a second-century Latin author and native of Samaria) recorded that this Simon was Simon Magus, the famous Samaritan who became the founder of the Christian Gnostics.²¹ Simon Magus taught that sub-divinities sprang from the true God and that the Old Testament creator was a junior divinity who made a physical world by mistake. Luke did not record this but identifies Simon as full of pride, dissent, and satanic sources.

Act 8:10. “*they all gave heed . . . This man is the great power of God.*” Simon’s claim to be some sort of great power had enchanted the Samaritans for years. However, soon the truth would prove his magic as a counterfeit stemming from Satan himself—the great and evil usurper.

Act 8:12 (NIV). “*they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.*” The Samaritans who heard and received Philip’s witness differentiated between sorcery and truth and committed to baptism. This verse outlines the principal beliefs required for baptism at that time: Jesus is the Messiah and the kingdom of God is here. I think it is also significant that Luke includes men and women. This shows a change from Jewish customs because in Christianity, women were given church responsibilities and could be witnesses.

Act 8:13 (NIV). “*Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere.*” Simon’s conversion seems to be linked to the miracles. Luke contrasts this with the many Jews who previously did not believe in the miracles.

Act 8:14–17 (BSB). “*When the apostles . . . heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John . . . [who] laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.*” These are exciting verses that demonstrate the different priesthoods functioning in the Primitive Church. As the branches in Samaria grew, two apostolic leaders traveled the two-to-three-day journey north (a hundred kilometers or sixty-two miles) to confirm the new Saints with the gift of the Holy Ghost. Completing baptism with a confirmation required the Melchizedek Priesthood ordinance (D&C 84:64). The pattern in the Primitive Church demonstrates that the early converts felt a witness of the Spirit but still needed the cleansing power and direction that comes from the gift of the Holy Ghost. The second ordinance of confirmation completed their baptism of water with the potential for the baptism of fire.²²

Act 8:18–19. “*when Simon saw . . . he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power.*” The sinful practice of offering money for ecclesiastical favors is known as priestcraft. Because of this story, the word *simony* is used to refer to buying an ecclesiastical office. This speaks of Satan’s well-known maxim, “You can buy anything in this world with money.”

In the Book of Mormon, the prophet Alma described “many who loved the vain things of the world, and they went forth preaching false doctrines; and this they did for the sake of riches and honor.” Alma also denounced priestcraft: “Were priestcraft to be enforced among this people it would prove their entire destruction” (Alm 1:12, 16).

Act 8:20 (ESV). “*you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!*” Peter was disgusted with Simon’s attitude; yet Peter still encouraged him to change his heart and repent (Act 8:22). Peter discerned that Simon was poisoned by “bitterness and sin.” Luke has already explained that Simon was filled with pride (Act 8:9). God’s forgiveness can only come if repentant sinners change their hearts and habits.

Act 8:24 (NIV). “*Pray to the Lord for me.*” We are not told how the story ended and learn only that Simon recognized that the Apostles had more power than he did. His first reaction did not demonstrate much self-initiative. Yet, he knew that righteous prayer was a powerful tool.

Act 8:25. “*when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned.*” The scene ends with Peter and John taking every opportunity to preach as they returned to Jerusalem “in many villages of the Samaritans.” It appears that the early disciples held no prejudice against their Samaritan neighbors.

Philip and the Ethiopian—Act 8:26–40

Act 8:26 (NIV). “*an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Go south to the road . . . to Gaza.’*” Philip received divine direction for his next missionary transfer, which even specified the road he was to take—the road from Jerusalem to Egypt, running along the Mediterranean coastal plain. Gaza was the Egyptian border at the time.

Act 8:27 (BSB). “*he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch.*” This traveling Ethiopian had a position of great authority: he was in charge of the national treasury. He was like a national cabinet member or a court official. Often chief attendants to the king or queen were emasculated to ensure they would not be seduced or abuse women in the court. In the Old Testament, eunuchs could not fully belong to the congregation (Deu 23:1). Yet, under Jesus’s restored higher law and with angelic guidance, Philip did not hesitate to teach this man.

Act 8:27. “*Candace.*” This was not a first name but a title. It was a transcription of the Nubian word for queen, *kntky*.²³ All Nubian queens used it, just as each Roman emperor adopted the name Caesar.

Act 8:27. (NIV). “*This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship.*” The Ethiopian was returning from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, perhaps for one of the three major feasts (Passover, Pentecost, or Tabernacles). He may have been “a God-fearing proselyte,” meaning that he was converted in heart but was not a circumcised member. Throughout the New Testament and, in particular, the book of Acts, this title is regularly used for a category of Jewish converts.²⁴

Act 8:29 (CSB). “*The Spirit told Philip, ‘Go and join that chariot.’*” The Spirit continued to guide Philip after the angel redirected him. The Spirit continues this ministry today to all who earnestly seek God.

Act 8:30 (BSB). “*Philip ran up and heard the man reading Isaiah.*” The ancients commonly read aloud. Philip ran to follow the Spirit’s promptings. The timing was absolutely miraculous—Philip

arrived right before the man read some of the most important prophecies of Jesus as the promised Messiah. If Philip had not run, he may have missed that opportunity. As Philip heard the Ethiopian reading, he asked him if he understood the Isaiah passage.

Act 8:31. “How can I, except some man should guide me?” The Ethiopian had remarkable faith. First, he believed Philip could help him understand Isaiah and invited him to sit with him in the chariot. Then he made the leap of faith to accept Jesus as the promised Messiah. This is the first of three conversion stories in the book of Acts (followed by Saul’s in Act 9 and Cornelius’s in Act 10). Each shows another step of God’s direction to open the mission to the Gentiles.

Act 8:32–34 (NIV). “*He was led like a sheep to the slaughter.*’ . . . ‘*who is the prophet talking about . . . ?*” Biblical scholars today ask the same question about Isa 53:7–8. It belongs to Isaiah’s four Suffering Servant passages, which Christians interpret as prophecy about Jesus’s Passion.²⁵ Philip followed the example that Jesus set for His disciples of interpreting scriptures. Luke previously recorded that Jesus “expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” and taught that “all things must be fulfilled, which were written . . . concerning me” (Lk 24:27, 44–45).

Act 8:35. “Then Philip . . . preached unto him Jesus.” Philip used the scriptures to show how Jesus fulfilled Isaiah’s Suffering Servant passages; he taught the gospel by direction from the Spirit.

Act 8:36 (NASB). “*Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?*” We are not told how long the two men’s discussion lasted before the Ethiopian asked Philip for baptism, but it seems as though the request came before the day was out.

Act 8:37. “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” The first half of this verse is not present in the best Greek manuscripts. It appears to have been added by a later editor of the Western text. The second half of the verse shares the Ethiopian’s powerful testimony of our Savior.

Act 8:38 (NIV). “*stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water.*” Immersion was practiced by the early Church as is described here with both of the men going down into the water. The Greek word also describes not only being immersed but also the process of change.²⁶

Act 8:39. “the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip.” After the baptism, the Spirit conveyed Philip to another area. This spiritual transportation was also given to the prophet Elijah (1 Kng 18:12; 2 Kng 2:16). Philip’s next assignment in Azotus was fifty miles north of Gaza on the Mediterranean Sea. He preached from there to Caesarea, two hundred miles farther north. Paul also stayed there with Philip in Act 21.

Acts 9—Saul’s Vision on the Road to Damascus

Act 9:1. “Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples . . . went unto the high priest.” Now, several years after Jesus’s Resurrection,²⁷ the persecution against the disciples grew under the hand of the dynamic, young Saul of Tarsus. His efforts were approved by the high priest (possibly still Caiaphas, who reigned from AD 18 to 36).

Act 9:2 (BSB). “*requested letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any men or women.*” Damascus was the oldest continually inhabited city at that time. Damascus was 208 miles north of Jerusalem in what is now Syria. Biblical scholars question the idea that the high priest had jurisdiction over religion in other countries, but perhaps he still directed the synagogue worship. We know that Roman law allowed ten denominations some level of religious freedom, with Judaism as one of those ten. This is one factor that made it possible for many Jews to live across the Roman Empire.

Saul’s goal to bind men and women was also significant because women did not actively participate in Jewish synagogue worship, but they did in Christian worship. House churches were organized and run by women, and women prayed, prophesied, taught, and served as missionaries.²⁸

Act 9:2 (NIV, ESV, BSB, NASB). “*the Way.*” This is the first name of Jesus’s Church and was used at least five times in Acts (and more in the rest of the New Testament).²⁹ It identifies the group of Jews who believed that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God and the promised Messiah. The name comes from Jesus’s words at the Last Supper: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (Jn 14:6). He is the way back to the presence of God, back to the tree of life to eat the fruit and live forever without our sins if we covenant to follow Him and receive His cleansing.

Genesis describes “the way of the tree of life” (Gen 3:24). This way back to the presence of God was symbolically outlined as the high priest’s path through the tabernacle into the Holy of Holies, or throne of God. The Way included passing the tree of life—that is, eating its fruit—after performing purification rituals. First priests washed, clothed, and offered sacrifices to receive vicarious remission of their sins. Then the high priest vicariously purified himself, his people, and the sacred space with sacred blood. Then he entered the Holy Place, where the bread and wine were constantly found beside the tree of life, or menorah, which illuminated the veil and place of prayer (as symbolized by the ascending incense from another altar). This Way typifies the path for all disciples to return to the presence of God, once cleansed from sin.³⁰

Act 9:2. “*he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.*” The trip from Jerusalem to Damascus (330 kilometers) took at least a week by horse. In Luke’s later retelling of this story, we learn that chief priests traveled with Saul (Act 26:12). This helps us understand how serious a threat the disciples had become to the Jewish leaders. We also learn how far the disciples had spread in a couple of years. Saul and his posse were determined that the distance to Damascus was worth the effort if they could bring Jesus’s disciples back to Jerusalem for imprisonment or stoning.

Act 9:3–4. “*suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: . . . he fell . . . and heard a voice . . . Saul, why persecutest thou me?*” After the search party had been traveling for days and shortly before they arrived at Damascus, the Lord redirected Saul. Luke emphasizes how bright the light was that caused Saul to fall. In later retellings Paul adds that it was about noon and that the voice spoke Hebrew to him (Act 22:18; 26:12, 14). In each of the three accounts Luke records of Saul’s first vision, he includes different details. (Luke also includes six of Paul’s other visions.)³¹ Just like Saul, sooner

or later each of us must face the Lord. Elder Neal A. Maxwell explained that at that point, “it will mean much less to kneel down when it is no longer possible to stand up.”³²

Act 9:5. “Who art thou, Lord? I am Jesus . . . it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.” The Lord follows His introduction with another reprimand. The call to repentance is perhaps the most often repeated command from Jesus and His prophets—from John the Baptist to President Russell M. Nelson.³³ Jesus began His ministry (as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels) with preaching repentance: “From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent.’”³⁴ We consistently find the injunction to repent in scripture. It appears 130 times in the Doctrine and Covenants and 362 times in the Book of Mormon.³⁵ This is numerically powerful, and additionally, modern scripture explains how to repent and how the Savior’s atoning sacrifice can mediate and cleanse humanity.

A *prick* is a goad—either a sharp spear or gadget used to prick the back of animals to make them move ahead. Animals that were pricked tended to kick back, but that only added distress and drove the wound deeper.

Act 9:6. “what wilt thou have me to do?” This is a good question for each disciple to include daily in our prayers. However, it is not found in other English translations, except those few taken from the same Greek manuscript, *Textus Receptus*. Most texts include the Lord’s direction to “get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do” (NIV).

Act 9:7. “the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.” The same spiritual experiences are often perceived differently by each person, even when those experiences are physical in nature. Saul saw a vision, but the veil was closed over his fellow persecutors’ eyes. They only heard a voice giving directions for them to change their plans.

Act 9:8–9 (NIV). “Saul got up . . . For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.” The three days of darkness may be an allegorical death of Saul’s carnal man, and then three days later he received a new life and sight. The Lord caused the blindness, but the text seems to say that Saul chose to fast as a sign of his repentance and humility before God. Likewise, we do not choose our challenges, but we do choose how we handle them.

Act 9:10–11 (BSB). “Ananias’ . . . ‘Here I am, Lord’ . . . ‘ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.’” This local leader received divine direction for his jurisdiction. It was not solicited, but he listened. Like the child prophet Samuel, Ananias heard and answered the divine voice, saying that he wanted to learn more. When I read the scriptures, I ask myself the questions and personally answer them. Like with Ananias, once the call comes, sometimes questions arise.

Act 9:13. “Lord, I have heard by many.” Ananias trusted his own wisdom and initially assumed he knew more than God. The Ananias principle is learning to ask God rather than tell Him.³⁶ Ananias had no idea of the impact of God’s inspiration. In fact, he was frightened to follow it. From a logical perspective, Ananias feared that Saul’s conversion was just a trap to imprison more of the Saints. But mortal logic can

detour our revelation, as the Lord taught Isaiah: “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways” (Isa 55:8).

Act 9:15–16. “Go . . . I will shew.” The principle of walking by faith includes trusting that God will show us His miraculous powers. The Lord revealed to Ananias that he had a role to play in helping Saul receive Jesus, including announcing his three-fold mission call: to preach before Gentiles, kings, and Israelites.

Act 9:17. “Brother Saul.” Ananias quickly put aside his personal fears and followed the Lord’s directions. By calling him “Brother Saul,” Ananias welcomed him into the Way as a fellow disciple.

Act 9:17. “receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.” Ananias became one of the few people other than Jesus to access God’s power to heal the blind. Each of the miracles that Luke includes in the book of Acts was first performed by the Lord, thus showing the continuity with the Apostolic Church. In addition to his physical sight, Saul received spiritual sight through repentance and coming unto Christ.

Act 9:18 (NIV). “immediately, something . . . fell from Saul’s eyes. . . . He got up and was baptized.” We all have something blocking our vision since “we see through a glass, darkly” (1 Cor 13:12). Saul’s repentant heart turned him completely around. He intended to imprison the disciples, but instead he joined them. We are not told whether the chief priests who traveled with him were baptized too. The new Church was again following the path that Jesus prescribed: “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn 3:5 ESV).

Act 9:19–22 (NIV). “Saul spent several days with the disciples . . . and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.” Luke does not say how long it took Saul to gain the trust of the local disciples nor how long he served as a missionary in Damascus. But Paul recorded in Gal 1:18 that he preached in Damascus for three years. That gave Saul some time before he had to face his former associates in Jerusalem. (There was also a change of high priests during that period.)

Act 9:23–25. “the Jews took counsel to kill him . . . [so] the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.” Ironically, Saul himself had to escape persecution from the Jews. They were so intent on killing him that he could not even sneak out of the city gate. It is interesting how the tables turn in life—we often find ourselves in the very place we vowed never to be.

Saul in Jerusalem—Act 9:26–31

Act 9:26–27 (BSB). “he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him. . . . Then Barnabas brought him to the apostles.” It appears that Saul was reticent about returning to Jerusalem—it took him three years to go back (Gal 1:18), and even then, he only came because his life was in danger. Even though there had been no word of Saul for three years, he had had such a bad reputation in Jerusalem that the disciples were cautious about believing his story. The Saints’ rejection undoubtedly reopened the pain and regret he felt for having hurt them. The Lord blessed him with one friend: a Levite convert named Barnabas, who came to his defense (Act 4:36). Barnabas even requested that Saul join him as a missionary companion.

Act 9:29–30 (BSB). “*they tried to kill him. When the brothers learned of this, they . . . sent him off.*” Luke’s retelling and Paul’s story have a few differences. Saul wrote in the Epistle to the Galatians that he stayed in Jerusalem for only fifteen days on that first trip and met exclusively with the Apostles Peter and James (Gal 1:18–19). For safety’s sake, he did not stay long. Luke remembered that Saul spoke “boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians” (Act 9:29). This is why the Greek-speaking Jews wanted to kill him. The Apostles called Saul to serve a mission far away, to Saul’s hometown, Tarsus (in what is now modern Turkey), and then to Antioch of Syria. Saul did not return to Jerusalem for five years, when he was called on another mission with Barnabas and Mark (Act 12:25–26).

Act 9:31. “*the churches [had] rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria.*” Over time, with a different high priest and Saul gone, the Jews decreased their persecution of the Saints for a few years.

Peter heals Aeneas—Act 9:32–35

Act 9:32 (NIV). “*As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the Lord’s people.*” Luke returns the focus to Peter. With peace restored enough to travel, Peter made a mission tour across Israel. The miracles Luke chose to incorporate into his text continue to parallel Jesus’s healings.

Act 9:32–33 (NIV). “*in Lydda . . . he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years.*” Lydda (also known as Lod in 1 Chr 8:12) was twenty-five miles northwest of Jerusalem. After the Israelites return from Babylon in the sixth century BC, Lydda became a western border for Jewish settlements. By the time of the New Testament, the town had smiths and craftsmen, and people other than Jews lived there—including Aeneas (which is not a Jewish name). When Peter came across this paralyzed man, he had compassion on him.

Act 9:34. “*Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.*” Luke carefully shows that Aeneas was not healed by Peter but by the name of Jesus Christ. Luke does not forget that the Apostles and evangelists were only mortals acting as God’s servants. Luke always gives credit to God’s power as the source of the miracle.

Act 9:35. “*all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.*” This healing not only was a great blessing to Aeneas but also became a great missionary tool for the gospel. As the disciples initially only taught fellow Israelites (and their estranged relatives, the Samaritans), many assume that “all that dwelt” refers only to the Israelites that were in the town.

Peter raises Dorcus—Act 9:36–43

Act 9:36. “*there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha.*” Eleven miles west of Lydda, along the road from Jerusalem to the Mediterranean Sea, lay Joppa, a big city in its day. Luke highlights a virtuous woman from Joppa who holds the distinction of being the only named woman in the New Testament referred to by the feminine form of the Greek word *mathetria*, “disciple.” (However, the Greek

suggests there were others.)³⁷ Tabitha (in Aramaic), or Dorcas (in Greek), is one of the forty-five named women in the New Testament (at least thirty of whom are described as devoted Saints).³⁸ As a disciple, she broke the Pharisaic restrictions against female learning and became a pupil of Jesus's gospel.³⁹ She was a public figure among the Christian community in Joppa for her contributions of time and service to the needy: she was "always occupied with works of kindness and charity," which included weaving and sewing clothing (Act 9:36 BSB).

Act 9:37. "she was sick, and died." After Tabitha died, her loved ones prepared her body for burial and laid it in an "upper chamber," or room upstairs, possibly a rooftop (the custom was to take bodies outside after sunset and then out of town for burial within twenty-four hours). Two disciples went to Lydda, eleven miles away, to find Peter to ask him to come immediately in hopes of healing or raising her.

Act 9:39. "the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments . . . Dorcas made." When the chief Apostle arrived, the local disciples flooded in to share with him all the good things that Tabitha had done for them.

Act 9:40 (ESV). "Peter put them all outside." Mourning over the dead was a dramatic display (see Act 8:2 at Stephen's burial). One rabbi recorded a prescription for widowed husbands: "Even the poorest Israelite should hire not less than two flutes and one wailing woman."⁴⁰ We do not know whether the Saints practiced these customs.

Act 9:40 (BLB). "and having bowed the knees, prayed. . . . 'Tabitha, arise!'" Just as Peter had watched Jesus do when raising Jairus's daughter (Mk 5:40), Peter dismissed the noisy crowd before bringing Tabitha back to life. Later, Luke will also show Paul raising a young man from the dead, consistently reinforcing Luke's pattern of double witnesses. God authorized the Apostles with His divine power.

Act 9:41–42. "he . . . called the saints and widows, presented her alive. And it was known throughout all Joppa." Again, this miracle had at least two purposes: healing the individual and building the collective faith. The miracle assisted in missionary work: "Many believed in the Lord."

Act 9:43 (NIV). "Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon." Peter's choice of residence was unusual. Tanning was one of the "unclean" professions, and because of the horrendous smells associated with it, tanners often lived away from other people.⁴¹ The smell was so offensive that women married to tanners were allowed, in one of the very rare exceptions listed in the Mishnah, to leave their husbands. Yet, the chief Apostle stayed with a tanner. Was the man no longer working as a tanner? Was this the only place available? In any case, Simon the tanner had become humble enough to receive Jesus's message. Luke also includes a record of many social outcasts in his Gospel and Acts.

Notes

1 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1998), 347.

2 Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:545. Many were given their freedom prior to that age. Ken M. Campbell, *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 135. Some sources record a release at age thirty, others at thirty-five or forty. The process of releasing a slave was known as manumission.

3 John W. Welch sees Stephen's defense following a similar pattern that was used by Alma and Amulek with the Zoramites (Alm 32–34) and by Alma with Corianton (Alm 39–42). See *John W. Welch Notes* (Springville, UT: Book of Mormon Central, 2020), 685–708, 733–750, <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/book/john-w-welch-notes/6420>.

4 Act 7:2, 11, 12, 15, 19, 32, 38, 39, 44, 45, 51, 52.

5 Frederick F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 191, 193. There are six thousand differences between the Masoretic Torah and the Samaritan Torah (the first five books of our Old Testament). For example, in Gen 11:32, Abraham left Haran sixty years before Terah died, making Terah 205 years old. In the Samaritan Old Testament, Terah died at 145 years old.

6 Lev 12:3–4; Gen 7:17; Ex 24:18.

7 Jn 5:22; see Jn 5:30; 8:16; and so forth.

8 “‘Church History,’ 1 March 1842,” p. 707, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/church-history-1-march-1842/2>. Joseph described first meeting the angel Moroni: “A sudden a light like that of day, only of a far purer and more glorious appearance, and brightness burst into the room, indeed the first sight was as though the house was filled with consuming fire the appearance produced a shock that affected the whole body; in a moment a personage stood before me surrounded with a glory.”

9 Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; and so forth.

10 See Heb 3:6; Rev 1:13; 14:14.

11 Paul J. Achtemeier, *Harpers Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1985), 1994.

12 Mishnah, *Avoth* 5:21. “Twenty for pursuing a vocation, at the age of thirty for entering into one’s full vigor, at the age of forty for understanding, at the age of fifty for counsel, at age sixty-one attains old age.”

13 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 2.22.5. “Thirty is the first stage of a young man’s age, and extends to forty, as all will admit.”

14 Jacob Neusner, ed., *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), s.v. “mourning.” During the Shiva, or first seven days of mourning, “they were prohibited from conducting business or doing other work, from bathing, cutting the hair, engaging in sexual relations, wearing leather shoes, or otherwise engaging in pleasurable activities.” Jonathan A. Goldstein, *1 Maccabees: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 272. “They rent their garments and made great lamentation and put on ashes. They prostrated themselves upon the ground . . . and cried out to Heaven.”

15 Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 296.

16 Mishnah, *Kelim* 1:6–9. The rabbis taught that there were ten degrees of holiness:

The land of Israel is holier than all lands . . .
The walled cities [of the Land of Israel]
Within the wall [of Jerusalem] is more holy
The temple Mount is more holy . . .
The rampart is still more holy
The Court of the Women is still more holy
The Court of the Israelites is still more holy
The Court of the Priests is still more holy
Between the porch and the altar is still more holy than it
The sanctuary is still more holy than it . . .
The Holy of Holies is still more holy than they.

17 D&C 46:8; see 1 Cor 10; Moro 10.

18 Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ's Emancipation of New Testament Women* (Palo Alto, CA: Good Sound Publishing, 2015), 32.

19 Max Kadushin, *The Rabbinic Mind* (Binghamton, NY: Binghamton University, 2001), 362.

20 “Discourse, 28 April 1842, reported by Eliza R. Snow,” p. [36–40], The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-28-april-1842-as-reported-by-eliza-r-snow/2>. “Respecting the female laying on hands, he further remark’d, there could be no devil in it if God gave his sanction by healing—that there could be no more sin in any female laying hands on the sick than in wetting the face with water—that it is no sin for anybody to do it that has faith, or if the sick has faith to be heal’d by the administration. He reprov’d those that were dispos’d to find fault with the management of concerns.” I refer to Eliza as a prophetess from the definition in Rev 19:10, “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy,” which the Prophet Joseph Smith used as well.

21 Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidences* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 58.

22 “Discourse, 9 July 1843, reported by Willard Richards,” p. 304, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-9-july-1843-as-reported-by-willard-richards/5>; spelling and punctuation modernized: “Peter on the days of Pentecost might as well baptize a bag of sand as a man, if not done in view of the getting of the Holy Ghost. Baptism by water is but half a baptism and is good for nothing without the other—the Holy Ghost.”

23 Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 412.

24 See, for example, Act 10:7, 22; 13:26, 43.

25 Isaiah’s Suffering Servant passages include Isa 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–7; and 52:13–53:12.

26 James Montgomery Boice, *Bible Study Magazine*, May 1989. In my notes from Jn 1, we talked about the different Greek words as found in an ancient cookbook: *bapto*, meaning “to dip repeatedly, to immerse, to submerge,” and *baptize*, meaning “to transform or make a change,” like a cucumber becoming a pickle.

27 The dating between AD 34 and 36 stems from references to Annas and Caiaphas in the persecution (Jn 18:13, 24–28; Act 4:6). The first high priest named in the Gospels, Annas (also spelled Ananus) ruled from AD 6 to 15 and died in AD 40. Josephus identified five of his sons who also reigned as high priests in this order: Eleazar (AD 16–17); Caiaphas, son-in-law of Annas (AD 18–36); Jonathan (AD 36–37 and 44); Theophilus (AD 37–41); Matthias (AD 43); and Ananus (AD 63). Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.224–251; Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1.36.

28 Rom 16:1–2, 7; Phlp 4:3; 1 Cor 11:5; Titu 2:3; Wilson, *Christ’s Emancipation of New Testament Women*, chapter 2.

29 Act 18:25–26; 19:9; 24:14, 22; the name also may be intended in Act 16:17; Mt 3:3; 7:14; 21:32; 22:16, Mk 1:3; 12:14; Lk 3:4; 12:58; 20: 21; Jn 1:23; 14:6; Heb 9:8; 2 Pet 2:2, 21, for example.

30 See Isa 35:8; Ps 1:6; Mal 3:1.

31 These visions are of Christ in the temple (Act 22:17–21); of a man from Macedonia (Act 16:9–10); of Christ at Corinth (Act 18:9–10); of Christ in Jerusalem fortress (Act 23:11); of an “angel of God” (Act 27:23–24); and of the “third heaven” and paradise (2 Cor 12:1–4).

32 Neal A. Maxwell, “Why Not Now?,” October 1974 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

33 Mt 3:2; Russell M. Nelson, “We Can Do Better and Be Better,” April 2019 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

34 Mt 4:17; see Mk 1:15; Lk 5:32.

35 In the Doctrine and Covenants, *repent* is used 81 times, *repentance* 32, *repenting* 1, *repented* 2, *repents* 4, *repenteth* 10. In the Book of Mormon, *repent* is used 207 times, *repentance* 99, *repenting* 3, *repents* 1, *repented* 35, and *repenteth* 17.

36 Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Understanding Paul* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1983), 31.

37 Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross Shepard Kraemer, eds., *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 159.

38 Of the 180 women mentioned in the New Testament, 94 are unnamed actual women, 14 are unnamed fictional women, and 27 are general references to women.

39 *Mishnah, Kiddushin* 4:13. Dan W. Clanton, *The Good, the Bold, and the Beautiful* (New York, NY: T & T Clark International, 2006), 23; “There is no firm evidence for women functionaries” or leadership in synagogue service. The vast majority of Jewish women at the time were illiterate, but even those who could read were discouraged from reading the Law, or Torah. Although some rabbis in the Mishnah, *Nedarim* 4.3, permitted a father to “teach scripture to his sons and daughters.” Yet others taught, “If a man gives his daughter a knowledge of The Law it is as though he taught her lechery” (*Mishnah, Sotah* 3.4). Later writers recorded, “And you shall teach them to your sons—not your daughters” (*Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin* 29b). Women were forbidden from being teachers (*Mishnah, Kiddushin* 4:13).

40 *Mishnah, Ketuboth* 4.4.

41 Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1969), 304–305.