



ACTS 1–5

THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH HEALS, PREACHES,
BAPTIZES, AND LIVES IN UNITY

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Following the writing of Christ’s life, the author Luke continued to write a second parchment to cover 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 were initially untitled, but some early Christians (“Church Fathers”), from at least the second century used the name “Acts of the Apostles.”¹ At the time biographies of famous men often used: “Acts of . . .” in their titles (i.e. Acts of Hippolus, Acts of Peter, etc.). These early Christians and many others identified “[Luke] the companion of Paul,” as the author of the third Gospel and Acts of the Apostles. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland suggested an alternate title that focuses on its central theme: *The Acts of the Resurrected Christ Working through the Holy Spirit in the Lives and Ministries of His Ordained Apostles.*²

Luke's characteristic writing style sets him apart as the author of both volumes. 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 due to his freer text—as he no longer follows Mark or Matthew).³ Also, both Luke and Acts are addressed to “Theophilus,” meaning, “lover of God.”

LUKE 1:1–4 (BSB)

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 . . .

ACTS 1:1–3 (BSB)

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.

Both volumes also demonstrate reverence without showing much of their human nature when referring to Jesus and the apostles. Both use parallels with nearly every story (i.e. Gabriel comes to Zacharias and then Mary in Luke 1, and the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son in Luke 15). Combining this information with the biographical information in the epistles from Paul, the thematic literary styles, and textual analysis both conclude that the books share the same author. Furthermore, literary style, vocabulary and stylometry statistically give conclusive data of single authorship.⁴

Who Was Luke?

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

1. Colossians 4:14 “Luke, the beloved physician”
2. Philemon 1:24 “. . . and Luke, my fellow workers” (NIV)
3. 2 Timothy 4:11 “Only Luke is with me”

These passages suggest that Luke served as a companion to the Apostle Paul. In the last half of the book of Acts, the author changes from “Paul” or “he,” to the plural, “we,” four times—as if the author were present. These passages have been studied carefully to find when and where the author joined Paul. The text also gives hints to the fact that the author was not a Jew, nor from Palestine, but probably a Greek convert to Christianity raised in the Diaspora.⁵

In the second century, a manuscript of the Gospel of Luke included an extra prologue which 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.⁶

In addition to Luke's pursuit as a theological historian, the JST of Luke 1:1 identifies him as a "messenger of Jesus Christ." A fourth century source includes Luke as a member of the Seventy.⁷

When did Luke Write Acts

The book of Acts begins by telling us that Luke first wrote his Gospel and then the Acts of the Apostles (1:1). As Acts does not mention the martyrdom of Paul, both books were probably completed before that event (ca. 64–67 AD).

Themes in Acts:

1. God is still in charge; Jesus has just changed locations from earth to heaven.
2. Witnesses of Jesus as the Son of God and Redeemer of humanity.
3. Bridges the life of Jesus and teachings of the apostles by giving examples of the apostles performing the same miracles and teaching the same message that Jesus did.
4. All (Jew and Gentile) may receive the Gospel.
5. Delayed Second Coming of Jesus as King.

Outline of Acts:

I. Acts 1–12 is centered in Jerusalem with Peter (1–5 Apostles miracles & preaching 6–12 Stephen, Philip, Paul, and Cornelius).

II. Acts 13–28 is centered in Antioch with Paul (conversion and three apostolic missions).

Acts typically gives examples of doctrines that were first introduced by Jesus in his Gospel, then followed by Peter and Paul in Acts. This illustrates that Paul taught what Jesus and Peter taught. It also provides a second and third witness to the truths presented.

CHAPTER 1

Text: The Prologue

Acts 1:1–5

Acts 1:1 “**In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about . . .**” (NIV) Luke is writing to “*Theophilus* / lover of God.” which may be one person or a whole congregation. At the time, authors often dedicated their books to a single person who contributed the costs to allow the book to be available for public use. Luke does the same at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke (see above).

The prologue proposes that Theophilus may have been a Roman patron or official. This theory is supported by Luke’s positive portrayal of Rome throughout both volumes. Luke needed a way to present Christianity to the literate Greeks. Luke also describes the honorable and law-abiding nature of Christianity (e.g. they pay their taxes, they come when called to a census even if difficult, they are peacemakers, etc.).

Christianity in the first century AD, vied for legal status as a religion in the Roman Empire. Rome allowed only ten legal religions. Judaism was not only one of the ten, it was also one of the six largest religions in the Empire. The population of Rome was about 10% Jewish; Antioch, the third largest city, was 20% Jewish.⁸ Luke (and Paul, etc.) try very hard to prove that Christianity is the natural extension of Judaism. Luke portrays Christians as law-abiding citizens that are worthy of legal recognition.

Acts 1:2 “**He was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles**” (NIV) Just as Jesus did before, even after His death and resurrection, He continues to communicate with His apostles, but now through the Spirit. The subject 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. This work of the Spirit as the vehicle of revelation is one of the major themes in this volume. Many Christians refer to the apostolic church as the beginning of the “Dispensation of the Spirit” (after the AMPC translation of 2 Corinthians 3:8). Unlike the Gospels, discussion about, and evidence of the Spirit fills the book of Acts and the Epistles.

Acts 1:3 “. . . being seen of them forty days” The 40-day ministry literature is filled with closely knit teachings,

miracles, rites, ordinances and prophecies of persecution that lay ahead for the apostles.⁹ Remember that from the time of the Law of Moses, forty was used for a duration of purification (Leviticus 12:2–6) and further back, for a learning and teaching period (Genesis 7:17; Exodus 34:28; Numbers 14:34). During this time, Jesus demonstrated “convincing proofs” (ISV) that He was indeed alive, and that they needed to learn to follow Him.

Acts 1:4–5 “while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift’ . . . baptized with the Holy Spirit” (NIV) JBpst’s prophecy was about to come to pass. John the Baptist came to baptize with water, but the Messiah would baptize with fire (Luke 3). Luke includes the command to wait in Jerusalem for this experience. The timing is not clear between this promise and the timing of other events during the 40-day-ministry. John 21:1 describes six apostles fishing in the Sea of Galilee when they see the Lord again. The baptism of fire is when the Spirit purges one’s soul. Elder Bednar explained, “The Holy Ghost is a sanctifier who cleanses and burns dross and evil out of human souls as though by fire.”¹⁰

Delayed Second Coming

Acts 1:6–11

Acts 1:6–7 “It is not for you to know the times or the season” This phrase acts as a bridge between the two volumes. Notice the similarities with the closing remarks in the four Gospels. Especially in Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32, we find Jesus repeating the same message with different words. The apostles repeated this same idea throughout the book of Acts and several Epistles. It became a theme as the apostolic church had to address the disappointment of the Lord’s delayed Second Coming.

Acts 1:8 “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes” (BSB) 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 toward Bethany (Luke 24:48–51). Jesus told them to stay in Jerusalem “until ye be endued [or ‘endowed’] with power.” Most English translations use, “clothed with power” (NIV, ESV, BSB, etc.). What was this endowment of power? Jesus had already taught them 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 (Ac 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.¹¹ The early apostles’ goal was to witness, not set up a long-term church. This verse foreshadows Peter’s vision in chapter 10.

Acts 1:9–10 “he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him . . . They were looking intently . . . 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 more instructions. They looked like men, which is consistent with other descriptions of angels in the restoration as they will be or have been mortal, as “no angels who min-

ister to this earth but those who do belong or have belonged to it” (D&C 130:5; also see 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.

Acts 1:11 “Jesus . . . will come back in the same way you have seen Him go” (BSB) The angel’s message reinforced the reality of the Second Coming, albeit by the time Luke wrote the book of Acts, it 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—Matthias Called as New Apostle

Acts 1:12–26

Acts 1:12 “Then returned they unto Jerusalem a sabbath day’s journey” A Sabbath’s day journey was just over a half mile (1 km). For the Old Testament derivation see Exodus 16:29 and Numbers 35:5.

Acts 1:13 “they went up into an upper room” Is this the same room where the Last Supper was eaten? Or could

Image of Pentecost from St. Paul Churchh. Photo by Ted via Flickr.



it have been in John Mark's mother's home where the saints gathered in Acts 12:12? The list of eleven apostles is consistent with the lists found in Matthew 10, Mark 3, and Luke 6, but now without Judas Iscariot.

Lists of Apostles in Gospels

MATT 10:2-4

Simon Peter
Andrew his brother
James Zebedee's son
John his brother

Philip
Bartholomew
Thomas
Matthew the publican
James Alphaeus' son
Lebaeus / Thaddaeus
Simon the Canaanite
Judas Iscariot betrayer

MARK 3:13-19

Simon named **Peter**
James Zebedee's son
John Zebedee's son
 "The sons of thunder"
Andrew
Philip
Bartholomew
Matthew
Thomas
James Alphaeus' son
Thaddaeus
Simon the Canaanite
Judas Iscariot betrayer

LUKE 6:14-16

Simon Peter
Andrew his brother
James
John

Philip
Bartholomew
Matthew
Thomas
James Alphaeus' son
Simon called Zelotes
Judas brother of James
Judas Iscariot, traitor

ACTS 1:14

Peter
James
John

Andrew
Philip
Thomas
Bartholomew
Matthew
James Alphaeus's son
Simon Zelotes
Judas brother of James

Acts 1:14-15 "all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women" Luke has included a group of women traveling and working alongside the Twelve since Luke 8:2-3, "Mary called Magdalene, Joanna the wife of Herod's household manager Chuza, Susanna" (BSB), and John 19:25 identifies some of the "other women," as Mary (Jesus' mother), her sister, and Mary the wife of Clopas. The group united in prayer included three additional men as well. For the first time, Jesus' half-brothers are listed with the believers: "James, Joseph, Simon and Judas," the sons of Mary and Joseph have joined the believers (Matthew 13:55). This addition makes me wonder if Mary and Joseph's daughters may have also been included "with the women." Previously in John 7:5, he shared the sad news that during Jesus' ministry, "even his own brothers did not believe in Him" (BSB).

Acts 1:15 "Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples" Peter spoke to a gathering of 120 saints in Jerusalem. The fraction of Jesus' disciples post-resurrection was a far cry from the thousands that had thronged Him at His Triumphal Entry, only six weeks earlier. Jesus' 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.

Acts 1:16–20 “. . . he [Judas] was numbered with us” Either the Lord during His 40-day ministry probably showed the disciples the Old Testament scriptures that prophesied of Judas’ betrayal, or else the Spirit led Peter to these verses (Psalms 41:9; 69:25; 109:8). The book of Psalms was cited more often than any other Old Testament book in the New Testament.



Pentecost by Stephan Dorfmeister, 1782.
Image via Wikimedia Commons.

“The field of blood” The author Luke was not present, but he quoted eye-witnesses (Luke 1:2–3), yet this story differs from Matthew 28:3–10. Both accounts explain why the field was nicknamed, “field of blood.”

Acts 1:21–22 “**must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection**” Luke outlines the requirements for apostleship including a special witness of Jesus’ resurrection and calling. However, the apostles are not Jesus’ 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.”¹² Jesus describes His successor during the Last Supper as the Comforter and Spirit of Truth (John 13–16). After the Quorum of the Twelve was complete again, the Lord sent an outpouring of the Holy Spirit as described in Acts 2:2–6.

Acts 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 quorum of the Twelve Apostles. I believe the Spirit directed the prayerful selection of these two even before they cast lots to determine the Lord’s final choice. Ancient Israelites cast lots as a means of receiving revelation to learn the Lord’s will (Joshua 18:6–10; Joshua 21:8; also see Nehemiah 10:34; 11:1; Jonah 1:7; etc.). Edersheim explains they cast lots in Herod’s Temple each morning for the Lord to select which priest would serve in each station (also see Leviticus 16:8).¹³

Acts 1:24–26 “**They prayed . . . which of these two you have chosen? . . . lot fell to Matthias**” (NIV). The words of the prayer spoke to their belief that Jesus continued 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 (6:13; 9:10; 11:49; 17:5; 22:14; 24:10), and 25 times in the book of Acts. In contrast, Matthew and Mark only use it once each (Matthew 10:2; Mark 6:30). Luke also writes with great respect when he refers to the important position of

an apostle (which the New Testament uses as a title for others, “sent” like Paul and Barnabas, who are not always included in the Twelve).

CHAPTER 2

Pentecost

Acts 2:1 “when the day of Pentecost was fully come” The first Pentecost celebrated Moses’ return to Mt. Sinai with the children of Israel after they left Egypt. The word comes from “fifty” as the fiftieth day after Passover. The feast is also known by two other names:

- “the Feast of Weeks,” for a week of weeks, $7 \times 7 = 49$, with the the next day being Pentecost, and
- “First Fruits of Labor” as the first barley harvest came in late May or early June (Leviticus 23:16–21 and Deuteronomy 16:10).

Since the time of the Second Temple, the feast of Pentecost was one of the three main week-long feasts each year that brought Jewish pilgrims (mainly men) to the Temple from around the Roman Empire.

“the believers were all together in one place” (BSB) This translation expands the KJV, “they,” from beyond the Twelve to possibly the whole group of 120 disciples (Acts 1:15). It may be a group gathered in the same upper room in Jerusalem (Acts 1:13). Luke says they sat in a house (Acts 2:2), not the Temple. (Nor is it the “house of the Lord” as Luke consistently uses a different word for Temple.) The saints gathered possibly to pray (Acts 1:14–15), or possibly to partake of the sacrament, if it were the first day of the week—or Sunday—to worship together in a sacred space (Acts 20:7). Pentecost, like Passover fell on different days of the week.

Gift of the Holy Ghost

Ac 2:2–3 “a sound like the roar of a mighty windstorm” (ISV) In both Hebrew and Greek, one of the words used for wind is the same word for spirit, “*ruach/pneuma*,” which occasionally results in confusion, *but not here*. Luke uses “*pnoe*/breath or wind.” Some have argued that it was Satan’s attempt to stop the work as he did before Joseph’s first vision. Yet, because the Prophet Joseph asked for the same, “let thy house be filled, as with a rushing mighty wind, with thy glory” in the dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland Temple, I doubt he referred to a Satanic experience (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.

Acts 2:3 “They saw . . . fire that separated and came to rest on each of them” When the Holy Spirit came it became a baptism of fire as promised. English translations each described it differently, including, “dividing tongues as of fire” (BLB), and “cloven tongues like as of fire” (KJV). This powerful Spirit enabled the disciples to

speak with the gift of tongues. 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, when the ancient disciples first received the personage of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:3–4). Similar manifestations are mentioned in the Book of Mormon, although the term cloven tongues is not used (Helaman 5:22–24, 43–45; 3 Ne[phi] 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.”¹⁴

A similar description is also part of the inspired dedicatory prayer for the Kirtland Temple. The Prophet asked the Lord if “cloven tongues as of fire” could bless the dedication as it did 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 to the local neighbors.¹⁵

Gift of Tongues

Acts 2:4–13

Acts 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 (John 14:26; 16:7–15; also see Acts 1:8). That gift came in abundance just 51 days later day 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 had been experienced at 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 old world between Moses and Jesus, only a few received the gift of the Holy Ghost during that time.¹⁶ Even so, during that time, God sent His Spirit in the form of several fruits including peace, love, faith, hope, etc. (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 was hed [sic] and ano[inte]d & c [sic] on the day of Pentecost.”¹⁷ This sounds as though Peter and the primitive saints may have also experienced the ordinance of anointings. Some even suggest the apostles received their endowment.¹⁸

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 (D&C 46:10–29; 1 Corinthians 12:3–8; Moroni 10:8–18; Article of Faith 7). Joseph spoke most often about the need to seek the gift of discernment.¹⁹ He also taught that when one receives the Holy Ghost one has received revelation.²⁰

The gift of tongues was first heard by Joseph Smith in the fall of 1832 when he met Brigham Young for the first time, and Brigham spontaneously spoke in tongues for his first time, followed by Joseph.²¹ The prophet encouraged the gift in 1836 at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple;²² 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 . . .”²³

Acts 2:5 “ . . . staying in Jerusalem . . . ” It sounds as if the location has changed from the “house” of Acts 2:2 to either a crowded area in Jerusalem or at the temple. The text suggests that the disciples had the Spirit and gift of tongues “rest” (JST) upon them and upon them in the house, and then they went out to preach. For five hundred years since the diaspora that followed the Babylonian captivity, Israelites (all of whom are called Jews in the New Testament) had moved into every corner of the Empire. The pilgrimage feast of Pentecost brought them to Jerusalem to worship at the temple.

“God-fearing Jews” is a term used specifically for converts who believed in the teachings of monotheism and the Law of Moses, but did not undergo circumcision as it was often a fatal operation for adult men.²⁴ These men were not considered Gentiles as they worshiped and lived most of the Laws of Moses. (The gospel was still only preached to Israelites until Acts 10.)

“Every nation under heaven” references the entire Roman Empire or civilized world. Many of these men were Jewish converts.

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

Acts 2:7 “Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?” (BSB) The Anchor Bible translates this question differently. Rather than the question being about 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 Matthew 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’ divinity with a powerful, strengthened witness.

Acts 2:8–13 “How do we each hear our own language” (BLB) Sixteen different peoples or countries are men-

tioned. 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. This 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

Acts 2:14–36

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

Acts 2:15 “. . . not drunk . . . it is only 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, they would not have eaten their first meal of the day by the third hour, let alone have become drunk. Peter changed the tables and asked if they were crazy.

Acts 2:16–20 “spoken by the prophet Joel . . . I will pour out my Spirit on all people” Peter quoted Joel 2:28–31 as being fulfilled. Though 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” (Acts 2:17) and expected the end because Jesus had instructed them to watch until the end (Matthew 24:14; 28:19–20; Luke 21:32). The apostles could not meet their end (death) until the gospel was witnessed to their world. Paul taught in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3, Hebrews 9:26–28, and Acts 20:29 that there would be a falling away and an apostasy as did Peter in 2 Peter 3:3–9. After Peter’s death came the anti-Christ of 1 John 2:18.

“signs and wonders” Luke repeats this phrase from Joel 2:30 nine times between Acts 2–15, but not again.

“The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood” (NIV) Peter finished quoting Joel 2:31 that prophesies of the judgment day (also see D&C 29:14; 34:9; 45:42; 88:87; Revelation 6:12).

Acts 2:22–24 “Jesus of Nazareth . . . ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified . . . God hath raised up” Peter bore a great testimony of the premortal existence.

“foreknowledge” other translations read: *definite plan* (RSV), *set purpose* (NIV), *predetermined plan* (NAS).

“prison” is changed in the JST from, “*hell*.” When did Joseph make this change? Did he know about Spirit Prison in 1831? It appears that Peter was quoting from the LXX (Septuagint or Greek translation of the Old Testament) of Psalms 16, from memory (or inspiration) that foreshadowed the resurrection.

Peter's sermon in Jerusalem. Painting by Benjamin West via Wikimedia Commons.



Acts 2:25–28 “. . . David says . . . I saw the Lord always before me . . . dwell in hope . . . fill me with joy” (BSB) After quoting Joel, Peter quoted the beloved King David’s Psalms 16:8–11. It references God restoring one’s spirit from hell (which the JST changes to “prison” in 2:27), and one’s body to hope. Specifically, the Psalms pointed out that “Your Holy One” who will not “see decay” (2:27).

Acts 2:29–30 “Brothers and sisters” (CSB) the KJV reads “Men and brethren,” and NIV “Fellow Israelites.” Many words in the Bible can be read as gender-specific or more generally for humanity. Titles such as “brethren,” often refer to both genders of believers. In Joseph Smith’s writings, he specifically pointed out “when we say brethren we mean those who have continued faithful in Christ: men, women, and children.”²⁵

“the patriarch David . . . sepulchre is with us” Peter referred to David’s tomb to prove that the scriptures were not fulfilled in his life. At the time of Jesus, there was a great interest in tombs of Old Testament kings and prophets.²⁶ Peter referred to David as both a patriarch and prophet. These are loose titles not applied to David in the Old Testament, but after a millennium of honoring him, have been added in the New Testament to mean he was a noble ancestor who spoke prophetically and testified of the coming Messiah/Christ (i.e. Psalms 16 and 132).

Acts 2:32 “of this we are all witnesses” (AB) In Greek “witness” is actually, “*eye witness*.” But the commission of the Twelve includes more than that. Peter and the other apostles standing there, witnessed Jesus “alive” (Acts 1:3), but 500 others did too. The things that set the Twelve apart were that Jesus called them to testify of the experience and be a witness of Him by their lives. They were now carrying out Jesus’ assignment from Acts 1:8, “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem” (NIV).

Acts 2:33 “received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father” (BLB) 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 lives of the disciples.

Acts 2:34–35 “THE LORD JEHOVAH said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand’” (Aramaic Bible) Peter quoted Psalm 110, but explained that it did not refer to David, because his bones were still in the tomb, rather it was Messianic.²⁷ Peter heard Jesus ask the same question about this Psalm (Matthew 22:41–46). Jesus silenced His Pharisaic questioners, but Peter, now explained the passage. Jesus is the One who is exalted at the right hand of God.

Three Thousand Believe

Acts 2:37–41

Acts 2:37–38 “They were cut to the heart . . . What shall we do?” The crowd of the international Jewish pilgrims gathered for the Feast also felt the Spirit and wanted to follow. Luke emphasizes their belief, “what shall we

DO?” Meaning what is next, how do we join you?

Acts 2:38–39 “Repent and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness” Repentance is more than stopping bad behaviors; it is turning towards Jesus for His Redeeming forgiveness and sanctification. That returning requires a change of one’s heart, mind, and behaviors. The Spirit then becomes the cleansing agent to enable the Savior’s atonement to work in one’s soul. Peter’s message extends to believers who need continued sanctification as we grow line upon line, precept upon precept (2 Nephi 28:30). We start with repentance and then keep coming back to it over and over again. President Russel 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.”²⁸

Acts 2:40 “Be saved from this corrupt generation.” (BSB). I prefer this translation because it continues to keep God as the source of our salvation. Most others 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 Nephi 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.

Acts 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. In either case, the Spirit’s witness had a powerful impact.

The Fellowship of Believers

Acts 2:42–43 “They devoted themselves to . . .” (BSB) The devoted disciples maintained a fourfold focus:

1. Teaching “apostles’ doctrines” (which we trust were the Lord’s teachings initiated through Jesus or the Spirit)
2. “Fellowship” meaning “contributory help, participation, sharing in, or spiritual fellowship.”
3. “Breaking of bread” a phrase used for the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, as well as a meal together.
4. “In prayers” The NT examples of prayers 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 they prayed for the gifts of the Spirit as they are received “many wonders and signs.”

Acts 2:44–45 “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.



After they “sold their possessions and goods,” everyone’s needs were met. “Parted them” is also translated, “distributed/sharing/gave.” The Lord restored the same law in Kirtland Ohio in 1831 (D&C 42; 105:29). We too must live this law to fulfill temple covenants. Zion is built on this principle (Moses 7:18).

Acts 2:46–47 “from house to house” The early saints met for worship and possibly for meals in members’ homes. They were known as “house churches.”²⁹ The key to their 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 their worship as is described next.

CHAPTER 3

Peter and John Go to the Temple at the Hour of Prayer

Acts 3:1

Acts 3:1 “. . . into the temple at the hour of prayer” The hour of prayer was 3:00 pm each day.³⁰ This was the same hour as the evening sacrifice and second lighting of the incense.³¹ The time of incense or hour of prayer developed from Exodus 30:7–8 when God instructed Aaron to burn incense “every morning . . . and at even . . . a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations.”³² The incense symbolized Israel’s continual prayers. This time became the most reverent hour at the temple each day.

The hour of prayer began once the priest lit the incense. The rising smoke from the sanctuary signaled the priests to line up in front of the Holy Place to recite or sing the priestly prayer from Numbers 6. As the priests gathered in a line, Jewish worshipers in the Court of the Women reverently bowed down and spread their hands on the ground in silent prayer (Numbers 24:26). 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 Numbers 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.”³³

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

Peter Heals Lame Man

Acts 3:2–10

Acts 3:2 “a man lame from birth . . . laid daily at the gate of the temple . . . to ask alms” (ESV) 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 worshipers. Most ancient Jews misunderstood birth defects and blamed them on sin (John 9:2; Leviticus 21:21, 17–23).³⁴ In addition to the challenges of living with disabilities in the ancient world, this cultural baggage added emotional and spiritual scars on top of their physical challenges.

Acts 3:3–5 “Peter and John about to go into the temple . . . said, Look on us” It sounds as if the lame man requested money from everyone he could. It appears that he did not know enough about faith or the apostolic missionary companionship to ask for healing. However, Acts 4:22 and 3:10 lets us know he was over forty years

old, and came regularly enough that people knew him. If that were the case, I presume he had heard about Jesus of Nazareth and possibly even seen Him. Nevertheless, the Spirit inspired Peter to heal this man, because God wanted him to witness of His power and to open up a wonderful missionary opportunity.

Acts 3:6 “Silver and gold have I none; but . . . In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise . . .” Again, Peter emphasized that the power of healing comes from the Savior. Through the name of Jesus, he was not the source of power or running the show but Jesus was. When we honor our Lord and exert our faith, His name has power. Peter exemplified President Russel M. Nelson’s counsel to “minister in His name, with His power and authority, and with His loving-kindness.”³⁵

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

Acts 3:8–10 “he entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God” The joyful entrance attracted plenty of attention and the onlookers were “filled with wonder and amazement.” The Court of the Gentiles covered about 35 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 to Onlookers at the Temple

Acts 3:11–26

Acts 3:11 “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 they moved into the area known as “Solomon’s porch.” It was a covered area with four rows of marble columns on the eastern side of the Court of the Women, where Solomon’s palace stables once stood.

Acts 3:12–16 “Why are you surprised by this? . . . as if by our own power . . . through faith in His name hath made this man strong” Peter made completely sure that everyone understood—he did not heal the lame man—the healing power was God’s power administered through faith on Jesus’ name. Luke uses unique titles for Jesus as the “Just” or “Righteous One” (Acts 3:14, NIV), and “Prince of life.”

Acts 3:17 “Fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance as did your leaders . . .” (NIV) Peter referred to his audience in a friendly manner and opened the way for those who killed Jesus to repent. The New Testament has several references to forgiving them (Acts 13:27; Luke 23:34; 1 Corinthians 2:8).

Acts 3:18 “God fulfilled . . . all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. Repent, then, and turn

to God” The early Christians found signs of Jesus foreshadowed all over the Old Testament (i.e. 1 Corinthians 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 (i.e. Noah’s ark paired with Jesus’ baptism, Adam and Eve’s fall with the Good Samaritan,³⁶ etc.).

Acts 3:19–20 “Repent, then, and turn to God . . . that times of refreshing may come” (NIV) This is the only mention of “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 Matthew 19:28, “. . . the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory” (also see the 10th Article of Faith). 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 (Matthew 24:14; Acts 1:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7). 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 KJV “preached” Acts 3:20).

Acts 3:21 “Heaven must take Him in until . . . the restoration of all things” (BSB) or a “restitution of all things” (KJV) or “the time comes for God to restore everything” (NIV). 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 apostacy occurred first (Acts 20:29; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 Timothy 4:1; etc.). We see a fulfillment of this prophesy from Peter in the spring of 1820, when God and His Son came down from heaven, called a young prophet to restore all things, and restored revelation and the nature of the Godhead.

“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?”³⁷

Acts 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’ lives are numerous. Like Moses, Jesus also taught a new-higher law (Matthew 5–7), fed the masses (Matthew 14:21; 15:38), offered living water (John 4:14), and led a way for all God’s children to enter the Promised Lands—Moses had led them into Israel, but Jesus had led them to kingdoms of glory with immortality and potentially Eternal Life (John 14:6, 2).³⁸

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 sooner, as President Nelson warned, **“Time is running**

out.³⁹ The assignment to prepare the world for that day is shared by latter-day saints.

Acts 3:24 “All the prophets . . . have foretold these days” Both the Jews and early saints searched their scriptures to find prophecies of their Messiah.⁴⁰ 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.”⁴¹

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

Acts 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 only points to Jesus, but lower case broadens the meaning to include God’s prophets and even disciples. Jesus is our great exemplar as the Servant of servants, and those who follow Him join in servitude.

CHAPTER 4

Peter and John Testify to the Sanhedrin

Acts 4:1–21

Acts 4:1 “as they spake . . . the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came” The exuberance of the healed man and the large crowd of 5,000 men (verse 4) 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.⁴² 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’ trial and concerned about more problems as a result.

Acts 4:2 “Being grieved that they taught . . . Jesus” It is interesting that the Sadducees are mentioned among those angry about the evangelizing of Peter and John 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.

Acts 4:3 “they seized them and took them into custody” Peter, John and possibly the healed man (see verse 14) were arrested and thrown into a 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.

Acts 4:4 “many of them which heard the word believed . . . about five thousand” The number 5,000 may be the number who crowded into the Court of the Women to hear Peter, or the total number of Christians (or 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” (Romans 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.

Acts 4:5 “On the morrow . . .” It sounds like 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’ accusers (elders, scribes,⁴³ see Matthew 26:3). The Sanhedrin met within the precincts of the temple in a stone chamber on the south wall of the Priest’s Court.



Peter and John heal a lame man. Image by Raphael via Wikimedia Commons.

Acts 4:6 “the high priest . . . and kindred of the high priest were gathered” Annas had reigned as the High Priest from AD 6–14. From AD 18–37, his son in law, Caiaphas served, followed by Annas’ son, John in AD 37. (Five of Annas’ sons acted as the high priest.) Alexander’s position is unknown to modern readers.

Acts 4:7 “By what power . . . what name?” Nearly the same question had been asked of Jesus by the same group just seven weeks earlier (Matthew 21:23). Latter-day saints also answer that question each week as they partake of the sacrament and renew their baptismal covenant.

Acts 4:8–10 “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 before. His testimony now carried a stronger power not only from His experiences and knowledge, but also with the power of God’s Spirit.

Acts 4:11 “the stone you builders rejected” (NIV) Peter quoted Psalm 118:22. This is the most frequently mentioned Psalm in the New Testament. Corner stones were usually the foundation and principal corner of a building. Pilgrims sang this as they walked up the mountain to Jerusalem. It applies to the Messiah.

Acts 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.”⁴⁴

Acts 4:13 “when they saw the boldness of Peter and John” The leaders knew these men had been Jesus’ disciples and were amazed by the strength of their convictions knowing that they were “unlearned in the Law and laymen” (AB). This does not mean illiterate, as most Jewish boys learned to read and write starting at age five.⁴⁵

Acts 4:14–18 “What shall we do to these men? . . . let us straitly threaten them . . .” The Council or Sanhedrin’s decision was to threaten Peter and John to stop talking about Jesus. But that did not go over very well with bold Peter and John.

Acts 4:19–20 “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him?” (NIV) Peter no longer had any fears of the Sanhedrin’s position or threatenings. His intimidation at Passover is completely gone by Pentecost. All disciples need to hearken more to God than to cultural norms or what is politically 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 parodical. (Luke includes Peter repeating the same message in a different setting Acts 5:29.)

Acts 4:21–22 “for many glorified God for that which was done” (JST) Just as with the trial for the Lord, the leaders “could not decide how to punish” Peter and John because of the miraculous healing. Luke includes many parallels between Jesus and the apostle’s healings to demonstrate that they were carrying on the same work.

Believers Pray for Wonders and Receive an Earthquake

Acts 4:23–31

Acts 4:23–24 “they lifted up their voice to God with one accord” The disciples prayed or sang with the Holy Spirit. They were filled with gratitude—rather than complain about the Sanhedrin and unfair imprisonment. Their grateful attitude decreased the pain of the night’s punishment. Their prayer confirmed their belief and eternal perspective that all will be well because Jehovah their Creator, is Jesus.

Acts 4:25–26 “Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?” David’s royal Psalm 2 (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 a dual meaning. This one applies to Peter and John’s experience, to Jesus’ trial and now. (Remember the word Christ/Messiah, from verse 26, means “anointed one,” and thus can be applied to all who have been anointed to serve God.)

Acts 4:27–30 “grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word” In addition to asking for confidence to declare God’s word, they also prayed for other gifts of the Spirit including miracles and wonders. Later Paul (and Joseph Smith and Mormon) directed the saints to seek the best gifts of the Spirit, “with all the energy of heart” (Moroni 7:48).

Acts 4:31 “The meeting place shook. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (CEV) Whether the room shook from an earthquake or local jolt, the saints saw it as a sign of God’s power. The miracle was in the timing. There were many earthquakes 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 Alma’s and Paul’s earthquakes).

Second Reference to Living in Financial Unity

Acts 4:32–37

Acts 4:32–33 “the believers were one in heart and soul . . . they shared everything” (ISV) Luke repeats the wonderful unity they shared as they lived the Law of Consecration and adds 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 of loving God and our neighbor.⁴⁶ 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 has stories 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.”⁴⁷ In an earlier General Conference Mark E. Peterson said: “The Law of Consecration is the most important, specific and sacred law.”⁴⁸

Acts 4:35–37 “those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money . . . [to] the apostles” The church is still small enough in Acts that the Twelve are taking care of all financial responsibilities of the church. The Levite, Joseph or Barnabas, is the example of a generous homeowner who is singled out because of the important role he will play as an apostle later in Acts.

CHAPTER 5

Ananias and Sapphira

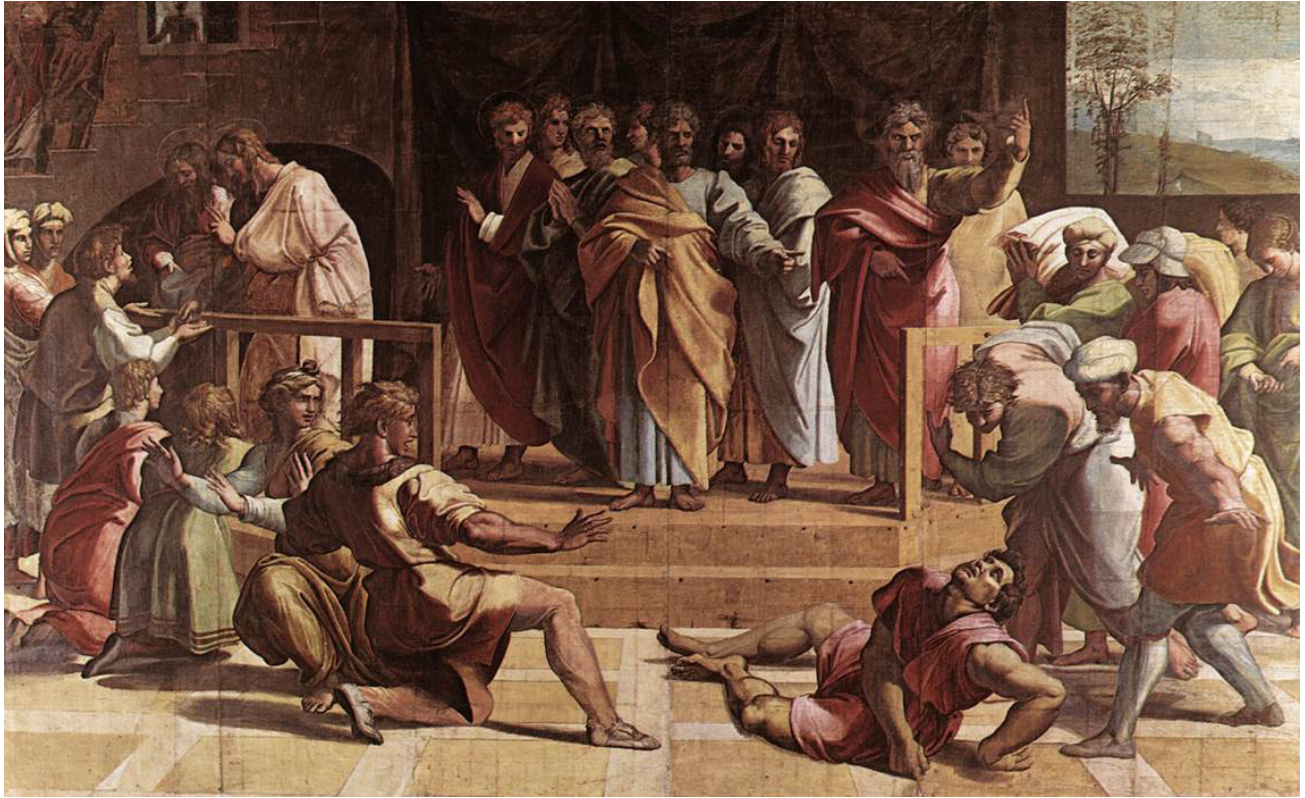
Acts 5:1–11

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

In contrast to Barnabas the Cyprus Levite’s generous example, we now have the premediated greed of Ananias and Sapphira (both commonly used 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 equated to stealing from God as well as breaking a very serious covenant. The story echoes Achan and his family who were likewise unfaithful to “devoted things” and were killed (Joshua 7:1, BSB).

Acts 5:3–4 “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 one promises to be honest multiples 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.”⁴⁹ Yet, when Ananias “lied to the Holy Spirit,” it was not the same as the unpardonable sin of perdition, as outlined in Matthew 12:31–32.⁵⁰

Acts 5:5–6 “When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all . . .” This immediate death did not leave Ananias time for any 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.”⁵¹ The text says, Ananias was immediately carried out to be buried. This was a common practice so one could be in the tomb before one’s body began to decompose.



The Death of Ananias by Raphael, 1515. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Acts 5:7–10 “... his wife came in ... ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘that is the price’ ...” (NIV) Just three hours later, Peter questioned Sapphira about the sale price, and she too answered “Yes.” The Bible records that the early saints replied, “yes” or “no,” for questions about their covenants. In this case though, it was a false answer. Luke included the story to teach the need for covenants to have no shades of grey or doubt.

Acts 5:11 “Great fear seized the whole church” (NIV) Luke’s story telling added to the impact of the story. It shocks us into the seriousness of covenant making, the seriousness of sin, and seriousness of Peter’s prophetic leadership. This is the first time in the New Testament that the word “church” is used. As the chief apostle, Peter eradicated the impurity in the church by receiving the gift of discernment. But it was God’s judgment that came upon the couple and shortened their lives.

Apostolic Healings

Acts 5:12–16

Acts 5:12 “The apostles performed many signs and wonders” (BSB) 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 (John 10:23; Acts 3:11). The stern threatening from the Sanhedrin did not slow them down especially with the apostles performing healings and other miracles.

Acts 5:13 “the rulers durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them” (JST) The JST change of “rest” to “rulers,” helps us to understand this verse. It clarifies that there are 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 were back causing problems by 5:18.

Acts 5:14–16 “more and more men and women believed” (NIV) Their immediate missionary success was phenomenal. The apostles continued to do Jesus’ work as they followed the same pattern that Jesus did—healing and preaching. God’s power is manifest through His servants.

“people brought the sick into the streets . . . so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some” (NIV) These Jews’ who sought healing from Peter exerted their faith and were richly rewarded. Peter had already taught that he was not the source of healing, but it was all through God’s great power. There was a similar outpouring of healing on two specific days when the resurrected Jesus visited the Nephites (3 Nephi 17:7; 26:15), and when the Prophet Joseph Smith healed hundreds of the saints who were encamped as refugees in tents and old army barracks on either side of the Mississippi River, suffering from malaria on July 22, 1839.⁵²

Second Imprisonment Apostles Imprisoned

Acts 5:17–28

Acts 5:17–18 “The high priest and all his associates, . . . were filled with jealousy” or “indignation” (NIV, KJV). Their envy led them to imprison all of the apostles this time. The translations of “common prison” or “public jail” is used most often in English and avoids too precise a definition.

Acts 5:19–20 “an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out” (NIV) An angelic release is all the more ironic as the Sadducees (5:17) did not believe in angels. The angels instructed the apostles to return to the temple court yards preach “about this new life” (NIV). Undaunted, the apostles returned to the courtyards around the temple to preach—the very place of their two previous arrests. These Galilean apostles had no respect or fear of the Jewish leaders.

Acts 5:21–23 “the officers came, and found them not in the prison” The high priest had gathered the Sanhedrin to discuss the case of the apostles’ preaching, but their prisoners 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.

Acts 5:25–26 “Look! the men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts, teaching” (NIV) The rumor or report that the apostles were preaching again in the temple was confirmed by a very 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 (Luke 22:6) the officers took care not to arouse the crowd who honored the apostles. We get a better feel for how deeply the apostles were honored by the locals from the next phrase. The guards took care because they “feared lest they should have been stoned” by the people for taking the apostles.

Acts 5:27–28 “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

Acts 5:29–32

Acts 5:29 “We ought to obey God rather than men” Peter gave the same answer that he did at his first hearing (4:19). Luke mentions that “the other apostles” joined Peter in the defense. If modern disciples can internalize the apostles’ rebuttal, it can become a source of strength to refute the world’s constant volley of compromises to faith and obedience. From the ancient commands of Sabbath and Chastity to modern prophets’ direction on limiting social media and diet, Christians can replay, “we ought to obey God rather than man.”

Acts 5:30–32 “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. They must have felt quite defensive. But there was no question in Peter’s mind who was to blame for Jesus’ death. Peter referred to Jesus’ death as “hanging on a tree.” The Law of Moses includes, “cursed is a man who hanged on a tree” (Deuteronomy 21:22–23). Yet, hearing that Jesus was exalted to the “right hand” position to God must have been very offensive to the Sanhedrin (Perhaps there was one with a soft heart, like “Alma,” in the group of wicked). The first Adam ate from the forbidden tree, now the second Adam hung on a tree to free us from sin.

Acts 5:32 “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 whom “obey him.” The Spirit acted as a second witness to the Apostles’ testament that Jesus is the Savior of the world.

Gamaliel’s Advice

Acts 5:33–42

Acts 5:33 “Cut to the heart” is also translated, “enraged” (RSV) or “furious: (NIV) or “infuriated” (JB). Some of the leaders became so angry that they wanted to kill the apostles.

Acts 5:34 “Gamaliel, a doctor of the law” The hero of the hour was Gamaliel (Saul’s previous teacher, Acts 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, etc.). His voice was also the first time a Pharisee has been mentioned in Acts. Since the Lord's death, no Pharisees have been included in the groups opposing the followers of Jesus. Here it is just the opposite— a Pharisee advocated tolerance for them. This may have been a Sadducee-versus-Pharisee battle as well.

Acts 5:35–39 “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 (which also sounds like an old Greek proverb from Euripedes). Some of the details have been garbled, nevertheless 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.⁵³ Judas protested the census of Quirinius (Luke 2) and became the father of Zealots (anti-Roman rule in Palestine).⁵⁴

Acts 5:40 “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 had ordered for Jesus a few months earlier (Luke 23:16-22; John 19:1)

Acts 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' commission to preach the Good News. And they felt the best spot to do that was in the Temple.

Header Image: Image of Pentecost by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay.

ENDNOTES

1. Paul J. Achtemeier, *Harper Collins' Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1996), "Luke," 629. Joseph A. Fitzmyer *The Anchor Bible: The Acts of the Apostles* (NYC, 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, *Ensign*, January 2003. First given at a Church Educational System conference at Brigham Young University on 8 August 2000.
3. Joseph A. Fitzmyer *The Anchor Bible: The Acts of the Apostles* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1998).
4. Achtemeier, *Harpers Dictionary*, 583, and Fitzmyer, Luke, 36; John L. Hilton unpublished Stylometry studies.
5. Luke's knowledge of Palestinian geography and customs are written as a foreigner. He makes minor mistakes when describing some traditions or temple customs—like, confusing Mary's required 40-day purification offering at the temple (Leviticus 12:2–6) and presenting the first born (Exodus 13:2; Numbers 18:15) in Luke 2:22–24.
6. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX, The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 38–39.
7. Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion* II. 51.11. He claims that both Mark and Luke were members of the Seventy. https://archive.org/stream/EpiphaniusPanarionBksIIIIII/Epiphanius%20-%20_Panarion_%20-%20Bks%20II%20%26%20III%20-%20I_djvu.txt. (Site accessed 6-17-19.)
8. Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Understanding Paul* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1983), 10. The religions in the Roman Empire included: Traditional pagan, Mystery religions, Stoicism, Epicureanism, Judaism, and Judaic sympathizers.
9. Hugh Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 10–167.
10. David Bednar, General Conference, April 2016.
11. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1844. Reprint 1980), 5:555. "The Holy Ghost is God's messenger to administer in all those priesthoods (HC, 5: 555; 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). Also see Andrew Ehat and Lyndon 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), 327–336.
12. Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, p. 273; see John 14:26; 16:7–15
13. Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple, Its Ministry and Services, as They Were at the Time of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, reprint, 1976, 1881), 132, 137.
14. Hoyt W. Brewster Jr., *Doctrine and Covenants Encyclopedia* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 2012). 89.
15. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 2:428 "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.”

16. 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 New Testament Gospels, even without the higher priesthood confirming the gift on most people.
17. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph*, 285. Joseph’s sermon was given years after he administered the first washings and anointings in January 1836.
18. *Temples in the Ancient World*, 56–57.
19. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph*, 21. “There was no point upon which the Prophet Joseph dwelt more than the discerning of Spirits.”
20. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6.58.
21. Dahl and Cannon, *Encyclopedia of Smith*, “Tongues, Gift of,” 669–670. “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 Jessee found references in Joseph’s handwritten journal from Oct 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; and Smith, *History of the Church*, 2:292; 2:376).
22. *Ibid.*, 2:428; “. . . 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 . . .”
23. *Ibid.*, 5:31–32; also 2:141.
24. 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.”
25. Joseph Smith wrote a letter while this confined in Liberty Jail, December 16, 1838, page 7 (accessed 6-19-19): <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/search?query=brethren&sort=alphabetical&page=1&perpage=50&startdate=1837.12.31&enddate=1838.12.31&transcripts=false&issuggestion=false&types=documents-papers|documents-papers-administrative|documents-papers-documents|documents-papers-legal|documents-papers-journals|documents-papers-histories|event>
26. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, VII. 15.3; 1 Kings 2:10. As mentioned previously, weeks before every Passover, the grave sites were white-washed to easily mark and avoid them to remain clean for the Passover.
27. For more information on David’s eternal status, see *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 339.
28. Russell M. Nelson, General Conference, “We Can Do Better and Be Better,” April, 2019.
29. Acts 1:14; 9:36; 16:1, 36; 17:4, 12, 34; Romans 1:8; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Philippians 4:3; etc. In the New Testament, four

- house-churches are mentioned by the women's name who opened their homes for regular worship: Mary, the Mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12), Lydia the seller of purple (Acts 16:14, 40), Chloe in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:11), and Priscilla/Prisca the wife of Aquila (Acts 18:2–3, 18–19, 26; Romans 16:3–5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19).
30. Jewish calendars started their days with the dark hours (as the Genesis creation account began with darkness before light). Their day began with approximately twelve-hours of darkness. The hours of 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. were divided into three or four watches of the night (depending on where and when they lived). The twelve-daylight-hours began at 6:00 a.m. as the first hour, and twelfth hour as 5:00 p.m. The hour of prayer was 3:00 p.m.
 31. Each day at the Temple there was a sacrifice offered and incense lit at sunrise and at 3:00pm. It became incorporated into a twice-daily ritual of temple service. It was also known as the “time of incense.” The priests met together and used lots for the Lord to assign a certain priest to lay the incense on the golden altar once in their life's service (age 30–50). A “cloud of odors rose up before the Lord” as prayers (Edersheim, *The Temple*, 167).
 32. This hour is found in the Old Testament as an important time for other prophets. Angel Gabriel visited Daniel “about the time of the evening oblation” or 3:00 p.m. (Daniel 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 Kings 18:36 also see Judith 9:1).
 33. Edersheim, *The Temple*, 141.
 34. Avraham Steinberg, ed., *Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics* (Jerusalem Israel: Feldheim, 2003), 34, “Any illness may result from sin.”
 35. Russell M. Nelson, General Conference, “Ministering with the Power and Authority of God” April 2018.
 36. John W. Welch, “The Good Samaritan: Forgotten Symbols, *Ensign*, 02/2007.
 37. Wilford Griggs, *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1986), 193;
 38. For more see for more see Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Gospel Symbolism*.
 39. Russell M. Nelson, “Come Follow Me,” General Conference, April 2019. The full quote reads: “Do the spiritual work to find out for yourselves, and please do it now. Time is running out.”
 40. 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 from Isaiah 42:1–7; 49:1–6; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:1.
 41. Max Kadushin, *The Rabbinic Mind* (Binghamton NY: Global Publications, Binghamton University, 1952, reprint 2001), 363.
 42. By the time of the late Second Temple, the Mosaic Priesthood were all descendants of Levi and Aaron, and divided into the following offices:
 - A. The one reigning High Priest (since King Herod I, this became more political, as was no longer lifelong nor 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
 1. Cultus: The leaders of the 24 weekly divisions or “courses.”
 2. Custody of the Temple: Temple overseers

3. Temple finances: Three treasurers
- C. The Priests: 24 weekly courses each of four to nine daily courses with about 7,200 priests
- D. The Levites (about 9,600): 24 weekly courses, each divided into:
 1. Singers and musicians
 2. Temple servants and guards with
43. After the temple's destruction in AD 70, scribes are known as rabbis.
44. Donald W. Parry, ed., *Temples of the Ancient World* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 457.
45. *Mishnah, Avoth* 5:21.
46. Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, FARMS, 1989), 422-485.
47. Gordon B. Hinkley, *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1997), 640.
48. Mark E. Peterson, General Conference, October, 1978.
49. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 2:58.
50. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:1976; "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." <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-e-1-1-july-1843-30-april-1844/348> (accessed 6-20-19); or in *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 358.
51. Fitzmyer, *Anchor Bible: Acts*, 317.
52. Smith, *History of the Church*, 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."
53. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XX.v.1; Theudas lived in AD 44.
54. Josephus, *Wars*, II.8.1; Judas liv