

*Who is your  
raison d'etre?*

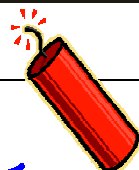
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 Tuesday, May 03, 2016  
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LESSON NOTES (EXPLORE THE BIBLE)

ACTS OF HOLY SPIRIT: THE ISIS OF 40-50AD MEETS THE CHRIST  
 (Acts 9) Lord's Day, May 8, 2016



D. Thomas Porter

OVERVIEW

"Session 10" for this week in the *Explore the Bible Series*

What do we make of the ISIS-like Saul of Tarsus? He was hell-bent on keeping the body of believers pure and free from this false messiah dude from Nazareth. Many messiahs had come and gone, but this one was different—the people were actually listening to His followers, and then actually following the followers. Things were getting out of hand.

A QUESTION TO GET YOU THINKING:  
 WHY DID THE LORD GOD PICK SAUL OF TARSUS OF ALL PEOPLE TO PROCLAIM THE "FULL MESSAGE" ABOUT "THE NEW LIFE?"

For example, there was this very nice Grecian Jew named Stephen who had the temerity to say publicly, right before the Sanhedrin itself, that the Temple was not where Yahweh resided. He even called loudly to this Jesus, and pretended to see Yahweh Himself in heaven. Then there was this Philip, another Grecian Jew who was spending time with Samaritans, teaching them about this Yeshua? Things were getting out of hand.

So, what did he do? The obvious. He went to the head of the Southern Baptist Convention and asked for authority to imprison all those men and women who had the gall to proclaim that Jesus was Christ, and He alone. The temple was no longer a building, but people? Such balderdash!

This is Saul's story. It's our story. It's the story of all who come to grips with the Lord Jesus the Christ—whether on a road with blinding light, or on a path with round, bland rocks, hard to see but nonetheless easy to trip upon. Saul was hell-bent; now he's heaven-bent. The Lord God was right in choosing him. May He choose us as well.

A NOTE OF ENCOURAGEMENT

The success of any Bible study is entirely dependent upon three entities: you, your teacher and Holy Spirit. He therefore exhorts you to study—do your homework; encourage your teacher by prayer and active participation; most importantly, continually pray to Father God for Holy Spirit to guide us as we learn what He taught Luke 1900+ years ago.

# ACTS

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## CONTEXT (Ending of Volume 1 ["Luke"])<sup>1</sup>

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After the two believers on the road to Emmaus met a man who turned out to be the risen Christ, Cleopas and his friend returned to Jerusalem where they informed the Eleven. While they were telling them, Jesus Himself stood among them and encouraged them amidst their doubts. Jesus was hungry, and He ate. Afterwards, He taught them more about how repentance and forgiveness of sins would be preached throughout the world, beginning at Jerusalem.

They were instructed to stay in Jerusalem until they have been clothed with power from on high. When He led them outside Bethany, He blessed them. While doing so, He ascended into heaven. They worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem, this time with full joy, continually praising God at the temple.

## CONTEXT (Beginning of Volume 2 ["Acts"])

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Acts 1. *After giving more encouragement and instruction Jesus the Christ ascends for the last time within the time of the disciples.* Before, friend of God, I told you about all that Jesus had begun to do and teach. After His suffering, He showed Himself numerous times over a period of about 40 days. He showed them empirical proof that He was indeed alive.

Commanding His students and other followers to stay in Jerusalem, He promised them what Father God had promised—Holy Spirit working among and within them. Formerly, people had been immersed in water to commemorate their repentance, but then the disciples would be immersed in God Himself.

Of course they were curious—was this the time Israel would be restored? Jesus made it quite clear, only the Father of the Groom knows when the wedding party will gather. But for now, you are to tell people about the Kingdom—start in Jerusalem, then go on to the land of the Samaritans (yes, I said Samaritans), and then to the ends of the earth!

After these marching orders, Jesus ascended up to heaven for the last time—angels told them to stop staring and get on with it. He will return as He left. They returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. Praying a lot, they all joined together with the women, including Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Recognizing their numbers were diminished, Peter finalized a procedure for a new disciple to be appointed. Matthias was appointed by God Himself (through a casting of lots).

- Q What does it mean to be baptized “*εν* Holy Spirit?”
- Q Why doesn't the Christ know when He will return to earth?
- Q What are the differences between His first ascension in Luke 24:51 and this one? Why is it useful to think there is but one ascension?
- Q What can we know about Jesus' return from this passage?

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<sup>1</sup>See <http://DThomasPorter.com/BibleStudies>

Acts 2:1-13. *God comes at Pentecost, among and within them—the world is never the same.* The disciples were all together when Pentecost<sup>2</sup> came. A sudden sound similar to a violent wind came from above and filled the entire house where were gathered. It looked like tongues of fire separated themselves and came to rest over each of them. All were filled with Holy Spirit and began to talk in other languages as He enabled them.

Believers in the Lord God were staying in Jerusalem, believers from all over. When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered in bewilderment. They were mystified—each one heard the disciples speaking in his/her own language.

Blown away, they asked—aren't these men Galileans? How do they know my native tongue? People were from the far east, e.g., Medes), and the far west, (e.g., Rome), the south (e.g., Libya), and far north (e.g., Asia [Turkey]). We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own language! What does all this mean?

Of course, there were skeptics. Some mocked them—they've had too much wine.

Q Why did Holy Spirit come to tabernacle with His people on Pentecost?

Q Why were they skeptical? What is today's equivalent to "they've had too much wine?"

Acts 2:14-28. *We're not drunk on wine, but with the Spirit Himself.* Peter steps up to the plate—listen up! Fellow believers, and all who live in Jerusalem—let me tell you what's going on...

These men are not drunk on wine; good grief, it's only nine in the morning! No, what you're seeing is what Joel said would happen a long time ago...

*In the last days, God will pour Himself out into all people. Your children will prophesy—your young men will visualize great things, your old men will dream dreams. Both men and women will have Me poured out in them. Great wonders in the heaven, signs on earth below, and blood and fire below will be manifested. The sun will be darkened and the moon changed to blood before the coming age of the great and glorious day of the Lord. AND, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved!*

Israelites—listen up! Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited to you by God Himself. Miracles, wonders, signs were done by God through Him—you know it's true.

Yet, this man was handed over to you—by God's own design—and what did you do? With the help of wicked people [aka, those who didn't know the Law], you put Him to death! You nailed Him to a cross! BUT, God raised Him from the dead—freeing Him from the agony of death. Why? Because it was impossible for death to stop Jesus! Why? David told us a long time ago...

*I saw Yahweh always before me—why? He is always at my right hand—I will not be afraid.*

*Therefore, my raison d'être is happy and that happiness is manifested by the rejoicing of my tongue.*

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<sup>2</sup>The 50th day after the Sabbath of Passover week (Leviticus 23:15-16), thus the first day of the week. Pentecost is also called the Feast of Weeks (Deuteronomy 16:10), the Feast of Harvest (Exodus 23:16) and the day of First-Fruits (Numbers 28:26). For some odd reason, most evangelical churches no longer observe Pentecost except a few as "Whit Sunday" (British/Irish).

So what? If in 2016 we were following the Biblical calendar, we would celebrate Resurrection Sunday on the first "first day of the week" after Passover (May 1, 2016) and then celebrate Pentecost on June 12, 2016. But western approval and western calendars are more important to us than Biblical calendars and Biblical guidance. In 2016 we celebrated Resurrection Sunday on March 27 and Pentecost on May 15.

As my body will live in hope, just as You will not abandon me to the grave, You will not let your Holy One see decay. You have made known in me the path<sup>3</sup> to life—You fill me with joy in Your presence.

Q What evidence did Peter offer to support the notion that Jesus was “the Holy One?”

Q To what extent is today the “last days” of which Joel spoke?

Acts 2:29-37. *David is dead—Jesus is not. You killed Him—God raised Him.* Hey brothers—I have no doubt, nor should you: David is dead. David was buried. David’s tomb is here today. But David was also a prophet who knew God promised him that one of his descendants would ascend to the throne.

So, seeing what’s coming—he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ. Christ was not abandoned, nor did His body decompose. God has raised this Jesus to life—we have all seen this with our very eyes! He is exalted, all the way to the right hand of Father God. Just as promised, Holy Spirit has poured Himself out on what you’re seeing right here, right now. Bottom-line: David did NOT ascend to heaven, yet he said,

*The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”*

SO? Let all of Israel know this assuredly—God has made this Jesus—who YOU crucified—both Lord and Messiah!

They were freaked—cut to the heart. Calling out to Peter and the other apostles, what shall we do?

Q What declaration was David making about footstool placement?

Q What are the implications of saying Jesus is not only Christ, but Lord?

Acts 2:38-47. *Get your act together, individually and corporately.* Peter was clear—every one of you—turn your life around, be immersed with the authority of Jesus the Christ because of the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the ultimate blessing—the Lord God Yahweh living within you. The gift of Holy Spirit’s presence is for you and for all who the Lord God will call to Himself.

He continued with other words of warning, and pleading. Save yourselves from this corrupt culture!

Those who accepted his words were immersed with Holy Spirit and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

So, they became devotees of teaching, fellowship, “breaking of bread,” and prayer. They were all filled with awe as the apostles did many wonders and signs of miraculous nature. When people had a need, people sold their stuff so no one was in need. It was family.

Every day they continued. Meeting in the temple courts. Breaking bread together at home. Eating together with joy, and a shared sincere raison d’être. Praising God. Enjoying the favor of all the people. AND...

**The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.**

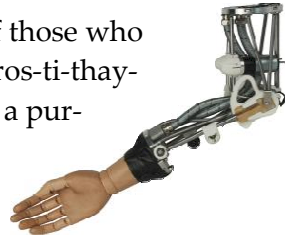
Q What value does “repentance” have in Peter’s answer to their question?

Q What value does “immersion by the authority of Jesus the Christ” have in Peter’s answer to their question?

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<sup>3</sup>This is the same Greek word that Jesus the Christ used when saying He was the “... way (οδους, hodous, 3598), and the truth, and the life.”

- Q What is the result of this repentance and immersion by/in Holy Spirit?
- Q What was corrupt about their generation? Ours?
- Q What verb was used to describe how people were associated with the number of those who believed and were baptized (verses 41&47)? So? [Hint: “added” προστίθημι, pros-ti-thay-mey, 4369, “i.e., put together for a purpose;” i.e., like a prosthesis, each of us has a purpose within the body.] See a great application of this concept in 1 Cor 12.
- Q Why did they sell their possessions? To what extent is this a good model for today’s church?
- Q Did Holy Spirit record these incidents of the early church as examples of what was done, or what was done and should be done? In other words, to what extent is the behavior of the early church a template for how today’s church should be organized, measured, manifested? Example or rule?



## CONTEXT FOR ACTS 4

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Context—Acts 3. *The good news is here, among you.* The apostles continued the work of the Christ—they went to temple frequently. They healed a 40+ year old cripple, right there in front of God and everybody, *by the authority of Jesus the Christ.* Some people were ecstatic about God’s presence within their lives. Others were threatened.

Of course, these were great teaching moments—Peter, for example, challenged the folks at temple. Why are you surprised? We didn’t heal these people. The God of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob has glorified His servant Jesus. Yet you killed the one God glorified, and God raised Him from the dead. It is by the authority of Jesus and the faith that comes through Him that healing has happened.

This is not news—prophets for centuries said the Christ would suffer; of course, you don’t think the Christ should suffer. But, He did. Because of you. So, stop, turn around, and turn to God. Otherwise the distance from you and God (sin) will not be reconciled. Then the time of refreshing can begin. Christ is in heaven awaiting the restoration of everything, just as promised by His prophets. Consider what Moses said—“The Lord your God will raise a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything He tells you.” Jesus is He. If you don’t listen to Him, you will be cut off.

Actually, all the prophets from Samuel on have foretold today. You are heirs of these prophets and the promise made by the Lord God to your ancestors. Remember what He said to Abraham—“Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.”

Bottom-line? God resurrected His Servant and sent Him to you to be blessed by turning you around, away from your wickedness.

- Q To whom did the apostles give credit for the healings at temple? Why?
- Q To be an heir to the promise made to Abraham must have some significance; what is that significance? [Hint: see Galatians 3:26-29.]

## CONTEXT FROM ACTS 4

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Acts 4:1-13. *In the face of powerful, but illegitimate authority, courage inspires.* Well, the powers that be, the priests and their body men and the politically connected Sadducees came to investigate.

Listening to Peter & John's preaching & teaching, their disturbance was palatable—especially about this “resurrection from the dead” business. So, they arrested John and Peter, put them in jail for interrogation later. It didn't help—about five thousand men now constituted the membership in The Way.

Well, the next day all these big wigs, plus professors of the Law (scribes) met in the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. Annas, the high priest was there as was Caiaphas, his son-in-law. Other notables included John, Alexander and other mucky mucks in the Annas family.

Peter & John were brought before this rather august group—the opening interrogative was:

*By what power or authority did you do this healing?*

Peter, “pletheitised”<sup>4</sup> (having been over-whelmingly filled) with Holy Spirit, answered:

*Honorable leaders of the people! If we are being indicted for being kind to a cripple and being challenged as to our means to do so, listen up! All of you, and all of the people of Israel! It is by the authority of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ who you crucified, but God raised from the dead that this cripple walks, and jumps, and yells, and praises God, and is healed! Jesus is the stone you builders of the temple rejected; He has become the cornerstone! Salvation is found no where else—for there is no other name, no other authority anywhere given to us by which we must be saved.*<sup>5</sup>

They were freaked—the courage of Peter & John was phenomenal, especially since these two were unschooled, ordinary men. Astonishment rose. And, they noted that these two were indeed two men who had been with Jesus.

Q What got the attention of the leaders of the temple? Why were they concerned?

Q Why did they hold John and Peter in jail for the next morning? Who was missing from their group?

Q What was their opening indictable question?

Q How would you summarize Peter's response—

1. To whom did he address his remarks? Why?
2. How did he challenge the indictment? What was the act of kindness?
3. To what extent was the authority or the power to do the act more salient?
4. How did Peter's response answer their bi-furcated question?
5. By what authority did they heal the cripple? By what power did they heal the cripple?
6. How was this kind act of healing connected to salvation?
7. Why the singularity of the Lord God in healing and salvation?

Q What was their first response to Peter's declaration? Why were they astonished? Freaked even more now?

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<sup>4</sup>πληθω—(play-thow, 4130) to be filled, completely, to the maximum. See <http://biblehub.com/greek/4130.htm>

<sup>5</sup>If this declaration by Holy Spirit doesn't turn you on, you need to check your knobs. If this powerful truth doesn't cause you to weep tears, get an appointment with an ophthalmologist. If your heart doesn't skip a beat reading this, see a cardiologist. Most importantly, if His declaration here does not move you, get to your knees and pray for a sensitive heart, an open mind, and a soul who truly cares about one's Creator, Savior, and Master.

Acts 4:14-22. *In the wake of Peter's response, authorities shake, trying to console each other, to little avail. Well, could they do? The healed dude was standing right there. What could they say? He'd been jumping around, walking around and praising Yahweh! So they had Peter & John escorted from the Sanhedrin hall and then asked themselves—*

*What are we going to do? These men have been seen doing this outstanding miracle by everybody living in Jerusalem. We can not deny that. But... to stop this thing from going any further, we must warn these two to no longer use Jesus' name when they teach or preach.*

Calling them back to the hall, they commanded them not to speak, or teach, at all by the authority of Jesus.

That went over like a lead balloon. Peter & John replied—

*Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey the Sanhedrin rather than the Lord God Jehovah. As for us, we can't help it. We are simply speaking about what we have seen, what we have heard.*

After more empty threats, the Sanhedrin let them go. They were not in one accord on how to punish these two—all the people were praising Yahweh for what had happened. The healed cripple was not only healed miraculously, he was over forty years old. This was no placebo.

Q To what extent was their concern a legitimate concern for the Sanhedrin?

Q What does it mean “not to speak or teach *in the name of Jesus?*”

Q Why do suppose the Sanhedrin could not agree on what to do regarding punishment?

#### EPILOGUE—ACTS 4:23-31 (verses 32-36 really belong with Acts 5)

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After their release, they went back to their people to celebrate. Peter & John chortled that even the chief priests of the Sanhedrin did not know what to do. When hearing this, the people broke out in song and prayer to God. Here are some of their songs and thoughts and prayers...

- Sovereign Lord, you created the universe.
- Sovereign Lord, you have spoken by Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, David, our ancestor David—

*Why do powers and people rage, plot in vain?*

*Kings take their positions, and rulers gather against the Lord and the Anointed One.*

- Herod failed. Pilate failed. Even the people of Israel failed. Their conspiracy against your holy servant Jesus who You anointed, failed. They only did what You had decided beforehand would happen.
- Now, Lord, consider the threats, and enable your slaves<sup>6</sup> to speak Your word with boldness, great boldness, bold boldness!
- Oh Lord, stretch out your hand—heal, do miracles, show wonders, all by the authority of your holy servant, Jesus.

After they prayed all this, where they were meeting was shaken. They were all filled by Holy Spirit and spoke God's word boldly.

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<sup>6</sup>When speaking of David or Jesus the Christ, the people used the word “pah-i-daw” (παῖδα, meaning beloved servant), and when referring to themselves, they used the word “douloi” (δουλοῖς, meaning slaves).

Acts 4:32-5:11. *Respect for the brethren's needs; respect for Holy Spirit*. Due to the tremendous needs of the people in Jerusalem as a function of Holy Spirit working, He inspired believers to assist each other in concrete ways.

One such man was Joseph Barnabas, Paul's missionary associate. He sold some property and provided it to the apostle's to meet the people's needs.

Two other folk sold their property as well—Ananias and his wife Sapphira. But, their gift was somewhat misleading as they pretended the *entire* proceeds of their sale was being given to the people. Peter called them both out, and because they lied to Holy Spirit—both were killed by Him on the spot.

Great feared seized the whole church, and all those who heard about their death.

Lying to God is not tolerated.

Q Why was the Lord God so severe in His punishment for the spiritual fraud being presented by Mr. & Mrs. Ananias?

Acts 5:12-24. *When the Lord God goes public, the powerful win*. Signs and wonders were becoming frequent in the area adjacent to the Temple. None of the authorities would bother them, even though they were meeting right there on Temple grounds. It would have been political suicide to stop them.

Yet, God continued to work among them—men *and* women believed in the word and were added<sup>7</sup> to the group. As the word spread, more and more people came—some even put their ill on mats & beds so that the shadow of Peter, for example, would fall on them. All were healed.

This couldn't go on long without the pastors and the deacons getting jealous, to say nothing of the SB's—they were filled with jealousy. So they arrested the apostles—put them in the public jail no less. BUT, during the night, perhaps Christ Himself, or at least an angel of the Lord, opened the jail doors, and brought them out. Go back to the temple courts—“tell the people the *full* message of this new life.”

So at daybreak, and they did as were told—the people were taught. Not looking outside, the Sanhedrin was assembled and the authorities sent to the jail, requiring the apostles to appear. Oops, the jailors reported—the jail was locked, and the guards were standing there, but when we opened the cells... They were not there. The captain of the Temple guard, to say nothing of the chief priests were puzzled. What would come of all this?

Q Why was it important that the teaching of the new life, with the full message be done there in public?

Q Why did the Lord God release them from jail? Could their work simply begin after their interrogation by the Sanhedrin?



Acts 5:25-42. When the Lord God gets a hearing, the powerful freak and flog, but the Lord God wins, always. When the mucky mucks found out the apostles, who they thought were in jail, were back at it teaching the new full message about the new life, the captain said bring 'em, carefully. We don't want a riot on our hands.

So the high priest began the interrogation—

*I thought we gave you strict orders not to teach in this name! You've filled Jerusalem with your teaching—and you are determined to make us guilty of this man's death.*

Peter & the apostles responded—

*The God of our fathers—and yours—raised Jesus from the dead. You killed Him by hanging Him on a tree! Yahweh has exalted Him by making Him Prince and Savior so that Israel can repent and may be given forgiveness. We are merely witnesses of these events, AND, so is Holy Spirit who Father God has given to those who obey Him.*

Wow. Now they were really nervous. They sought to put them to death. But a member of the minority group, the Pharisees, one Gamaliel, a famous and respected professor of the Law stood up and said:

*Men of Israel—be careful what you do to these men. Remember Theudas who claimed to be the Messiah. About 400 men rallied to him, and yet he was killed. All his followers gave up and were scattered. A similar thing happened with Judas the Galilean.<sup>8</sup> Both groups came to nothing.*

*So, in the present case therefore, I implore you to leave these men alone. If what they're teaching originates from humans, it will too fail. But, if their teaching is indeed from God—you won't be able to stop them, and you'll be fighting against God Himself.*

They were persuaded not to kill them, but to flog them, and again they ordered them to speak in the name of Jesus, and then they let the apostles go.

Totally cranked, the apostles left the Sanhedrin with their spiritual adrenalin pulsing—they had been counted worthy to suffer disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts, and from house to house they *never* stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah!

- Q Where were the apostles ordered to teach? Did they? Why there?
- Q What was the key concern of the Sanhedrin, the content of their teaching or by what authority they taught? What was the basis for their concern? To what extent was it legally and theologically legitimate?
- Q Why was the “hanging on a tree” indictment so severe?
- Q According to the apostles, Father God not only raised Jesus from the dead, but had also made Him Prince *and* Savior. What are the implications of this declaration in this context of the Sanhedrin?
- Q What the logic behind Gamaliel's approach to the problem? Who would become his student later?

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<sup>7</sup>“added” = προστίθημι, pros-ti-thay-mey, 4369, “i.e., put together for a purpose;” i.e., like a prosthesis, each of us has a purpose within the body.

<sup>8</sup>Josephus refers to him as a man from Gamala in Gaulanitis who refused to give tribute to Caesar. His revolt was crushed, but a movement, started in his time, may have lived on in the party of the Zealots.

- Q Why were the apostles flogged, even with Gamaliel's warning?
- Q Why were they cranked about being flogged for teaching the full message about the new life in the temple courts?
- Q To what extent did the flogging facilitate teaching about the full message about the new life? Why are we so concerned, then, about persecution?

## CONTEXTUAL ISSUES ACTS 6

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Acts 6:1-6. *Social problem, spiritual answer, bold consequences.* As the number of followers of the Way increased, believers from outside of Jerusalem were kvetching to believers from Jerusalem about their widows being neglected when food was being distributed. The tension between the "pure" folks from Judea and the "Diaspora" folk from all over the empire was palatable.

So the apostles gathered all folks together and announced:

*It is neither prudent nor pleasing<sup>9</sup> for us to spend time feeding people food when we could be feeding people the Word. So folks, look around you and choose seven men who are known to be indwelled fully by Holy Spirit, and wisdom. We will turn over this responsibility to them, and devote our full attention to prayer and ministry of the Word.*

The believers were pleased by the proposal. And very wisely chose seven men, seven believers with Grecian backgrounds<sup>10</sup>—Stephen, Philip, Pocours, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas (a gentile, specifically a proselyte to Judaism from Antioch). The seven were presented to the apostles who prayed over them and laid their hands on them, blessing and commending them to their new service role among the believers.

- Q Why were there so many "foreign" believers in Jerusalem? So what?
- Q Why was there enmity/tension between believers in Jerusalem versus those from Alexandria, Antioch, Rome, Ephesus, etc.?
- Q What was the rationale for the apostles seeking others to take care of feeding the widows of the Way?

Acts 6:7-15. *Holy Spirit emboldens even the old guard.* The word of the Lord God spread rapidly as the number of followers in Jerusalem increased rapidly—a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. See page 22.

Things were happening—Stephen, full of God's mercy and power, did wonderful wonders, and miraculous miracles among the believers. They were great and honored the Lord God.

No good deed goes unpunished, for defenders of the old guard—the Freedmen (Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia & Asia Minor—were irritated. So they began to argue with Stephen,

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<sup>9</sup>Luke uses the Greek ἀρεστόν (701, ah-res-ton) which is a combination of being reasonable as in rational, and desirable as in pleasing. NIV85 uses the word "right."

<sup>10</sup>All seven of the chosen had Greek names. The murmuring had come from the Greek-speaking, non-traditional segment of the church; so those elected to care for the work came from the group that was apparently or in reality being neglected. A pragmatic and public relations sensitive solution.

especially about the nature of the temple. But they were out of their league for Stephen easily stood up to their arguments—his wisdom came from Holy Spirit.

So they turned to false witness facilitation: they secretly persuaded some men to say they'd heard Stephen blaspheme against the Law of Moses and against the Lord God Jehovah. It worked. People were stirred up, along with elders and professors of the Law. They seized Stephen and, like the apostles, brought him before the Sanhedrin.

The false witnesses did their thing—their testimony said Stephen never stops speaking against the holiness of this Temple, and against the Law. We've heard him say this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy the Temple and change the rules and customs which Moses gave us centuries ago!

As they sat there in the Sanhedrin, all looked intently at Stephen. His face was like the face of a messenger from God Himself.

So, the high priest asked him—Is this true?

**[My apologies: the consequences for this event are skipped next week. Lifeway and Dr. Register chose not to deal with the Deacon who was killed for his sermonic testimony before the Sanhedrin. Perhaps we think too little of deacons? Or perhaps powerful deacons make elders/pastors/clergy really nervous?]**

- Q What is the significance of several priests coming to faith in the Lord Jesus? Note page 19.
- Q Why were the Freedmen especially incensed about Stephen? Why did they resort to facilitating false testimony?
- Q What are examples of false testimony today about the Lord Jesus and The Way?
- Q What was the condemning indictment supported by the false testimony?

Acts 7:1-19. *Stephen stirs the pot—Holy Spirit empowers—Abraham to Joseph.*  
 Stephen didn't answer the high priest, initially nor directly, but he did have a Holy Spirit empowered response to the Sanhedrin...

*Listen up! You are my brothers, my fathers. The God of glory showed Himself to Abraham while he was still living in Mesopotamia, even before he lived in Haran. God said—“Leave your country, leave your people, and go—to a land I will show you.” [Stephen’s quoting Genesis 12:1]*

*So Abraham left the land of the Chaldeans, settling in Haran. After his father’s death, God sent him to the land where you are now living. No inheritance was given, not even a foot of ground. BUT, God promised that his descendants would possess the land—even though he had no children at that time.*

*God explained—“Your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own; they will be enslaved for 400 years. BUT I will punish those who mistreated them, and later they will come to the land and worship Me in this place. The covenant was sealed with circumcision, and when Isaac was born, he was circumcised 8 days after his birth. Isaac begat Jacob and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.*

*Now Joseph’s brothers were jealous, and selling him as a slave into Egypt. BUT God was with him, and Joseph rose to great influence when a famine affected Egypt. It was there that Jacob was reconciled with Joseph and Joseph with his enslaving brothers. From seventy-five people, the Hebrews were to become hebrew no longer. As the years passed, Joseph’s contribution and legacy was forgotten and the leaders of Egypt oppressed our forefathers, even forcing them to kill their newborn babies.*

- Q How did Stephen lay the groundwork for identifying with the Sanhedrin?
- Q What is the persuasive value of Stephen’s review of how Abraham came to the “land where you are living” right now?
- Q Why did Stephen emphasize the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham?

**ACTS 7:1-19**

Then the high priest asked him, "Are these charges true?"

<sup>2</sup>To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran. <sup>3</sup>'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.

<sup>4</sup>"So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. <sup>5</sup>He gave him no inheritance here, not even a foot of ground. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child. <sup>6</sup>God spoke to him in this way: 'Your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. <sup>7</sup>But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,' God said, 'and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.'<sup>B</sup> <sup>8</sup>Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.

<sup>9</sup>"Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him <sup>10</sup>and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt; so he made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.

<sup>11</sup>"Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our fathers could not find food. <sup>12</sup>When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers on their first visit. <sup>13</sup>On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph's family. <sup>14</sup>After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. <sup>15</sup>Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our fathers died. <sup>16</sup>Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.

<sup>17</sup>"As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt greatly increased. <sup>18</sup>Then another king, who knew nothing about Joseph, became ruler of Egypt. <sup>19</sup>He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our forefathers by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die.

Acts 7:20-38. *Stephen stirs the pot—Holy Spirit empowers—Moses to Mt. Sinai*. Even with the death of infants, Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. After three months at home, he was brought up by the king's daughter as her own son. And Moses was educated in Egyptian wisdom, powerful in rhetoric and action.

When Moses was forty, however, when visiting his kindred Israelites, he killed an Egyptian who was abusing an Israelite. Moses mistakenly thought his people would protect him, follow him. He was called out by two Israelites who were fighting and Moses was trying to achieve peace—they said, are you going to kill one of us?

Knowing he was in trouble, Moses fled to Midian where he lived as an alien; he had two sons.<sup>11</sup> Forty years later, an angel told him to listen to a burning bush where he heard the Lord say—*I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob*.

The Lord told him to take off his sandals, for this was holy ground.

*I have seen the oppression of My people back in Egypt; I have heard their cries of anguish. I have come down to set them free. Now, come to Me and I will send you back to Egypt.*

And who was God speaking to—the same Moses who they'd rejected. Moses was sent to be their deliverer and ruler by God Himself! God led them out of Egypt, doing wonders and miraculous signs in Egypt, at the Sea of Reeds, and for forty years in the desert.

Moses told the Israelites—*God will send you a prophet like me from your own people* [quoting

Deuteronomy 18:15]. *This prophet was in the assembly in the desert. He was with the angel who spoke to Moses on Mt. Sinai. And, He was with our fathers—Moses received living words to pass on to us.*

Q Why did the Lord God Jehovah allow Moses (a name sounding like the Hebrew for *pulled from the water*) to be reared by pagans?

## ACTS 7:20-38

"At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. [some mss. read *was fair in the sight of God*.] For three months he was cared for in his father's house. <sup>21</sup>When he was placed outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. <sup>22</sup>Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

<sup>23</sup>"When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites. <sup>24</sup>He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. <sup>25</sup>Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not.

<sup>26</sup>The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, 'Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?'

<sup>27</sup>"But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, 'Who made you ruler and judge over us? <sup>28</sup>Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?'

<sup>29</sup>When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.

<sup>30</sup>After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai.

<sup>31</sup>When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to look more closely, he heard the Lord's voice: <sup>32</sup>'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.

<sup>33</sup>"Then the Lord said to him, 'Take off your sandals; the place where you are standing is holy ground. <sup>34</sup>I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.'

<sup>35</sup>"This is the same Moses whom they had rejected with the words, 'Who made you ruler and judge?' He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. <sup>36</sup>He led them out of Egypt and did wonders and miraculous signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea<sup>G</sup> and for forty years in the desert.

<sup>37</sup>"This is that Moses who told the Israelites, 'God will send you a prophet like me from your own people.' <sup>38</sup>He was in the assembly in the desert, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living words to pass on to us.

<sup>11</sup>Gershom and Eliezer (Ex 2:22; 18:3-4; 1Ch 23:15).



Q About whom was Moses speaking in verse 37-38? To what extent are you sure? Why?

## CONTEXTUAL ISSUES ACTS 7

*Acts 7:39-53. Stephen stirs the pot—Holy Spirit empowers—Disobedience to exile to today.*

But, again, our forefathers didn't obey. Instead, they created idols. The Lord God was incensed—your idol worship is akin to those who worship the child killing Molech!

You see, our forefathers had the tabernacle of Testimony in the desert. It remained among us, even during the realm of David. But, it was Solomon who built the house for Him. BUT, the MOST HIGH does not live in houses made by man. Isaiah was clear—“Heaven is My throne, and the earth My footstool.”

You stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You're

just like your fathers—you always resist Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet you didn't persecute? They even killed the prophets who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now?! You have betrayed the Righteous One—you have murdered Him. You've received the Law but have not obeyed it!

Q What parallels did Stephen draw between the disobedience of the past and the disobedience of the immediate present?

Q What was Stephen's most severe indictment of those listening in the Sanhedrin court? Which do you suppose will get him in the most trouble?

Q What parallels would Stephen draw today if he had provided this analysis?

### ACTS 7:39-53

"But our fathers refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. <sup>40</sup>They told Aaron, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt--we don't know what has happened to him!' <sup>41</sup>That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and held a celebration in honor of what their hands had made. <sup>42</sup>But God turned away and gave them over to the worship of the heavenly bodies. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets:

" 'Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the desert, O house of Israel?

<sup>43</sup>You have lifted up the shrine of Molech and the star of your god Rephan, the idols you made to worship. Therefore I will send you into exile' beyond Babylon.

<sup>44</sup>"Our forefathers had the tabernacle of the Testimony with them in the desert. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen.

<sup>45</sup>Having received the tabernacle, our fathers under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, <sup>46</sup>who enjoyed God's favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. <sup>47</sup>But it was Solomon who built the house for him.

<sup>48</sup>"However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet [Isaiah] says:

<sup>49</sup>" 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be?

<sup>50</sup>Has not my hand made all these things?'

<sup>51</sup>"You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! <sup>52</sup>Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him-- <sup>53</sup>you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it."

## CONTEXTUAL ISSUES ACTS 7

Acts 7:54-60. *The upshot: Stephen is given a presumably hellish punishment – not.*

When hearing:

1. Their beloved Temple was not the residing place for the Lord God,
2. Their ears and hearts were uncircumcised,
3. They had persecuted the prophets who had predicted the coming of the Righteous One,
4. They had betrayed and murdered the Righteous One of whom Moses spoke—

They freaked, and gnashed their teeth at Stephen. It was neither pretty sight nor sound.

But Stephen was not phased for being full of Holy Spirit, he looked up to heaven and saw Jesus Himself, right at the right hand of Father God Himself. Then, like all fools for Christ, he declared out loud—“I see heaven opened up and the Son of Man right there next to the Lord God!”

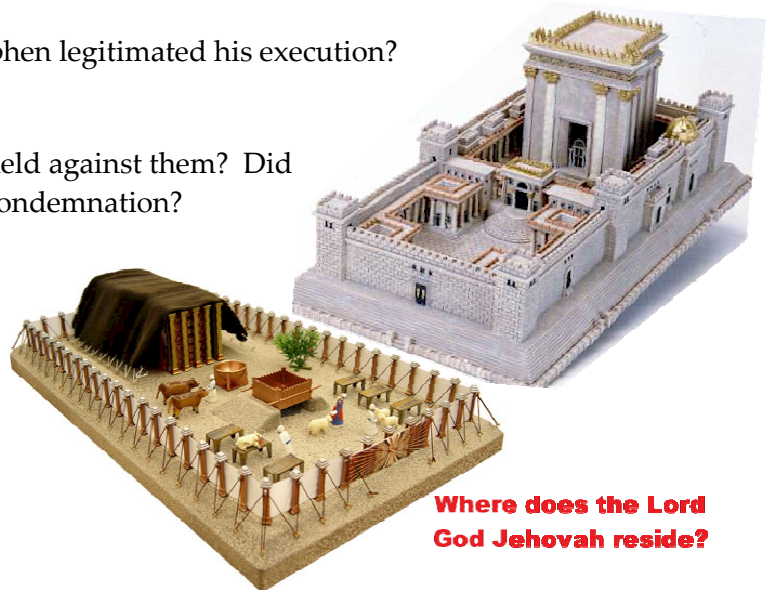
This was too much—covering their ears, yelling at the top of their voices, they rushed him, dragged him out of Jerusalem and began to stone him. (By the way, those who were witnesses to the stoning had their outer robes guarded by a young man named Saul.)

As they were killing him, Stephen prayed for them—“Lord Jesus, receive me into heaven.” As he fell to his knees, he continued his prayer—“Lord, do not condemn them for this sin.” After praying this, he died.

- Q Which of the four statements above by Stephen legitimated his execution?
- Q Why did they drag him out of Jerusalem?
- Q Why did Stephen ask that their sin not be held against them? Did they not sin? Did they not deserve God’s condemnation?
- Q Should Stephen soft-pedaled his declaration to preach another day? To bring more people to Christ? To serve as an excellent example of a church leader for years to come?

**ACTS 7:54-60**

When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. <sup>55</sup>But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. <sup>56</sup>"Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."  
<sup>57</sup>At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, <sup>58</sup>dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.  
<sup>59</sup>While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." <sup>60</sup>Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.



Acts 8:1-19. *Persecution fertilized the growth of the Way in ways unforeseen.* Yep, young Saul was there giving approval to Stephen's death. It was that day which will live on in the memories of infamy for great persecution broke out on the assembly in Jerusalem. Everyone was scattered throughout Judea and Samaria—the apostles, however, managed to stay in Jerusalem.

Stephen was mourned and buried by Godly men, but Saul began to destroy members of the Way, going house to house and dragging off people to put them into prison.

Yet, those who were scattered evangelized for the *λογον* wherever they went. For example, Philip even proclaimed the Christ in Samaria! People saw the miraculous signs he did and paid close attention to his teaching. Evil spirits were cleansed, paralytics and cripples were healed, great joy was had by all.

Even a sorcerer was converted. Simon had amazed Samaritans with a "divine power." But when the Samaritans heard the truth from Philip, men and women were immersed; even Simon believed and followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great miracles he saw.

Samaritans accepting the Christ was big news to the apostles in Jerusalem, so Peter and John were sent to investigate. When they arrived, they prayed that the Samaritan converts would receive Holy Spirit because Holy Spirit had not apparently come upon any of them; they had simply been immersed by the authority of the Lord Jesus. When Peter and John placed their hands on them, they received Holy Spirit.

Back to Simon. Seeing all this, he offered Peter and John money to receive "the Spirit." I want this ability so everyone on whom I lay my hands may also receive Holy Spirit. Uh, oh.

Q Was Stephen's death a good thing, or a bad thing?

Q Why did Saul approve of Stephen's death? What legitimized his authority to imprison people?

Q Should Philip have preached to the half-breeds in Samaria? Did that not cause dissension within the body?

Q Why didn't the Samaritans who were baptized into Christ not receive Holy Spirit?

Acts 8:20-40. *Simon is chastised, Peter and John join in preaching to the ones for whom you don't want to even use their dishes.* Peter made it quite clear—

*Simon, may your money perish with you. You cannot buy the gift of God with money! You have no part in this ministry—your raison d'être is not right before the Lord God! You're full of bitterness, and you're a captive of sin.*

Simon was scared—*Please pray to the Lord that what you've said won't happen.*

When Peter & John finished earnestly testifying [*διαμαρτυροῦμενοι*, 1263] and spoking the word of the Lord, they evangelized in many Samaritan towns on their way back to Jerusalem.



Back to Philip where an angel of the Lord ordered him to go south to Gaza. So, Philip started out and on the way met a marvelous man who was the treasurer for Candace, the queen of Ethiopia. He had been to Jerusalem to worship and was reading Isaiah. Holy Spirit told Philip to go to his chariot and stay near it.

Huffing and puffing, Philip ran up to the chariot hearing the treasurer reading Isaiah. Do you understand what you're reading?

How can I unless someone explains? So he invited Philip into the chariot—it's hard to talk and read while running, especially at horse speed.

An interesting passage was being read—something about someone being led to the slaughter, yet not protesting his slaughter. Humiliation deprived Him of justice, and his descendants were not—His life was taken.

So, tell me, I beg you—just who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else? Wow, what an intro. Philip began with that very passage from Isaiah and told him the full message about the new life about Jesus!

As they were traveling along, the eunuch noticed some water—here's water. Why shouldn't I be immersed? Orders were given to stop the chariot, and they both went down into the water and Philip immersed him. When they came up out of the water, Holy Spirit whisked Philip away. The eunuch didn't see Philip again, but went on back to Ethiopia rejoicing!

Philip re-appeared in Azotus and when traveling about, proclaimed the gospel [εὐηγγελίζετο, 2097] in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

- Q Why was Peter so harsh with Simon? He was a brother in Christ, or was he not?
- Q About what was Simon bitter? How was he captive to sin?
- Q What change in Peter & John's behavior was facilitated by Holy Spirit's work with Philip in Samaria?
- Q Why did the Lord God order Philip to the road to Gaza?
- Q What is particularly significant about the eunuch coming home from Jerusalem to worship there? [Hint: see Deuteronomy 23:1]
- Q Why did the eunuch need help understanding Isaiah?
- Q What do you suppose Philip's next sentence was after "Tell me..." using Isaiah 53:7-8?
- Q Why was the chariot stopped? Why was the eunuch immersed?
- Q Why did the Lord God whisk Philip away from there on the road to Ethiopia?



Acts 9:1-9. *Breathing murder evokes the Lord God to act.* While all this was happening in Samaria and elsewhere beyond Jerusalem, Saul was breathing murderous slaughter (φόνου, 5408, “killing slaughter,” *hapax legomenon*) itself against the followers of the Lord Jesus.

Saul had received authority from the high priest to find those who belonged to the Way—even women—to arrest them for imprisonment in Jerusalem. His letters were applicable to the synagogues in Damascus, Syria. It was on his way to Damascus around noon that something very weird, something very wonderful, something very scary happened...

**ACTS 9:1-9**

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest <sup>2</sup>and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup>As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. <sup>4</sup>He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

<sup>5</sup>"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. <sup>6</sup>"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

<sup>7</sup>The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. <sup>8</sup>Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. <sup>9</sup>For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

As he and his cohorts came close to Damascus, a light from heaven itself suddenly flashed around him. Falling to the ground, he heard a voice say, *Saul, Saul. Why do you persecute<sup>12</sup> Me?*

*Who are you Lord?* Saul asked.

*I am Yeshua, who you are persecuting by pursuing and putting to flight My followers. Now, get up. Go into Damascus—then you'll be told what you must do.*

Saul's cohorts were speechless—they heard the sound, but didn't see anyone. Saul got up, but when he opened his eyes, there was nothing to see. He was blind. So they led him into Damascus, holding his hand to avoid tripping. For three days he was blind, and he didn't eat or drink anything.

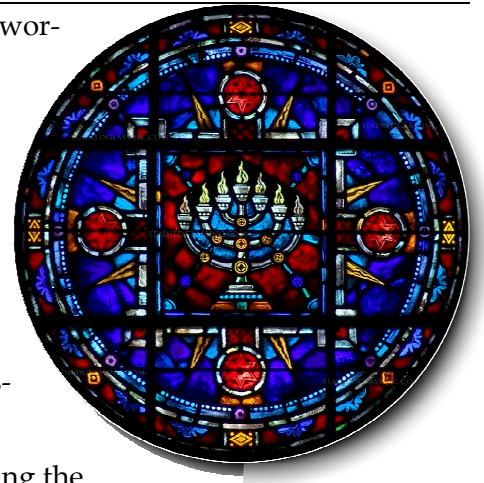
- Q Why was Saul so incensed with the followers of The Way who kept harping on this Yeshua as the Messiah?
- Q Why were women also rounded up and imprisoned?
- Q What was the reason to focus upon the synagogues (see the insert on the next page) of believers?
- Q How did Saul know the voice was Yeshua Himself? And what did Jesus tell him to do? Why?
- Q Why was Saul blinded? What advantageous function would this serve?
- Q For how long was Saul without food and drink? So?

<sup>12</sup>The word the Lord God uses here may be a pun of sorts—dioko, διώκω—to put to flight, to pursue, to persecute, 1377.

## A FEW NOTES ABOUT THE "SYNAGOGUE"

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"The origin of the synagogue, in which the congregation gathered to worship and to receive the religious instruction connected therewith, is wrapped in obscurity. By the time it had become the central institution of Judaism (no period of the history of Israel is conceivable without it), it was already regarded as of ancient origin, dating back to the time of Moses (see Yer. Targ., Ex. xviii. 20 and I Chron. xvi. 39; Pesik. 129b; Philo, "De Vita Mosis," iii. 27; Josephus, "Contra Ap." ii., § 17; Acts xv. 21). ... The synagogue as a permanent institution originated probably in the period of the Babylonian captivity, when a place for common worship and instruction had become necessary."



"The great prophet, in the second part of the Book of Isaiah, in applying the phrase "house of prayer" to the Temple to be built at Jerusalem (Isa. lvi. 7 and, according to the very defensible reading of the LXX., also lx. 7), may have used a phrase which, in the time of the Exile, designated the place of united worship; this interpretation is possible, furthermore, in such passages as Isa. lviii. 4. The term was preserved by the Hellenistic Jews as the name for the synagogue (προσευχή = οἶκος προσευχῆς; comp. also the allusion to the "proseucha" in Juvenal, "Satires," iii. 296)."

[Note: James uses "synagogue" to describe the assembly of believers in James 2:2; sunagwghn, 4864.]

"After the return from the Captivity, when the religious life was reorganized, especially under Ezra and his successors, congregational worship, consisting in prayer and the reading of sections from the Bible, developed side by side with the revival of the cult of the Temple at Jerusalem, and thus led to the building of synagogues. The place of meeting was called "bet ha-keneset," since an assembly of the people for worship was termed a "keneset"; the assembly described in Neh. ix.-x. was known in tradition as the "great assembly" ("keneset ha-gedolah"; see Synagogue, The Great). The synagogue continued to be known by this name, although it was called also, briefly, "keneset" (Aramaic, "kanishta"), and, in Greek, συναγωγή."

...

"The synagogue and the academy were the two institutions which preserved the essence of the Judaism of the Diaspora and saved it from annihilation. As the place of public worship, the synagogue became the pivot of each community, just as the Sanctuary at Jerusalem had been the center for the entire people. Ezek. xi. 16, "Yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary," was rightly interpreted, therefore, to mean that in its dispersion Israel would retain the synagogue as a sanctuary in miniature in compensation for the loss of the Temple (Targ. ad loc.), and the community crystallized around the synagogue, the only possible organization for the Jews of the Diaspora. Synagogal worship, therefore, however much it might vary in detail in different countries, was the most important visible expression of Judaism, and the chief means of uniting the Jews scattered throughout the world; while the academy, in like manner, guaranteed the unity of the religious spirit which animated the synagogue. The synagogue, consequently, is the most important feature of the Jewish community, which is inconceivable without it."

–Wilhelm Bacher, Lewis N. Dembitz; see <http://www.JewishEncyclopedia.com/articles/14160>

Acts 9:10-22. *The man from ISIS encounters his opposition, the man from the Lord Jesus the Christ. And so in Damascus there was a follower of the Way named Ananias.<sup>13</sup> Well, the Lord God called him out in a dream...*

*Ananias!*

*Yes Lord, Ananias answered.*

*Go to Judas house, you know the one on Straight Street. Ask for a man named Saul; he's from Tarsus north of here in Cilicia. Now here's what's happened—he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight. Yes, he's blind.*

*Lord, Ananias answered, this guy has a lousy reputation—he's been hurting your believers in Jerusalem, and he's come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who answer to Your authority.*

*Go! You may not like him, but he is My instrument, and he will carry My Name to the heathen world, their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for following My authority.*

Well, Ananias did as he was told, finding the house on Straight Street, he entered it and placed his hands on Saul. Ananias said...

*Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road to here—He has sent me so that you may see again, and be filled with Holy Spirit Himself.*

Immediately, like scales being trimmed away, Saul's sight returned. He got up, was baptized, and after eating, regained his strength.

### ACTS 9:10-22

In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

<sup>11</sup>The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. <sup>12</sup>In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

<sup>13</sup>"Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

<sup>15</sup>But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. <sup>16</sup>I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

<sup>17</sup>Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." <sup>18</sup>Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, <sup>19</sup>and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. <sup>20</sup>At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. <sup>21</sup>All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" <sup>22</sup>Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.

<sup>13</sup>“Ananias” (אֲנָנְיָהּ, from אָנַן to be gracious, and יְהוָה Jehovah)



Saul spent several days in Damascus—the synagogues were filled with this terrorist proclaiming that Yeshua of Nazareth is not only Messiah, but the Son of Father God Himself. They were freaked—

*Isn't this the same dude who was raising havoc, ravaging those in Jerusalem who call upon the Name?  
Was he not sent here to take these troublemakers as prisoners, delivering them to the chief priests?*

It didn't matter—Saul's proclamation's confounded all the believers in the synagogues—perhaps this Yeshua was the Christ?

Q What was Ananias' concern about this Saul person? To what extent was it legitimate?

Q How did Ananias know about the authority Saul was carrying with him?

Q On what was the Lord God's defense of Saul based?

Q Why did the Lord God declare Saul would be shown "how much he must suffer for my name?" How much did Saul suffer? How so? Why would this be a persuasive approach?

Q What did Ananias call Saul when entering the house of Judas on Straight Street?

Q Besides being healed from his blindness, what else did Saul receive? So?

Q Why was he baptized? Why did he eat?

Q Why did the Lord God allow Saul to teach/proclaim in the synagogues without going to seminary?

Q Why were the folks in the Damascus synagogues freaked?

Q Why were they baffled that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed Yeshua, the Messiah?



Straight Street, in modern times, before the war.



**4:1** *priests*. Those who were serving that week in the temple precincts. *captain of the temple guard*. A member of one of the leading priestly families; next in rank to the high priest (see 5:24,26; Lk 22:4,52).

*Sadducees*. A Jewish sect whose members came from the priestly line and controlled the temple. They did not believe in the resurrection or a personal Messiah, but held that the Messianic age—an ideal time—was then present and must be preserved. They believed only the Pentateuch was legitimate, authoritative scripture. The high priest, one of their number, presided over the Sanhedrin (see 5:17; 23:6-8; Mt 22:23-33).

**4:3** *evening*. The evening sacrifices ended about 4:00pm, and the temple gates would be closed at that time. Any judgments involving life and death must be begun and concluded in daylight hours.

**4:4** *men*. Lit. "males." *five thousand*. A growth from the 3,000 at Pentecost (2:41); see later growth (5:14; 6:7).

**4:5** *rulers, elders and teachers of the law*. The three groups making up the Sanhedrin, Israel's supreme court (see Lk 22:66; see also on Mt 2:4; 15:2; Mk 14:55; Lk 5:17).

**4:6** *Annas*. High priest A.D. 6-15, but deposed by the Romans and succeeded by his son, Eleazar, then by his son-in-law, Caiaphas (18-36), who was also called Joseph. Annas was still recognized, however, by the Jews as high priest (Lk 3:2; cf. Jn 18:13, 24).

*John*. May be Jonathan son of Annas, who was appointed high priest in A.D. 36. Others suggest it was Johanan ben Zaccai, who became the president of the Great Synagogue after the fall of Jerusalem. *Alexander*. Not further identified.

**4:8** *filled with the Holy Spirit*. A fulfillment of 1:5,8; see also Jesus' promise in Luke 24:49. Their spirits were completely under the control of Holy Spirit; their words were His words.

**4:11** *the stone . . . rejected*. Fulfillment of prophecy was an important element in early Christian sermons and defenses. Jesus had also used Ps 118:22 (Mt 21:42; see 1Pe 2:7 and cf. Ro 9:33; Isa 28:16).

**4:12** *no other name*. See 10:43; John 14:6; 1Ti 2:5; even His name means "Yahweh saves;" i.e., Yeshua, (in English, Joshua), Matthew 1:21. Yes, we have obliterated His name to a Latinized version "Eeaysous," added a "j" and now use the word "Jesus" as a substitute for His real name, Yeshuah.

**4:13** *unschooled, ordinary men*. Peter and John had not been trained in the rabbinic schools, nor did they hold official positions in recognized religious circles. Their rabbi, however, was well-schooled, for He had first hand knowledge of all that was and is and shall be in Yahweh's mind, for He was Yahweh, the Creator. He was and is and shall be the Word, the logos on which the universe was created, and will be rebuilt.

**4:20** *cannot help speaking*. See Acts 5:29.

**4:23** *went back*. Possibly to the same upper room where disciples had met before (1:13) and where the congregation may have continued to meet (12:12).

**4:24** *Sovereign Lord*. See Luke 2:29.

**4:27** *Herod*. Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea (Luke 23:7-15). *Pontius Pilate*. Roman procurator of Judea (Luke 23:1-24).

**4:31** *was shaken*. An immediate sign that the prayers had been heard (see 16:26). *filled with the Holy Spirit*. A fulfillment of 1:5,8; see also Jesus' promise in Luke 24:49. Their spirits were completely under the control of Holy Spirit; their words were His words. *spoke the word of God*. They continued preaching the gospel despite the warnings of the Sanhedrin.

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<sup>14</sup>Adapted, corrected, and revised by D. Thomas Porter from Compton's Interactive NIV © 1996.



**4:33** *testify to the resurrection.* As significant as the death of Christ was, the most compelling event was the resurrection—an event about which the disciples could not nor would not keep silent.

**4:36** *Levite.* Although Levites owned no inherited land in Palestine, these regulations may not have applied to the Levites in other countries (Cyprus). So perhaps Barnabas sold land he owned in Cyprus and brought the proceeds to the apostles (v. 37). Or he may have been married, and the land sold may have been from his wife's property. It is also possible that the prohibition against Levite ownership of land in Palestine was no longer observed.

*Cyprus.* An island in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea. Jews had settled there from Maccabean times.

*Joseph Barnabas.* Used here as a good example of giving. In this way Luke introduces the one who will become an important companion of Paul (see 13:1-4). For other significant contributions of this great hearted leader to the life and ministry of the early church see 9:27; 11:22,25; 15:37-39.

**5:1** *Ananias . . . Sapphira.* Given as bad examples of sharing (Barnabas was the good example). Love of praise for (pretended) generosity and love for money led to the first recorded sin in the life of the church. It is a warning to the readers that "God cannot be mocked" (Gal 6:7). Compare this divine judgment at the beginning of the church era with God's judgments on Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:2), on Achan (Joshua 7:25) and on Uzzah (2Sam 6:7).

Leviticus reads...

Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, contrary to his command. <sup>2</sup>So fire came out from the presence of Yahweh and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. <sup>3</sup>Moses then said to Aaron, "This is what Yahweh spoke of when He said:

"Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored."

Aaron remained silent.

**5:2** *kept back part.* They had a right to keep back whatever they chose, but to make it appear that they had given all when they had not separated them from Holy Spirit.

**5:3** *Satan has so filled your heart.* The continuing activity of Satan is noted (see Lk 22:3; Jn 13:2,27; 1Pe 5:8).

*lied to the Holy Spirit.* A comparison with v. 4 shows that the Holy Spirit is Yahweh Himself present with His people.

**5:9** *to test the Spirit of the Lord.* If no dire consequences had followed this act of sin, the results among the believers would have been serious when the deceit became known. Not only would dishonesty appear profitable, but the conclusion that the Spirit could be deceived would follow. It was important to set the course properly at the outset in order to leave no doubt that Holy Spirit will not tolerate such hypocrisy and deceit.

**5:11** *church.* The first use of the term in Acts. It can denote either the local congregation (8:1; 11:22; 13:1) or the universal church (see 20:28). The Greek word for "church" (*ekklesia*) was already being used for political and other assemblies (see 19:32,40) and, in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures), for Israel when gathered in religious assembly.

**5:13** *No one else dared join them.* Because of the fate of Ananias and his wife, no pretenders or halfhearted followers risked identification with the believers. Luke cannot mean that no one joined the Christian community, since v. 14 indicates that many were coming to Christ.

**5:14** *more men and women believed.* See 4:4. This is the first specific mention of women believing (cf. 8:3,12; 9:2; 13:50; 16:1,13-14; 17:4,12,34; 18:2; 21:5; but cf. also 1:14).



**5:15** *Peter's shadow.* Parallels such items as Paul's handkerchiefs (19:12) and the edge of Jesus' cloak (Mt 9:20)--not that any of these material objects had spiritual qualities, but the least article or shadow represented a direct means of contact with Jesus or His apostles.

**5:17** *high priest.* The official high priest recognized by Rome was Caiaphas, but the Jews considered Annas, Caiaphas's father-in-law, to be the actual high priest since the high priesthood was to be held for life. *his associates.* His family members.

**5:19** *angel of the Lord.* This phrase is used four other times in Acts:

- (1) Stephen speaks of him (7:30-38);
- (2) he guides Philip (8:26);
- (3) he liberates Peter (12:7-10);
- (4) he strikes down Herod (12:23).

See also Mt 1:20-24; 2:13,19; 28:2; Lk 1:11-38; 2:9.

**5:21** *Sanhedrin.* The supreme Jewish court, consisting of 70 to 100 men (71 being the proper number). They sat in a semicircle, backed by three rows of disciples of the "learned men," with the clerks of the court standing in front.

**5:28** *make us guilty of this man's blood.* Probably a reference to the apostles' repeated declaration that some of their leaders had killed Jesus (2:23; 3:13-15; 4:10-11; cf. Mt 27:25).

**5:30** *tree.* Used to describe the cross (1Pe 2:24; see Dt 21:22-23). Like its Hebrew counterpart, the Greek for this word could refer to a tree, a pole, a wooden beam or some similar object.

**5:32** *so is Holy Spirit . . . given to those who obey him.* See Jn 15:26-27. The disciples' testimony was directed and confirmed by Holy Spirit's presence, who convicts the world through the word (Jn 16:8-11) and tabernacles with those who respond to Father God & Christ with "the obedience that comes from faith" (Ro 1:5).

**5:34** *a Pharisee named Gamaliel.* The most famous Jewish teacher of his time and traditionally listed among the "heads of the schools." Possibly he was the grandson of Hillel. Like Hillel (see Mt 19:3), he was moderate in his views, a characteristic that is apparent in his cautious recommendation on this occasion. Saul (Paul) was one of his students (22:3).

**5:36** *Theudas.* We know of him from no other historical source.

**5:37** *days of the census.* Not the first census of Quirinius, noted by Luke in his Gospel (2:2), but the one in A.D. 6.

**5:40** *flogged.* Beaten with the traditional penalty of "forty lashes minus one" (2Co 11:24).

**6:1** *the number of disciples was increasing.* A considerable length of time probably transpired since the end of ch. 5. The church continued to grow (see 5:14), but this gave rise to inevitable problems, both from within (6:1-7) and from without (6:8-7:60).

At this stage of its development, the church was entirely Jewish in its composition. There were, however, two groups of Jews *within* the fellowship:

1. *Grecian Jews.* Hellenists—those born in lands other than Palestine who spoke the Greek language and were more Grecian than Hebraic in their attitudes and outlook. Unlike the Hebraic Jews, they could not trace their lineage—their legitimacy as believers—to a particular tribe of Israel. They were the Diaspora.
2. *Hebraic Jews.* Those who spoke the Aramaic and/or Hebrew languages of Palestine and preserved Jewish culture and customs. These folks took pride in their ability to trace their lineage to Judah, Benjamin, and Levi. Paul, for example, made it quite clear that even though he was an apostle to the Gentiles, he was a clearly legitimate Jew, from the tribe of Benjamin. These people became known as "Jews" after their return from Babylon as the majority of people were from the Southern Kingdom—dominated by "Judah."

*daily distribution of food.* Help was needed by widows who had no one to care for them and so became the church's responsibility (cf. 4:35; 11:28-29; see also 1Titus 5:3-16).

**6:2** *the Twelve.* At this early stage, the apostles were responsible for church life in general, including the ministry of the word of God and the care of the needy. *tables.* The early church was concerned about a spiritual ministry ("word of God" and "prayer"; see v. 4) and a material ministry ("wait on tables").

**6:3** *choose seven men.* The church selected them (v. 5), and the apostles approved them (v. 6). In this way they were appointed to their work.

**6:5** *They chose Stephen . . . Nicolas.* Only Stephen and Philip of the Seven receive further notice (Stephen, 6:8-7:60; Philip, 8:5-40; 21:8-9).

*from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.* It is significant that a proselyte was included in the number and that Luke points out his place of origin as Antioch, the city to which the gospel was soon to be taken and which was to become the "headquarters" for the forthcoming Gentile missionary effort.

**6:6** *prayed and laid their hands on them.* Laying on of hands was used in the time before Christ to confer blessing (Ge 48:13-20), to transfer guilt from sinner to sacrifice (Lev 1:4) and to commission a person for a new responsibility (Nu 27:23).

In the NT period, laying on of hands was observed in healing (28:8; Mk 1:41), blessing (Mk 10:16), ordaining or commissioning (Ac 6:6; 13:3; 1Ti 5:22) and imparting of spiritual gifts (Ac 8:17; 19:6; 1Ti 4:14; 2Ti 1:6). These seven men were appointed to responsibilities turned over to them by the Twelve.

The Greek word used to describe their responsibility ("wait on") is the verb from which the noun "deacon" comes. Later one reads of deacons in Php 1:1; 1Ti 3:8-13. The Greek noun for "deacon" can also be translated "minister" or "servant." The men appointed on this occasion were simply called the Seven (21:8), just as the apostles were called the Twelve. Some dispute whether the Seven were the first deacons or were later replaced by deacons (see 1Ti 3:8).

**6:7** One of a series of progress reports given periodically throughout the book of Acts (1:15; 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:31).

*a large number of priests.* Though involved by lineage and life service in the priestly observances of the past, they accepted the preaching of the apostles, which proclaimed a sacrifice that made the old sacrifices unnecessary (see Hebrews 8:13; 10:1-4, 11-14).

**6:8** *great wonders and miraculous signs.* Until now, Acts told of only the *apostles* working miracles (2:43; 3:4-8; 5:12). But now, after the laying on of the apostles' hands, Stephen too is reported as working miraculous signs. Philip also will soon do the same (8:6).

**6:9** *Freedmen.* Persons who had been freed from slavery. They came from different Hellenistic areas.

- ✓ *Cyrene.* The chief city in Libya and north Africa, halfway between Alexandria and Carthage. One of its population groups was Jewish (see 11:19-21).
- ✓ *Alexandria.* Capital of Egypt and second only to Rome in the empire. Two out of five districts in Alexandria were Jewish.
- ✓ *Cilicia.* A Roman province in the southeast corner of Asia Minor adjoining Syria. Tarsus, the birthplace of Paul, was one of its principal towns.
- ✓ *Asia.* A Roman province in the western part of Asia Minor. Ephesus, where Paul later ministered for a few years, was its capital.

**6:11** *blasphemy against Moses and against God.* Since Stephen declared that the worship of God was no longer to be restricted to the temple (7:48-49), his opponents twisted these words to trump up an accusation that Stephen was attacking the Temple, the Law, Moses and, ultimately, the Lord God.

**6:13** *speaking against this holy place and against the law.* Similar to the charges brought against Christ (see Mt 26:61). Stephen may have referred to Jesus' words as recorded in John 2:19, and the words may have been misunderstood or purposely misinterpreted (v. 14), as at the trial of Jesus.

**7:1** *high priest.* Probably Caiaphas (see Mt 26:57-66).

**7:2** *Abraham . . . in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran.* Abraham's call came in Ur, not Haran (cf. Ge 15:7; Ne 9:7). Or, perhaps, he was called first in Ur, and then later his call was renewed in Haran (see Jer 15:19-21).

**7:4** *land of the Chaldeans.* A district in southern Babylonia, the name was later applied to a region that included all Babylonia.

*After the death of his father.* Ge 11:26 does not mean that all three sons--Abraham, Nahor and Haran--were born to Terah in the same year when he was 70 years old. See Ge 11:26-12:1. It may be that Haran was Terah's firstborn and that Abraham was born 60 years later. Thus the death of Terah at 205 years of age could have occurred just before Abraham, at 75, left Haran.

**7:6** *four hundred years.* A round number for the length of Israel's stay in Egypt (Ex 12:40-41 has 430 years). That four generations would represent considerably less than 400 years is not a necessary conclusion (see Ge 15:16). Ex 6:16-20 makes Moses the great-grandson of Levi, son of Jacob and brother of Joseph. This would make four generations from Levi to Moses. But in 1Ch 7:22-27 a list of ten names represents the generations between Ephraim, the son of Joseph, and Joshua. The ten generations at 40 years each would equal 400 years, the same period of time noted as four generations. But one list is abbreviated and the other gives a full genealogy.

**7:8** *covenant of circumcision.* See Ge 17:10-11. The essential conditions for the religion of Israel were already fulfilled long before the temple was built and their present religious customs began.

**7:9** *they sold him.* Israel consistently rejected God's favored individuals. Stephen builds his case about Jesus' rejection by noting Joseph's rejection by his brothers (Ge 37:12-36).

**7:14** *Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all.* Although the Hebrew Bible uses the number 70 (Ge 46:27; Ex 1:5; Dt 10:22), the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures (the Septuagint) adds at Ge 46:20 the names of two sons of Manasseh, two of Ephraim, and one grandson of the latter. This makes the number 75 and is the number that Stephen uses.

**7:16** Stephen greatly compresses Scripture accounts of two land purchases (by Abraham and Jacob) and two burial places (at Hebron and Shechem). According to the Hebrew Scriptures, Abraham purchased land at Hebron (Ge 23:17-18), where he (Ge 25:9-11), Isaac (Ge 35:29) and Jacob (Ge 50:13) were buried. Jacob bought land at Shechem (Ge 33:19), where Joseph was later buried (Jos 24:32).

Josephus preserves a tradition that Joseph's brothers were buried at Hebron. Stephen's rhetorical device (by which he recalls that Jacob and the 12 patriarchs were not buried in Egypt but in Canaan) is strange to modern ears but would have been well understood by his hearers.

**7:22** *Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.* Not explicitly stated in the Hebrew Scriptures but to be expected if he grew up in the household of Pharaoh's daughter. Both Philo and Josephus speak of Moses' great learning.

**7:23** *Moses was forty.* Moses was 80 years old when sent to speak before Pharaoh (Ex 7:7) and 120 years old when he died (Dt 34:7). Stephen's words agree with a tradition that at his first departure from Egypt he was 40 years of age.

**7:29** *fled to Midian.* Rejected by his own people, Moses feared that they would inform the Egyptians, and this led to his flight to Midian (Ex 2:15), the land flanking the Gulf of Aqaba on both sides.

**7:30** *After forty years.* Plus the 40 years of v. 23, making the 80 years of Ex 7:7. *Mount Sinai.* Called Horeb in Ex 3:1 (see note there).

**7:35** *the same Moses . . . sent to be their ruler and deliverer.* Israel rejected Moses, their deliverer, just as the Jews of Stephen's day were rejecting Jesus, their deliverer. Yet both were sent by God.

**7:38** *angel who spoke to him.* According to Jewish interpretation at that time, the law was given to Moses by angel mediation--after the manner of the original call of Moses (see Ex 3:2; see also v. 53; Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2).

*he received living words to pass on to us.* Moses was the mediator between God and man on Mount Sinai.

**7:39** *refused to obey him.* Another rejection of God's representative and his commands.

**7:40** *Make us gods.* While Moses was on Sinai receiving the law, the people made the golden calf, rejecting God and his representative (Ex 32:1). The people had not traveled far from the idolatry of Egypt.

**7:42** *God . . . gave them over.* See Ro 1:24.

**7:43** Stephen quotes Amos 5:25-27 as translated in the Septuagint, except that he replaces Damascus with Babylon in view of the fact that the final exile of Israel from the promised land was carried out by the Babylonians (Amos was speaking first of the Assyrian exile of the northern kingdom).

**7:44-50** Because he had been accused of "speaking against the holy place" (6:13), Stephen concludes his recital with a word about the sanctuary. Presumably, he had been preaching that the risen Christ had now replaced the temple as the mediation of God's saving presence among his people and as the one (the "place") through whom they (and "all nations," Mk 11:17) could come to God in prayer (see note above on Acts 6:13).

**7:44** *tabernacle of the Testimony.* So called by Stephen because the primary contents of the desert tabernacle were the ark of the covenant and the two covenant tablets it contained, which were called "the Testimony" (see Ex 25:16,21 and notes).

**7:49** Isaiah reminded Israel that all creation is the temple that God himself had made. Stephen recalls that word to remind his hearers that ultimately God builds his own temple.

**7:51** *uncircumcised hearts and ears.* Though physically circumcised, they were acting like the uncircumcised pagan nations around them. They were not truly consecrated to the Lord.

**7:56** *Son of Man.* See Mk 8:31. Jesus used this title of himself (see Mk 2:10) to emphasize his relationship to Messianic prediction (Mt 25:31; Da 7:13-14). It is unusual for someone other than Jesus to apply this term to Christ (see also Rev 1:13).

**7:60** *do not hold this sin against them.* Compare with Jesus' words (Luke 23:34).

**8:1** *scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.* The beginning of the fulfillment of the commission in 1:8--not by the church's plan, but by events beyond the believers' control.

**8:3** *began to destroy*. See 22:4. The Greek [ἐλομαίνετο, 3075, filthy insult to depravity] underlying this phrase sometimes describes the ravages of wild animals.

**8:4** *preached the word*. Many witnesses to the gospel went everywhere proclaiming the good news. The number of witnesses multiplied, and the territory covered was expanded greatly (cf. 11:19-20).

**8:5** *Philip*. One of the Seven in the Jerusalem church (6:5), who now evangelizes for the Christ (Messiah); see also 21:8. Philip is an example of one of those who were scattered.

*a city in Samaria*. Some manuscripts have "the city of Samaria," a reference to the old capital Samaria, renamed Sebaste or Neapolis (modern Nablus).

**8:9** *Simon*. In early Christian literature the "sorcerer" (Simon Magus) is described as the arch-heretic of the church and the "father" of Gnostic teaching. Whether this is the same person is sheer speculation.

**8:10** *the Great Power*. Simon claimed to be either God himself or, more likely, his chief representative.

**8:13** *Simon himself believed and was baptized*. It is difficult to know whether Simon's faith was genuine. Even though Luke says Simon believed, Peter's statement that Simon had no part in the apostles' ministry because his heart was not "right before God" (v. 21) casts some doubt.

**8:14** *had accepted the word of God*. Were obedient to the gospel proclaimed by Philip.

[were] *sent Peter and John*. The Jerusalem church assumed the responsibility of inspecting new evangelistic efforts and the communities of believers they produced (see 11:22).

**8:16** *not yet come upon any of them*. Since the day of Pentecost, those who "belong to Christ" (Ro 8:9) also have the Holy Spirit. But the Spirit had not yet been made manifest to the Christians in Samaria by the usual signs. This deficiency was now graciously supplied (v. 17).

**8:17** *placed their hands on them*. See v. 18; 19:1-7; cf. 2Ti 1:6; see also note above on Acts 6:6.

**8:18** *he offered them money*. Simon had boasted of having great powers before (see v. 10 and note), and now he tried to buy this magical power he believed the apostles possessed.

**8:23** *full of bitterness*. See Deuteronomy 29:18—"Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the LORD our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison."

**8:26** *from Jerusalem to Gaza*. A distance of about 50 miles.

**8:27** *an Ethiopian*. Ethiopia corresponded in this period to Nubia, from the upper Nile region at the first cataract (Aswan) to Khartoum.

*Candace*. The traditional title of the queen mother, responsible for performing the secular duties of the reigning king—who was thought to be too sacred for such activities.

*gone to Jerusalem to worship*. If not a full-fledged proselyte (Deut 23:1), the Ethiopian was a Gentile God-fearer.

**8:30** *heard the man reading*. It was customary practice to read aloud.

**8:34** *who is the prophet talking about . . . ?* Beginning with Isa 53 (see v. 35), Philip may have identified the suffering servant with the Davidic Messiah of Isa 11 or with the Son of Man (Daniel 7:13).

**8:36** *they came to some water*. There were several possibilities: a brook in the Valley of Elah (which David crossed to meet Goliath, 1Sa 17:40); the Wadi el-Hasi just north of Gaza; water from a spring or one of the many pools in the area.

**8:39** *rejoicing*. Joy is associated with salvation in Acts (see 16:34).

**9:1** *Saul*. Introduced at the stoning of Stephen (7:58), he was born in Tarsus and trained under Gamaliel (22:3). See Philippians 3:4-14.

*murderous threats*. We do not know that Saul was directly involved in the death of anyone other than Stephen (8:1), but there appear to have been similar cases (22:4; 26:10).

*high priest*. Probably Caiaphas (see 4:6) and the members of the Sanhedrin, who had authority over Jews both in Judea and elsewhere.

Damascus represented much more to Saul, the strict Pharisee, than another stop on his campaign of repression. It was the hub of a vast commercial network with far-flung lines of caravan trade teaching into north Syria, Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Persia, and Arabia. If the new "Way" of Christianity flourished in Damascus, it would quickly reach all these places. From the viewpoint of the Sanhedrin and of Saul, the arch-persecutor, it had to be stopped in Damascus.

The city itself was a veritable oasis, situated in a plain watered by the Biblical rivers Abana and Pharpar. Roman architecture overlaid the Hellenistic town plan with a great temple to Jupiter and a mile-long colonnaded street, the "Straight Street" of Acts 9:11. The city gates and a section of the town wall may still be seen today, as well as the lengthy bazaar that runs along the line of the ancient street. See the photo above.

The dominant political figure at the time of Paul's escape from Damascus (2 Co 11:32-33) was Aretas IV, king of the Nabateans (9 B.C.-A.D. 40), though normally the Decapolis cities were attached to the province of Syria and were thus under the influence of Rome.

**9:2** *Damascus*. Located in the Roman province of Syria, it was the nearest important city outside Palestine. It also had a large Jewish population. The distance from Jerusalem to Damascus was about 150 miles, four to six days' travel.

*the Way*. A name for Christianity occurring a number of times in Acts (16:17; 18:25-26; 19:9,23; 22:4; 24:14,22; see 2Pe 2:2). Jesus called himself "the way" (Jn 14:6).

*prisoners to Jerusalem*. Where the full authority of the Sanhedrin could be exercised in trial for either acquittal or death.

**9:4** *why do you persecute me?* To persecute the church is to persecute the Christ, for the church is His body (see 1Co 12:27; Eph 1:22-23).

**9:5** *Who are you, Lord?* In rabbinic tradition such a voice from heaven would have been understood as the voice of God himself. The solemn repetition of Saul's name and the bright light suggested to him that he was in the presence of Deity.

**9:11** *Straight Street*. Probably followed the same route of the long, straight street that today runs through the city from east to west. It is a decided contrast to the numerous crooked streets of the city.

*praying*. Prayer is often associated with visions in Luke and Acts (see 10:9-11; Lk 1:10; 3:21; 9:28).

**9:15** *before the Gentiles*. See Romans 1:13-14. *their kings*. Agrippa (26:1) and Caesar at Rome (25:11-12; 28:19).

**9:17** *Jesus, who appeared to you*. The Damascus road experience was not merely a vision. The resurrected Christ actually appeared to Saul, and on this fact Saul based his qualification to be an apostle (1Co 9:1; 15:8).

**9:20** *synagogues*. It became Saul's regular practice to preach at every opportunity in the synagogues (13:5; 14:1; 17:1-2,10; 18:4,19; 19:8).

*Jesus is the Son of God*. Saul's message was a declaration of what he himself had become convinced of on the Damascus road: Jesus the Christ's Deity as the Son of God, and Messiahship.

**9:23** *After many days*. Three years (Galatians 1:17-18). It is probable that the major part of this period was spent in Arabia, away from Damascus, though the borders of Arabia extended to the environs of Damascus.

*the Jews conspired to kill him.* Upon his return to Damascus, the governor under Aretas gave orders for his arrest (2Co 11:32). The absence of Roman coins struck in Damascus between A.D. 34 and 62 may indicate Aretas was in control during that period.

**9:25** *lowered him in a basket.* See 2Co 11:33 (cf. Jos 2:15; 1Sa 19:12).

**9:26** *he came to Jerusalem.* From Gal 1:19 we learn that all the apostles were away except Peter and James, the Lord's brother. James was not one of the Twelve, but he held a position in Jerusalem comparable to that of an apostle.

**9:29** *He talked and debated.* Formerly Saul was arguing against the Christ; now he is forcefully presenting Jesus as the Messiah.

**9:31** *the church.* The whole Christian body, including Christians in the districts of Judea, Galilee and Samaria. The singular thus does not here refer to the various congregations but to the church as a whole (see 5:11).

*encouraged by the Holy Spirit.* The work of Holy Spirit is particularly noted throughout the book of Acts (see 13:2 and 1:2). This is why the book is sometimes, and should be, called the Acts of Holy Spirit.

**9:32** *Lydda.* A town two or three miles north of the road connecting Joppa and Jerusalem. Lydda is about 12 miles from Joppa.

**9:33** *Aeneas.* Since Peter was there to visit the believers, Aeneas was probably one of the Christians.

**9:35** *Sharon.* The fertile plain of Sharon runs about 50 miles along the Mediterranean coast, roughly from Joppa to Caesarea. The reference here, however, may be to a village in the neighborhood of Lydda instead of to a district (an Egyptian papyrus refers to a town by that name in Palestine).

**9:36** *Joppa.* About 38 miles from Jerusalem, the main seaport of Judea. Today it is known as Jaffa and is a suburb of Tel Aviv.

**9:37** *body was washed.* In preparation for burial, a custom common to both Jews (Purification of the Dead) and Greeks. *upstairs room.* If burial was delayed, it was customary to lay the body in an upper room. In Jerusalem the body had to be buried the day the person died, but outside Jerusalem up to three days might be allowed for burial.

**9:38** *come at once!* Whether for consolation or for a miracle, Peter was urged to hurry in order to arrive before the burial.

**9:40** *sent them all out.* Cf. 1Ki 17:23; 2Ki 4:33. Peter had been present on all three occasions recorded in Scripture when Jesus raised individuals from the dead (Mt 9:25; Lk 7:11-17; Jn 11:1-44). As when Jesus raised Jairus's daughter, the crowd in the room was told to leave. Unlike Jesus, however, Peter knelt and prayed.

**9:42** *many people believed.* Cf. John 12:11. Note that not "all" people believed just as in John's record of the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

**9:43** *a tanner.* Occupations were frequently used with personal names to identify individuals further (see 16:14; 18:3; 19:24; 2Ti 4:14), but in this case it is especially significant. A tanner was involved in treating the skins of dead animals, thus contacting the unclean according to Jewish law; so he was despised by many. Peter's decision to stay with him shows already a willingness to reject Jewish prejudice and prepares the way for his coming vision and the mission to the Gentiles. He still had a long way to go, however, as his predilection to be approved by his colleagues led to some serious problems within the church over tradition's rules versus God's rules.

## A NOTE ABOUT X

## NEW TESTAMENT (COMMON) GREEK PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

A	α	alpha	a	<u>f</u> ather
B	β	beta	b	
Γ	γ	gamma	g	
Δ	δ	delta	d	
E	ε	epsilon	e	<u>e</u> nd
Z	ζ	zeta	z	
H	η	eta	ê	<u>h</u> ey
Θ	θ	theta	th	<u>th</u> ick
I	ι	iota	i	<u>i</u> t
K	κ	kappa	k	
Λ	λ	lambda	l	
M	μ	mu	m	
N	ν	nu	n	
Ξ	ξ	xi	ks	<u>box</u>
O	ο	omicron	o	<u>o</u> ff
Π	π	pi	p	
P	ρ	rho	r	
Σ	σ/ς	sigma	s	
T	τ	tau	t	
Υ	υ	upsilon	u	<u>put</u>
Φ	φ	phi	f	
X	χ	chi	ch	<u>Bach</u>
Ψ	ψ	psi	ps	
Ω	ω	omega	ô	<u>grow</u>

### Notes

- ✓ **Sigma (σ, ς):** There are two forms for the letter sigma. When written at the end of a word, it is written like this: ς. If it occurs anywhere else, it is written like this: σ.
- ✓ **Upsilon (υ):** In the above table, pronounce this letter like “u” in “put.” The preferred pronunciation is actually more like the German “ü” as in “Brücke,” or like the French “u” as in “tu.” If you speak neither German or French, worry not; just pronounce it the way the table suggests.

- ✓ **Xi (χ):** This is the same sound as “ch” in “Bach,” *not* the sound like “ch” in “chair.” The same sound occurs in the Scottish “Loch,” as in “Loch Ness,” or the German “ach!”
- ✓ **Diphthongs:** When two vowels combine to make one sound, it is called a diphthong. There are seven diphthongs in Greek:

αι	<u>A</u> isle
ει	<u>F</u> reight
οι	<u>O</u> il
αυ	<u>C</u> ow
ευ	eh-oo as in Edward without the “d”
ου	<u>F</u> ood
υι	<u>Q</u> ueen

The “ευ” combination is probably the hardest to learn for most people. It may help to take the “ow” sound and say it slowly; if you notice, there are actually two sounds in “ow.” It starts out with “ah,” then glides to an “oo” sound, “ah-oo.” Try doing the same with “e” (as in “Edward”) and “oo” – “e-oo.” This is a little like the “e-w” in Edward—if you remove the “d.”

### Breathings

The rough breathing is pronounced like an “h,” and looks like a backwards comma written over a vowel. The smooth breathing is not pronounced at all, and looks like a regular comma written over a vowel. Note the difference between “en” and “hen:”

<u>smooth</u>	<u>rough</u>
εν̄	έν
en	hen

In *older* New Testament manuscripts, the text is written in all capital letters (Uncial).

ΛΟΓΟΣ = λογος = logos = “word”