

TEACHING GUIDE

Witnesses of the Risen Christ

A Ten-Part Teaching Series on the Speeches in Acts

How Peter, Stephen, and Paul preach the gospel, defend the faith, guide the church,
and carry the message forward

*"You will be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and
even to the end of the earth."*

Acts 1:8

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Series Purpose

This guide is written for church members, Bible-study groups, and teachers. It studies the major speeches of Peter, Stephen, and Paul. Each lesson explains the type of speech, the audience, the use of Scripture, the message about Jesus, the response being sought, and the speech's place in the story of Acts.

CENTRAL THESIS

Acts presents one unchanging gospel through several types of speeches. The message stays the same, but the speaker begins at a point the audience can understand.

- To Jews, the apostles begin with Israel's Scriptures and promises.
- To pagans, they begin with creation, God's care for the world, and the true God.
- Before courts, they defend the gospel through testimony and resurrection.
- Before believers, they stress endurance, leadership, and faithfulness.

Series Overview

Lesson	Passage	Speaker	Primary classification
1	Selected passages	-	Introduction to the Lukan speeches
2	Acts 1:15-22; 2:14-40	Peter	Ecclesial deliberation; Pentecost kerygma
3	Acts 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 5:29-32	Peter	Jewish missionary and forensic speeches
4	Acts 10:34-43; 11:4-17; 15:7-11	Peter	Gentile missionary, apologetic, and deliberative speeches
5	Acts 7:2-53	Stephen	Forensic defense and salvation-historical indictment

Lesson	Passage	Speaker	Primary classification
6	Acts 13:16-41	Paul	Synagogue missionary sermon
7	Acts 14:15-17; 17:22-31	Paul and Barnabas	Pagan missionary speeches
8	Acts 20:18-35	Paul	Pastoral farewell discourse
9	Acts 22; 23; 24; 26	Paul	Forensic and apologetic defenses
10	Acts 27:21-26; 28:17-28	Paul	Prophetic exhortation and final kingdom proclamation

LESSON 1

Understanding the Speeches in Acts

Academic terms explained in plain language and the main pattern of apostolic preaching

Lesson movement: Begin with the main academic terms. Then trace the gospel truths that appear again and again. End by asking how Luke recorded and arranged the speeches. Each term will make sense when we see what the speeches actually do.

1. The Academic Terminology

THE LUKAN SPEECHES

"The speeches in Acts" or "the Lukan speeches" is the broadest academic name. "Lukan" means related to Luke or written by Luke. This broad group includes missionary sermons, courtroom defenses, synagogue sermons, words of encouragement, church-council speeches, farewell speeches, and even speeches by people who did not follow Jesus.

The total depends on whether very short statements are counted as speeches. Most scholars find more than twenty. One useful count lists eight speeches by Peter, one major speech by Stephen, and nine main speeches by Paul.

KERYGMATIC SPEECHES

Kerygma (keh-RIG-mah) means "proclamation" or "announcement." A kerygmatic speech announces what God has done through Jesus and calls the listeners to respond. In simple terms, it is gospel preaching aimed at faith and repentance.

- Acts 2:14-40
- Acts 3:12-26
- Acts 10:34-43
- Acts 13:16-41

"Missionary speech" is also a useful term. Not every scholar thinks these sermons follow one fixed outline. Luke shows the speakers shaping the same gospel for different listeners.

SALVATION-HISTORICAL SPEECHES

These speeches tell the story of God's saving work through history and show that it leads to Jesus. The German academic term is Heilsgeschichte (HILES-geh-shik-teh), meaning "salvation history." Acts 7 and Acts 13 are major examples.

Salvation-history movement: *Patriarchs -> Exodus -> covenant -> David -> prophetic promise -> Jesus -> resurrection -> Spirit -> mission to the nations*

FORENSIC SPEECHES

"Forensic" means a courtroom or legal speech. These speeches deal with charges, evidence, guilt or innocence, and testimony before judges or rulers.

- Peter before the Sanhedrin
- Stephen before the Sanhedrin
- Paul before Jewish crowds, governors, and kings

DELIBERATIVE SPEECHES

"Deliberative" means a speech that tries to persuade a group about what it should do next.

- Peter proposing the replacement of Judas
- Peter addressing the Jerusalem Council
- Paul warning the Ephesian elders
- Paul exhorting the sailors during the storm

APOLOGETIC SPEECHES

Apologia (ah-poh-loh-GEE-ah) means a reasoned defense, not an apology for doing wrong. In Acts, these speeches defend the Christian mission. They show that the gospel agrees with Israel's Scriptures, that Jesus called Paul, that Gentiles may enter God's people through faith, and that resurrection is the heart of Christian hope.

OTHER USEFUL TERMS

- Ecclesial: a speech about the life, decisions, or unity of the church.
- Pastoral: a speech that guides and protects believers and their leaders.
- Farewell speech: final instruction from a leader who expects to leave.
- Natural theology: reasoning about God from creation and the order of the world.
- Prophetic charge: a warning that exposes sin and calls people back to faithfulness.

2. The Basic Pattern of Apostolic Proclamation

- Promise: God prepared the way through Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets. The gospel fulfills the story already told in Scripture.

- **Fulfillment:** Jesus is not presented as a teacher with no connection to Israel's story. God's covenant promises and the hope for David's greater Son reach their goal in him.
- **Public ministry:** God confirmed Jesus through miracles, acts of mercy, freedom from the devil's power, and events known by the people who heard the sermons.
- **Rejection and death:** People rejected God's chosen one and killed him. The speeches speak honestly about human guilt at the cross.
- **God's purpose:** Jesus' death took place within God's saving plan. Yet God's rule does not excuse the people who chose to act wickedly.
- **Resurrection:** God overturned the human verdict by raising Jesus bodily from death. The resurrection is the center of apostolic preaching.
- **Witness:** The apostles do not describe the resurrection as a private idea. They give public testimony because they met the risen Jesus and were sent to speak for him.
- **Jesus raised to honor and authority:** The risen Jesus rules as Lord, Messiah, Leader, Savior, and Judge. His resurrection proves his present authority.
- **Gift of the Spirit:** The coming of the Spirit shows that Jesus reigns and that God's promised last-days work has begun.
- **Saving gift:** Through Jesus, God offers forgiveness, a right standing with him, a clean heart, and the Holy Spirit. These gifts do not come through race, personal achievement, or ownership of religious places.
- **Required response:** Listeners are called to repent, believe, be baptized, turn from idols and sin, and show their repentance through a changed life.
- **Mission to all people:** The promise is announced to Israel first and then carried to the nations. This continues Israel's hope while showing the growing reach of God's saving purpose.

3. How Luke Presents the Speeches

Acts does not claim to give a modern word-for-word record of every speech. Acts 2:40 says that Peter spoke "with many other words." This tells us that Luke gives a faithful summary.

- Luke carefully writes and arranges the speeches for his readers.
- The speeches may preserve eyewitness memories, early apostolic teaching, and arguments suited to the real settings.
- Luke chooses the parts that help readers understand each event.
- Scholars continue to discuss how much wording comes directly from the speakers and how much Luke summarized.

Teaching emphasis: *The speeches are not interchangeable gospel outlines. Luke shows the gospel confronting different people in different circumstances.*

DEEPER UNDERSTANDING

- **One speech may fit more than one category.** A speech may preach the gospel, answer a court, and tell the story of salvation at the same time. For example, Acts 4:8-12 answers the council's question, announces Jesus' resurrection, and says that salvation is found in him alone.
- **Kerygma names the gospel announcement.** Earlier scholars sometimes tried to rebuild one fixed outline behind every sermon. The speeches do share a clear center, but each one is shaped for its audience. For this reason, many scholars also use the simpler name “missionary speech.”
- **Salvation history gives the speeches their story line.** Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets are not extra details. Their stories reveal God's promises and show how people often reject God's messengers before God proves them right. These themes help explain Jesus' resurrection and the mission of the church.
- **Luke carefully shapes the speeches for his readers.** Ancient historians often gave faithful summaries that fit the occasion instead of word-for-word records. Luke arranges each speech to explain the event around it. Scholars still discuss how much wording came from eyewitness memory and early apostolic teaching.
- **The starting point changes, but the gospel does not.** Jewish listeners hear from Scripture. Pagans hear about the Creator. Rulers receive testimony, and elders receive guidance for the church. In every setting, God acts, Jesus is shown to be Lord, and the listeners must decide how they will respond.

LESSON 2

Pentecost and the Beginning of Apostolic Witness

The restored apostolic witness and the first major Christian sermon

Lesson movement: *The believers first replace Judas and restore the group of twelve witnesses. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit gives them power to speak in public. The lesson moves from preparation inside the church to gospel preaching before the nations gathered in Jerusalem.*

Speech 1: Peter and the Replacement of Judas

PASSAGE Acts 1:15-22

CLASSIFICATION Ecclesial speech; deliberative address; scriptural interpretation

This is not yet a sermon aimed at conversion. It restores the group of twelve apostles. They will testify that the crucified Jesus truly rose, and the Spirit will give them power to speak.

STRUCTURE

- Peter identifies Judas's betrayal as a fulfillment of Scripture.
- He cites Psalms 69 and 109.
- He argues that another person must take Judas's position.

- He establishes the qualifications for an apostolic witness.

SIGNIFICANCE

- The Twelve symbolically represent restored Israel.
- The apostolic office is grounded in eyewitness testimony.
- An apostle must be a witness to the resurrection.
- The church understands its present circumstances through Scripture.
- The speech prepares for the public testimony beginning at Pentecost.

EXPANDED TEACHING NOTES

- **The restored Twelve carry importance as a symbol and as witnesses.** Jesus had appointed twelve apostles in conscious relation to Israel's twelve tribes. Filling Judas's place before Pentecost preserves that pattern of twelve representing Israel and prepares the group to bear united witness to Israel.
- **Scripture interprets the crisis without erasing moral agency.** Peter can say that Judas's betrayal fulfilled Scripture while still treating Judas as accountable. Fulfillment means that rebellion did not defeat God's purpose, not that betrayal became morally innocent.
- **The qualifications are limited to that time and role.** The candidates must have accompanied Jesus from John's baptism through the ascension and be able to testify to the resurrection. The passage therefore describes the first apostles' special role, not a general procedure for appointing every later church leader.
- **Deliberation prepares proclamation.** Acts moves from an internal decision governed by Scripture and prayer to public witness empowered by the Spirit. The church does not manufacture its mission. It orders itself around the testimony Christ commissioned.

Speech 2: Peter's Pentecost Sermon

PASSAGE Acts 2:14-40

CLASSIFICATION Pentecost speech; missionary speech; kerygmatic sermon; prophetic and salvation-historical proclamation

AUDIENCE Jews, Gentile converts to Judaism (proselytes), and pilgrims gathered in Jerusalem

Peter begins with the sign of the Holy Spirit that the crowd can see and hear. He explains it through Joel, points to Jesus, uses David's Psalms, and calls the people to repent.

1. THE COMING OF THE SPIRIT Acts 2:14-21

- The disciples are not drunk.
- Joel's prophecy explains what the crowd is witnessing.
- The "last days" have begun.
- The Spirit's outpouring demonstrates that God's saving promises are being fulfilled.

2. THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS Acts 2:22-32

- Jesus' ministry was publicly confirmed by God.
- The people delivered Jesus over to death.
- His death occurred according to God's predetermined plan.
- God raised him because death could not hold him.
- Psalm 16 prophetically points beyond David to the Messiah.

3. THE EXALTATION OF JESUS Acts 2:33-36

- Jesus has been exalted to God's right hand.
- He has poured out the promised Spirit.
- Psalm 110 identifies him as David's Lord.
- The crucified Jesus has been made both Lord and Messiah.

4. THE SUMMONS TO RESPOND Acts 2:37-40

- Repent.
- Be baptized in Jesus' name.
- Receive forgiveness.
- Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- Separate from the unbelief of the present generation.

SIGNIFICANCE

- This is the first major Christian sermon after the ascension.
- The resurrection and being raised to honor and authority are central, not incidental.
- The Spirit is evidence that Jesus reigns.
- Divine rule does not eliminate human responsibility.
- The gospel produces both conviction and a concrete response.
- The church begins as an last-days, Spirit-filled community.

Central teaching statement: *The outpouring of the Spirit proves that the crucified and risen Jesus now reigns as Lord and Messiah.*

TEACHING DEVELOPMENT

- **Peter begins with the phenomenon his hearers must explain.** The crowd sees and hears Spirit-inspired speech. Peter first rejects the charge of drunkenness, then argues from Joel that the event belongs to God's promised last-days activity. The sign becomes evidence rather than spectacle.
- **Joel creates an last-days frame for the entire sermon.** The gift of the Spirit means the "last days" have begun and that salvation is available to everyone who calls upon the Lord. Peter then identifies the crucified and exalted Jesus as the Lord through whom that promised deliverance is received.

- **The cross joins divine rule and human guilt.** Acts 2:23 attributes Jesus' death to God's definite plan and prior knowledge while charging the hearers with lawless action. Peter neither imagines a frustrated God nor allows God's care and guidance to excuse wicked means.
- **The Psalms interpret resurrection and reign.** Psalm 16 cannot terminate in David because David died and his tomb remained. Peter reads it as pointing to the Messiah's deliverance from decay. Psalm 110 then explains where the risen Messiah now reigns: at God's right hand.
- **The Spirit links what happened to Jesus with what happened to the crowd.** Jesus' being raised to honor and authority is not invisible truth about God. Peter argues that the ruling Christ has poured out the Spirit, so Pentecost is the public consequence of resurrection and royal reign.
- **The response is personal and also brings people into God's community.** The listeners feel deep conviction. Peter tells them to repent, be baptized in Jesus' name, and leave the sinful ways of their generation. God promises forgiveness and the Holy Spirit. Conversion means loyalty to Jesus and a new place among his people.

LESSON 3

Peter's Jerusalem Proclamation and Judicial Defenses

The gospel proclaimed in the Temple and defended before the Sanhedrin

Lesson movement: A healing at the Temple draws a crowd. Peter explains the miracle through Israel's Scriptures, and the leaders question him. The setting changes from public preaching to a courtroom, but the message about the risen Jesus stays the same.

Speech 3: Peter at Solomon's Portico

PASSAGE Acts 3:12-26

CLASSIFICATION Jewish missionary speech; kerygmatic proclamation; prophetic covenant lawsuit (charge of covenant breaking)

The healed man is living evidence before the crowd. Peter turns attention away from the apostles and points to the risen Jesus. Israel rejected Jesus, but the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob honored him.

IMPORTANT TITLES FOR JESUS

- God's Servant
- The Holy and Righteous One
- The Author or Prince of Life
- The Messiah
- The prophet like Moses
- Abraham's promised offspring

STRUCTURE

- The healing did not occur through the apostles' own power.
- The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob glorified Jesus.
- Israel rejected Jesus and asked for a murderer.
- They killed the Author of Life.
- God raised him from the dead.
- Faith in Jesus' name explains the healing.
- Israel acted in ignorance, but ignorance does not remove the need for repentance.
- Jesus fulfills Moses, Samuel, and the prophets.
- God sends blessing by turning people away from wickedness.

SIGNIFICANCE

- The gospel is presented as the fulfillment of Israel's covenant story.
- Resurrection power is displayed through the healing.
- Repentance means turning from sin, not merely feeling regret.
- Jesus is the prophet like Moses, but rejection of him brings covenant judgment.
- Israel retains first opportunity in the mission: "to you first."

EXPANDED TEACHING NOTES

- **The sign must be interpreted in light of who Jesus is.** Peter refuses the honor implied by the crowd's amazement. The healing is not evidence of innate apostolic holiness or power. It is the activity of the risen Jesus, whose "name" denotes his authority and saving identity.
- **The titles build a strong claim about who Jesus is.** Servant, Holy and Righteous One, Author of Life, Messiah, prophet like Moses, and offspring promised to Abraham draw together Isaiah, creation-and-life language, Deuteronomy, and covenant promise. No single title exhausts Peter's presentation of Jesus.
- **Ignorance does not remove truth nor the need to turn.** Peter acknowledges that the people and rulers acted in ignorance, creating space for mercy rather than minimizing the crime. Their proper response is repentance so that sins may be wiped away and seasons of refreshing may come from God's presence.
- **Blessing takes the form of a changed life.** The given to Abraham promise is not reduced to special standing based only on nation. God blesses Israel by sending the Servant to turn people from wickedness, showing that blessing promised in God's covenant includes deliverance from sin's rule.
- **The Moses warning intensifies the summons.** If Jesus is the promised prophet like Moses, refusing him is not fidelity to Moses but disobedience to Moses' own command to listen. The speech therefore presents repentance as the only faithful response to Israel's Scriptures.

Speech 4: Peter Before the Sanhedrin

PASSAGE Acts 4:8-12

CLASSIFICATION Forensic defense; judicial testimony; brief kerygmatic proclamation

The council asks what power caused the healing. Peter answers the legal question, then names the court's deeper problem. The Jesus they rejected is the only one who can save.

STRUCTURE

- Peter explains how the disabled man was healed.
- The healing occurred through Jesus Christ.
- The leaders crucified Jesus.
- God raised him.
- Jesus is the rejected stone of Psalm 118.
- Salvation is found in no one else.

SIGNIFICANCE

- A legal defense becomes an evangelistic proclamation.
- The court that thinks it is judging Peter is confronted with God's judgment concerning Jesus.
- The rejected Jesus has become the cornerstone.
- The exclusive saving authority of Jesus is publicly declared.
- The Spirit produces courage in formerly fearful disciples.

EXPANDED TEACHING NOTES

- **Peter answers the stated charge and exposes the unstated issue.** The leaders ask about the power or name behind the healing. Peter names Jesus of Nazareth and then turns from the healed man's condition to the rulers' rejection of the one God raised.
- **Psalm 118 reverses the court's verdict.** The builders discarded Jesus as unsuitable, but God made the rejected stone the cornerstone. The image announces that God proved Jesus right: the authorities' judgment is overruled by resurrection.
- **Salvation and healing are linked by the same Greek word.** The Greek verb can describe being saved or made well, allowing the restored man to function as a visible sign of the fuller salvation found in Christ. Physical healing is not equated with final salvation, but it points toward Jesus' authority over the whole person.
- **Jesus' unique saving role rests on God's unique appointment of Jesus.** Acts 4:12 is not an general claim that Christianity is better because of its culture. It argues that God has provided one saving name by raising and exalting the rejected Jesus. The uniqueness of salvation follows from the uniqueness of God's act in him.

Speech 5: Peter and the Apostles' Second Defense

PASSAGE Acts 5:29-32

CLASSIFICATION Forensic response; prophetic confrontation; condensed apostolic kerygma

This short speech contains the heart of apostolic preaching. People rejected Jesus, but God raised and honored him. Jesus offers repentance and forgiveness, and both the apostles and the Spirit bear witness.

CORE PROCLAMATION

- God must be obeyed above human authorities.
- Israel's leaders killed Jesus.
- The God of Israel raised him.
- God exalted Jesus as Leader and Savior.
- Jesus grants repentance and forgiveness.
- The apostles and the Holy Spirit are witnesses.

SIGNIFICANCE

- Human authorities possess real but limited authority.
- The church may not obey commands that directly contradict God's commission.
- Repentance is described as a gift granted through the exalted Christ.
- Apostolic testimony and the Spirit's testimony agree.
- Opposition cannot silence the risen Christ's witnesses.

EXPANDED TEACHING NOTES

- **Obedience to God is a narrow claim with a concrete cause.** The apostles are not announcing contempt for civil order. They refuse one specific command—to stop bearing the witness Jesus required—because compliance would directly contradict God's authority.
- **The speech deliberately contrasts human and God's action.** The leaders killed Jesus by hanging him on a tree. The God of the fathers raised and exalted him. The contrast makes resurrection God's verdict on both Jesus and the court that condemned him.
- **Jesus raised to honor and authority explains the offer of repentance.** Jesus reigns as Leader and Savior “to give repentance” and forgiveness. Repentance is truly commanded, yet it is also a saving benefit made possible and granted through the exalted Christ.
- **Witness has both apostolic and God's confirmation.** The apostles testify to events they encountered, while the Holy Spirit confirms the truth and power of the exalted Christ. Luke does not collapse these witnesses into one another. Eyewitness testimony and God's confirmation work together.

LESSON 4

Peter and the Opening of the Gentile Mission

Cornelius, Peter's defense, and the Jerusalem Council

Lesson movement: Peter first preaches inside a Gentile home. He then explains God's action to the church in Jerusalem. At the council, he shows what the event means: God saves Jews and Gentiles through the same grace.

Speech 6: Peter in Cornelius's House

PASSAGE Acts 10:34-43

CLASSIFICATION Gentile missionary speech; kerygmatic summary; narrative proclamation of Jesus' life

AUDIENCE Cornelius, his household, relatives, and close friends

Peter speaks to people who respect Israel's God but are not Jews. He tells the public story of Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection. He then announces that everyone who believes may receive forgiveness.

GOD'S IMPARTIALITY

- God does not show favoritism based on race or nation.
- The gospel is not the possession of one nation.
- Peace is announced through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.

JESUS' MINISTRY

- God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power.
- Jesus went about doing good.
- He delivered those oppressed by the devil.
- God was with him.

DEATH AND RESURRECTION

- Jesus was killed by being hung on a tree.
- God raised him on the third day.
- God caused him to appear to chosen witnesses.
- The apostles ate and drank with the risen Jesus.

COMMISSION AND RESPONSE

- Jesus is the appointed judge of the living and the dead.
- The prophets bear witness to him.
- Everyone who believes receives forgiveness through his name.

SIGNIFICANCE

- This is the clearest narrative summary of Jesus' earthly ministry in Acts.
- Salvation reaches Gentiles without prior conversion to Judaism.
- Forgiveness is offered to "everyone who believes."
- The Spirit falls before Peter finishes, demonstrating God's initiative.
- The church must recognize those whom God has received.

EXPANDED TEACHING NOTES

- **God's fairness does not mean every religion is the same.** Peter concludes that God does not favor one ethnicity over another, but he immediately proclaims peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. Gentile inclusion is offered to all peoples and specifically received through Christ alone.
- **The sermon gives a short summary of the Gospel story.** Peter begins with John's baptism and tells how Jesus served in the Spirit's power. He includes Jesus' acts of mercy, death on the cross, resurrection on the third day, appearances to witnesses, role as judge, and offer of forgiveness. Cornelius's household now knows the Jesus in whom they are called to believe.
- **Eating and drinking strengthens the claim of bodily resurrection.** The chosen witnesses did not encounter merely an inward idea of Jesus' survival. Eating together after resurrection underscores that it was truly the same Jesus and the real and physical nature of the appearances.
- **Jesus' role as judge of everyone grounds the mission to all peoples.** The one appointed to judge the living and the dead cannot be confined to Israel alone. The same universal authority that makes every person accountable also authorizes the offer of forgiveness to everyone who believes.
- **The Spirit interrupts the expected order.** The Spirit falls while Peter is still speaking and before circumcision or formal conversion to Judaism can be required. God thus supplies the decisive evidence that believing Gentiles are received as Gentiles.

Speech 7: Peter's Defense in Jerusalem

PASSAGE Acts 11:4-17

CLASSIFICATION Ecclesial apologia; narrative defense; testimony about God's guidance

Peter does not ask the church to accept his word because he is an apostle. He lists several matching signs of God's work. The church must see that welcoming uncircumcised Gentiles obeys God and does not reject holiness.

STRUCTURE

- Peter recounts his vision.
- He explains the Spirit's command.
- He recounts Cornelius's angelic message.
- He describes the Spirit falling upon the Gentiles.
- He remembers Jesus' promise of baptism with the Holy Spirit.
- He concludes that opposing Gentile inclusion would mean opposing God.

SIGNIFICANCE

- Peter does not defend his actions through personal preference.
- He appeals to God's repeated actions.
- God's gift of the Spirit supports Gentile faith.
- Testimony becomes a means of resolving controversy in the church.
- The church is required to adjust its assumptions to God's revealed action.

EXPANDED TEACHING NOTES

- **The defense proceeds through several matching signs.** Peter recounts the repeated vision, the Spirit's command, the arrival of the messengers, Cornelius's angelic instruction, the preaching of the saving message, and the coming of the Spirit. No isolated impression carries the argument by itself.
- **Memory of Jesus interprets the event.** When the Spirit falls, Peter recalls Jesus' distinction between John's water baptism and baptism with the Holy Spirit. The Cornelius event is therefore read through Jesus' own promise rather than through experience detached from earlier revelation from God.
- **The same gift establishes the same standing.** Peter stresses that Gentiles received the gift God gave Jewish believers when they believed in the Lord Jesus. Equality rests on God's identical gift, not on the Jerusalem church extending a lesser status.
- **The final question reverses the accusation.** Peter's critics initially ask why he crossed purity boundaries. His conclusion asks whether they will place themselves against God, shifting the issue from Peter's irregular conduct to the church's obedience.
- **The church's resolution leads to praise to God.** The hearers become silent and glorify God for granting repentance that leads to life to the Gentiles. Proper correction of the church's beliefs culminates not merely in institutional agreement but in worship.

Speech 8: Peter at the Jerusalem Council

PASSAGE Acts 15:7-11

CLASSIFICATION Deliberative council speech; theological argument; ecclesial testimony

Peter now explains what the Cornelius event means for the whole church. God cleaned Gentile hearts by faith and gave them the same Spirit. Requiring circumcision for salvation would oppose God's own decision.

MAJOR POINTS

- God chose Peter to announce the gospel to Gentiles.
- God gave the Gentiles the Holy Spirit.
- God made no distinction between Jewish and Gentile believers.
- Their hearts were cleansed by faith.
- Requiring the Mosaic yoke would test God.

- Jews and Gentiles are saved through the same grace of Jesus.

SIGNIFICANCE

- Gentiles are full members of God's people through faith.
- Circumcision is not a prerequisite for salvation.
- Jewish believers are saved by grace in the same manner as Gentiles.
- The Spirit's work and the doctrine of grace settle the controversy.

EXPANDED TEACHING NOTES

- **Peter appeals to a earlier event the whole church knew.** The council is not asked to trust a new private message from God. Peter reminds the assembly of an earlier event known to the church: God chose that Gentiles should hear the gospel from his mouth and believe.
- **The heart-knowing God gave the final decision.** Because God knows the heart, the gift of the Spirit testifies to true acceptance by God more deeply than an outward sign of group membership could. God himself bore witness to the Gentiles' acceptance.
- **Purification is attributed to faith.** The argument moves beneath outward religious status to heart cleansing. Peter does not deny the changed life salvation entails. He denies that circumcision is the instrument by which God purifies and brings in Gentile believers.
- **The yoke language identifies an unbearable rule for salvation.** Peter is not dismissing the Old Testament as evil. He rejects requiring Gentiles to keep the Law of Moses as a condition of salvation—a burden neither the present generation nor their ancestors successfully bore as a way to be made right with God.
- **The conclusion places Jewish Christians beside Gentile converts.** Peter does not merely say that Gentiles may be saved like Jews. He says “we” believe that Jewish believers are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus in the same way, making grace the common ground of the whole church.

COMPANION SPEECH

James's address in Acts 15:13-21 is also a deliberative council speech. James uses Amos 9 to show that welcoming Gentiles agrees with the prophets. He then suggests practical steps that will help Jewish and Gentile believers share life together.

LESSON 5

Stephen: Israel's History as Indictment

Stephen turns the trial back on his judges

Lesson movement: Stephen retells Israel's story. God works outside the land, Israel rejects its deliverers, the people turn to idols, and no building can contain God. Step by step, Stephen shows that his judges are repeating Israel's rebellion.

Stephen's Address Before the Sanhedrin

PASSAGE Acts 7:2-53

CLASSIFICATION Forensic defense or apologia; salvation-historical speech; prophetic indictment; covenant lawsuit (charge of covenant breaking)

AUDIENCE The high priest and the Sanhedrin

Stephen answers charges about the land, Moses, the Law, and the Temple by retelling Israel's story. He shows that owning holy places and receiving God's Law do not prove that a person is faithful to God.

THE REVERSAL IN STEPHEN'S SPEECH

Stephen begins as the accused, but the speech gradually places his accusers on trial. The council charges him with speaking against Moses, the Law, the Temple, and the customs of Israel. Stephen responds by showing that his accusers have repeated Israel's pattern of resisting God.

1. ABRAHAM Acts 7:2-8

- God appeared to Abraham outside the land.
- God's presence was never confined to Jerusalem.
- Abraham lived by promise before possessing the land.

2. JOSEPH Acts 7:9-16

- Joseph was rejected by his brothers.
- God was with the rejected deliverer.
- The one rejected by Israel became Israel's means of rescue.

3. MOSES Acts 7:17-43

- Moses was initially rejected by his own people.
- God appointed the rejected Moses as ruler and redeemer.
- Israel rejected Moses again in the wilderness.
- They turned toward idolatry and made the golden calf.

4. TABERNACLE AND TEMPLE Acts 7:44-50

- The tabernacle accompanied Israel in the wilderness.
- Solomon eventually built the Temple.
- The Most High does not dwell in structures made by human hands.
- Isaiah 66 relativizes every attempt to confine God to a building.

5. THE PROPHETIC INDICTMENT Acts 7:51-53

- The leaders are stiff-necked.
- They resist the Holy Spirit.
- Their ancestors persecuted the prophets.
- They betrayed and murdered the Righteous One.

- They received the Law but did not keep it.

SIGNIFICANCE

- Sacred geography cannot be used to control God.
- Possessing the Temple and Law does not guarantee obedience.
- Israel repeatedly rejects deliverers before God proves right them.
- Joseph and Moses establish a pattern culminating in Jesus.
- Stephen stands in the tradition of Israel's prophets.
- His death becomes the catalyst for the gospel's movement beyond Jerusalem.
- Saul's presence connects Stephen's martyrdom with the future Pauline mission.

Central teaching statement: *Stephen does not reject Israel's history. He uses Israel's history to prove that the leaders rejecting Jesus are repeating Israel's rebellion.*

HOW STEPHEN'S ARGUMENT WORKS IN THE STORY

- **God's work outside Jerusalem challenges a Temple-centered view.** God appears to Abraham in Mesopotamia, stays with Joseph in Egypt, calls Moses in Midian, and leads Israel through the wilderness. God has always worked beyond Jerusalem. His presence and revealed truth have never depended on one holy place.
- **Rejected deliverers create the main pattern.** Joseph's brothers reject the one through whom they will later be saved, and Israel asks Moses who made him ruler and judge before God sends him as ruler and redeemer. Stephen does not claim that every detail directly predicts Jesus. He traces a repeated resistance to God's chosen agents that reaches its climax in the Righteous One.
- **Stephen honors Moses while exposing disobedience to him.** Stephen speaks of Moses' calling, miracles, living words from God, and promise of a coming prophet. Moses is not unimportant to Stephen's message. The problem is that Israel's ancestors rejected Moses, and the council now rejects the prophet Moses promised.
- **The wilderness reveals that idolatry can coexist with outward religious identity.** Israel carried the tabernacle, yet their hearts turned back toward Egypt and they worshiped the calf and the host of heaven. Sacred objects cannot compensate for a heart that refuses God's word.
- **The Temple is relativized rather than treated as evil in itself.** Stephen acknowledges the tabernacle given by God and Solomon's construction of the house. His citation of Isaiah 66 denies that the Creator can be contained by things people make, especially when the worshipers resist the Spirit and violate the Law.
- **The final accusation completes the courtroom reversal.** The council charged Stephen with hostility to the Law and Temple. Stephen charges them with receiving the Law but not keeping it, persecuting the prophets, betraying the Righteous One, and resisting the Holy Spirit. The judges become the ones charged with guilt.

- **Stephen's death advances the narrative he interpreted.** Persecution scatters believers beyond Jerusalem, while Saul witnesses the execution and soon becomes the mission's leading messenger. Apparent defeat becomes the means by which Acts 1:8 continues to unfold.

LESSON 6

Paul's Synagogue Sermon

Israel's story, God's promise to David, resurrection, and being made right with God

Lesson movement: Paul retells Israel's history with God as the main actor. He connects God's promise to David with Jesus and proves the resurrection from Scripture. He ends by offering forgiveness and warning the listeners not to reject God's work.

Paul at Pisidian Antioch

PASSAGE Acts 13:16-41

CLASSIFICATION Synagogue sermon; Jewish missionary speech; salvation-historical proclamation; kerygmatic sermon

AUDIENCE Israelites, Gentile God-fearers, and synagogue attendees

Paul begins with a story the synagogue knows: God's choice of Israel, the exodus, the land, the kings, David, and the prophets. He shows that the resurrection identifies Jesus as David's promised Son, who offers forgiveness and makes believers right with God.

1. ISRAEL'S HISTORY Acts 13:16-22

- God chose the patriarchs.
- God delivered Israel from Egypt.
- God sustained Israel in the wilderness.
- God gave the land.
- God supplied judges and kings.
- God raised up David.

God remains the main actor throughout the story.

2. THE PROMISED DAVIDIC SAVIOR Acts 13:23-25

- God brought Jesus from David's offspring.
- Jesus fulfills God's promise.
- John the Baptist prepared the way.
- John denied that he himself was the Messiah.

3. REJECTION AND RESURRECTION Acts 13:26-37

- Jerusalem's rulers failed to recognize Jesus.

- By condemning him, they fulfilled the prophets.
- Jesus was killed and buried.
- God raised him.
- The risen Jesus appeared to witnesses.

4. SCRIPTURAL DEMONSTRATION

- Psalm 2
- Isaiah 55
- Psalm 16

David died and underwent decay. Jesus was raised permanently and did not see decay.

5. THE OFFER AND WARNING Acts 13:38-41

- Forgiveness is proclaimed through Jesus.
- Everyone who believes is justified.
- The Law of Moses could not provide this complete justification.
- Habakkuk warns the audience not to reject God's astonishing work.

SIGNIFICANCE

- Paul's gospel stands in continuity with Peter's proclamation.
- Jesus fulfills the connected to David promises.
- The resurrection distinguishes Jesus from David.
- Forgiveness and justification are offered through faith.
- Israel's history reaches its intended goal in Jesus.
- Rejecting the gospel repeats the pattern of failing to recognize God's work.

TEACHING DEVELOPMENT

- **God is the main actor of Israel's story.** Paul repeatedly emphasizes what God chose, exalted, led, endured, gave, provided, removed, raised, and promised. Israel's history is not a record of independent human success but of God moving the story toward the Savior.
- **David functions as both high point and bridge.** The review of Israel's history arrives at David, the king after God's heart, but immediately moves beyond him to the promised descendant. David matters because God's covenant promise requires a greater heir.
- **The Jerusalem rejection fulfills Scripture without vindicating the rejecters.** The rulers did not understand the words of the prophets read every Sabbath, yet by condemning Jesus they brought those words to fulfillment. As in Peter's Pentecost sermon, fulfillment guided by God and human guilt are affirmed together.
- **The resurrection texts form a Bible-based case that builds step by step.** Psalm 2 speaks of God's royal Son, Isaiah 55 of the sure holy promises made to David, and Psalm 16 of the Holy One not seeing decay. Paul argues that these promises require a permanently risen connected to David heir, since David himself died and decayed.

- **Justification sharpens the saving offer.** Through Jesus, forgiveness is proclaimed and everyone who believes is justified from what the Mosaic law could not justify. The point is not that the Law was faulty in its God-given purpose, but that being declared right with God and set free from sin are found in the risen Messiah.
- **The warning from the prophets makes a neutral response impossible.** Habakkuk originally announced a divine work that people who mock would not believe. Paul reapplies the warning so that synagogue hearers recognize the danger of marveling at God's work while refusing the Messiah through whom it comes.

LESSON 7

Preaching to Pagans

From the Creator and God's care for the world to repentance, judgment, and resurrection

Lesson movement: *These listeners do not know Israel's Scriptures, so the missionaries begin with the Creator and his care for the world. They expose the false worship of idols. Then they call everyone to repent because God will judge the world through the man he raised from the dead.*

Speech 1: Paul and Barnabas at Lystra

PASSAGE Acts 14:15-17

CLASSIFICATION Pagan missionary address; anti-idolatry proclamation; natural-theology appeal (reasoning from creation); deliberative summons

AUDIENCE A crowd attempting to sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas

The crowd is trying to worship Paul and Barnabas. The missionaries first stop the sacrifice and correct the crowd's false view of the gods. They point to the living Creator, whose goodness can be seen in rain, food, and joy.

STRUCTURE

- The missionaries reject worship.
- They identify themselves as ordinary human beings.
- They command the crowd to turn from "vain things."
- They proclaim the living Creator.
- God made heaven, earth, sea, and everything in them.
- God permitted the nations to follow their ways.
- God nevertheless gave witness through God's care and guidance.
- Rain, crops, food, and gladness testify to divine goodness.

SIGNIFICANCE

- The gospel confronts idolatry rather than absorbing it.
- Paul begins with creation because the audience lacks biblical formation.
- Creation and God's care and guidance provide genuine knowledge of God.
- General God's revealed truth establishes responsibility but does not replace gospel proclamation.
- Biblical evangelism may first require correcting the audience's doctrine of God.

EXPANDED TEACHING NOTES

- **The missionaries begin by refusing the role the crowd assigns them.** Tearing their garments and rushing into the crowd dramatize that worship of the messengers contradicts their message. Evangelism begins here with a clear rejection of worship given to the wrong person.
- **“Vain things” names both the idols and the futility of trusting them.** The crowd must turn away from gods that cannot create, sustain, speak, or save and turn toward the living God. Repentance therefore includes a complete change of worship and allegiance.
- **Creation identifies the God being proclaimed.** He is not a stronger member of the group of local gods but the maker of heaven, earth, sea, and everything in them. The difference between the Creator and creation dismantles the pagan ideas about the gods through which the Lystrans interpreted Paul and Barnabas.
- **God's care gives kind evidence of himself, not a complete gospel.** Rain, fruitful seasons, food, and gladness display a generous Creator who has not left the nations without witness. Yet these gifts do not narrate Jesus' death and resurrection. They establish the true God to whom the full gospel message calls the listener.
- **The short speech fits an interrupted crisis.** Acts reports only enough address to show the missionaries' immediate purpose—stopping sacrifice and redirecting worship. Its brevity should not be treated as evidence that Paul possessed a missionary message without Christ.

Speech 2: Paul at the Areopagus

PASSAGE Acts 17:22-31

CLASSIFICATION Gentile missionary speech; philosophical and theological address; deliberative summons to repentance; public critique of idolatry

AUDIENCE Athenians, philosophers, and members of the Areopagus

Paul does not repeat a synagogue sermon, because this audience does not know Israel's Scriptures. He begins with Athenian religion, teaches about the Creator, exposes idols, and calls everyone to repent because the risen Jesus will judge the world.

This speech is best understood as gospel preaching that challenges pagan religion. It is not mainly a defense against a criminal charge.

1. THE UNKNOWN GOD

- Paul begins with an altar familiar to the Athenians.

- He does not endorse their religion.
- He uses the altar to expose their ignorance.

2. THE CREATOR

- God created the world.
- God is Lord of heaven and earth.
- God does not live in human temples as though confined by them.
- God does not need human service.
- God gives life and breath to all.

3. HUMANITY AND PROVIDENCE

- God made every nation from one.
- God appointed historical times and geographical boundaries.
- Human beings should seek God.
- Paul quotes Greek poets to establish a point of contact.

4. THE CRITIQUE OF IDOLATRY

- Humanity is God's offspring in the creaturely sense.
- Therefore, God cannot be represented by gold, silver, or stone.
- Idols reduce the Creator to objects shaped by human imagination.

5. REPENTANCE, JUDGMENT, AND RESURRECTION

- God commands all people everywhere to repent.
- God has appointed a day of judgment.
- Judgment will occur through the appointed man.
- God has assured this by raising him from the dead.

SIGNIFICANCE

- Paul fits the presentation without changing the message.
- He begins with shared knowledge but confronts false conclusions.
- He moves from creation to accountability, judgment, and resurrection.
- The resurrection is the decisive public assurance of coming judgment.
- The sermon shows that gospel proclamation must sometimes rebuild an audience's entire basic view of God and the world.

HOW PAUL'S ARGUMENT WORKS

- **The altar supplies contact, not shared belief about God.** Paul begins with an object in Athenian religious life, but his announcement shows what they do not know: the God they do not know cannot be located within their many local religions. The point of contact becomes a point of correction.
- **Creation overturns temple, sacrifice, and ideas that God needs human help.** The Lord of heaven and earth cannot be housed as though dependent on sacred architecture or served as though

lacking something. Worship does not supply God's needs. The giver of life, breath, and all things supplies ours.

- **Common descent supports both worth and responsibility.** God made every nation from one and guided human history so that people might seek him. Ethnic pride is excluded, but so is human independence from God: every nation lives within the Creator's world and under his claim.
- **The poets are quoted carefully and places them under biblical truth.** “In him we live” and “we are his offspring” provide language Paul can redirect toward dependence on the Creator. He does not adopt the poets' wider religious systems. He uses their true insight to expose the foolishness of fashioned idols.
- **Paul's teaching about the Creator leads to a call to repent.** Paul first identifies the true God and exposes the sin of idols. He then says that God commands all people to repent. A day of judgment is coming, and God confirmed the Judge by raising him from the dead.
- **Resurrection is both offense and evidence.** Some hearers mock because resurrection contradicts common Greek beliefs, while others seek further hearing and some believe. Luke shows that careful clear connection with the audience can clarify the claim but cannot remove the scandal or guarantee acceptance.

LESSON 8

Paul's Farewell to the Ephesian Elders

Pastoral ministry, watchfulness, and the word of grace

Lesson movement: Paul reminds the elders how he served among them. He accepts the suffering ahead and gives the elders responsibility for the church. They must now follow the faithful pattern they saw in Paul and depend on God and his word of grace.

Paul's Farewell at Miletus

PASSAGE Acts 20:18-35

CLASSIFICATION Farewell discourse; pastoral speech; deliberative exhortation; ministerial self-defense (defense of his ministry)

AUDIENCE Christian elders summoned from Ephesus to Miletus

This speech trains leaders who already believe. Paul's way of life supports his teaching. Because he is leaving, the elders must guard the church and trust God and his word of grace.

This is Paul's only long speech in Acts directed mainly to Christian leaders.

PAUL'S PREVIOUS MINISTRY

- He served with humility and tears.
- He endured opposition and trials.

- He withheld nothing helpful for spiritual growth.
- He taught publicly and from house to house.
- He testified to Jews and Greeks.
- His message included repentance toward God and faith in Jesus.

PAUL'S JOURNEY TOWARD SUFFERING

- The Spirit compels him toward Jerusalem.
- Imprisonment and affliction await him.
- His life is less important than completing his ministry.
- His calling is to testify to the gospel of God's grace.

PAUL'S DECLARATION OF INNOCENCE

- He proclaimed the whole counsel of God.
- He did not withhold necessary truth.
- He is innocent of responsibility for those who reject the warning.

THE ELDERS' RESPONSIBILITY

- Watch themselves first.
- Watch the entire flock.
- Recognize that the Holy Spirit appointed them as overseers.
- Shepherd the church purchased at great cost.
- Guard against external wolves.
- Guard against internal teachers who distort the truth.
- Remain alert.

FINAL COMMENDATION

- Paul commends them to God and the word of grace.
- He rejects greed and financial exploitation.
- His own labor demonstrated generosity.
- Christian ministry should remember the weak.
- Giving is more blessed than receiving.

SIGNIFICANCE

- Faithful ministry involves doctrine, character, courage, and watchfulness.
- Leaders must guard themselves before guarding others.
- The church belongs to God, not to its human leaders.
- Danger comes from both outside and inside the congregation.
- Sound leadership is grounded in grace rather than personal control.
- Paul's life reinforces the message he teaches.

HOW PAUL'S PASTORAL APPEAL WORKS

- **Paul's example is evidence, not self-congratulation.** The elders know how he lived among them: humility, tears, trials, public teaching, house-to-house instruction, and refusal of covetous gain. His conduct demonstrates that the exhortations he gives are possible to live out and sincere.
- **The ministry is summarized by repentance and faith.** Paul's testimony to Jews and Greeks required turning toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus. The two expressions describe one conversion movement: away from rebellion and toward trusting allegiance to Christ.
- **Suffering is subordinated to calling.** The Spirit's warnings do not necessarily forbid the journey. They prepare Paul for its cost. He measures his life by whether he completes the course and testifies to the gospel of grace, not by whether he preserves comfort or status.
- **The watchman's duty explains Paul's declaration of innocence.** By teaching the whole counsel of God and withholding nothing profitable, Paul has carried out his duty to warn. The elders inherit that responsibility. Silence concerning necessary truth can make a leader responsible for preventable harm.
- **Oversight begins with self-watch.** Leaders who neglect their own doctrine, character, and weak points cannot faithfully guard the flock. The order "yourselves and all the flock" makes personal watchfulness an element of pastoral care rather than a private concern.
- **The church's value determines the seriousness of shepherding.** The flock belongs to God and was obtained at immeasurable cost. Overseers therefore act as stewards, not owners, and must resist both attacks from outside and false teaching from inside of apostolic teaching.
- **Grace, not personality, secures the church after Paul's departure.** Paul commends the elders to God and to the word of grace, which is able to build up and grant the inheritance. Healthy succession depends on God's action through his word rather than permanent dependence on a gifted founding leader.
- **Material integrity gives pastoral teaching trust.** Paul's labor and generosity reject ministry as a means of exploitation. Remembering the weak and giving rather than grasping embody the grace the elders are called to proclaim.

LESSON 9

Paul on Trial: The Gospel as Apologia

Paul uses each legal defense to bear witness to Jesus

Lesson movement: Paul appears before several courts. Each time, he defends himself and bears witness to Jesus. His Jewish background, conversion, calling, hope of resurrection, and mission to the Gentiles build one connected defense.

Speech 1: Paul Before the Jerusalem Crowd

PASSAGE Acts 22:1-21

CLASSIFICATION Forensic defense; autobiographical testimony (personal testimony); apologetic speech

Paul speaks as a Jew to fellow Jews and uses his own life as evidence. He once fought against the church with great zeal. His mission did not grow from hatred of Israel. The risen Jesus changed his direction.

SIGNIFICANCE

- Paul emphasizes his Jewish upbringing and training.
- He once persecuted the Way.
- His conversion resulted from God stepping in.
- Ananias is presented as a devout observer of the Law.
- Paul's Gentile mission originated in Jesus' command, not contempt for Israel.
- Personal testimony becomes evidence of divine grace and commission.

EXPANDED TEACHING NOTES

- **Paul establishes identification before explaining disagreement.** He addresses the crowd in their language and describes his birth, upbringing in Jerusalem, training under Gamaliel, and zeal for God. The defense denies that ignorance of Judaism produced his faith in Christ.
- **His persecuting past strengthens the need for an external cause.** Paul was not naturally likely to join the movement he tried to destroy. The reversal requires an event adequate to explain it: the risen Jesus confronted and commissioned him.
- **Ananias connects the commission with faithful Jewish witness.** Luke's account describes Ananias as devout according to the Law and respected by local Jews. Paul therefore receives explanation and guidance through a witness whose Jewish faithfulness the audience cannot easily dismiss.
- **The Gentile mission is narrated as obedience, not betrayal.** Paul initially witnesses in Jerusalem and must be sent away because the risen Lord declares that the city will not receive his testimony. The mission's controversial direction rests on Jesus' command, not on hatred of another people.
- **The crowd's reaction reveals the boundary of its willingness to hear.** The audience listens through Paul's conversion account but erupts at the commission to the Gentiles. Luke exposes that the decisive offense is not merely Paul's biography but the scope of God's saving purpose.

Speech 2: Paul Before the Sanhedrin

PASSAGE Acts 23:1-6

CLASSIFICATION Brief forensic defense; judicial confrontation

The hearing quickly falls into disorder, so the speech is short. Even so, Paul names the real issue: the hope of bodily resurrection. Christian hope grows from a hope already debated within Judaism.

SIGNIFICANCE

- Paul appeals to a clear conscience.
- He exposes the high priest's unlawful behavior.
- He identifies resurrection hope as the underlying dispute.

- The conflict between Pharisees and Sadducees reveals that Paul's hope has roots within Jewish belief.
- Christianity's claim concerning Jesus is inseparable from bodily resurrection.

EXPANDED TEACHING NOTES

- **A clear conscience is not a claim to sinlessness.** Paul asserts that he has lived before God with integrity in carrying out his calling. The claim concerns the sincerity and desire to live faithfully before God of his conduct, not moral perfection apart from grace.
- **The unlawful blow exposes a unfair trial.** Ananias orders Paul struck before guilt is established, contradicting the Law the council claims to defend. Paul's "whitewashed wall" accusation identifies the gulf between appearance of justice and actual conduct in court.
- **The high-priest exchange should be taught with care.** Commentators differ over whether Paul failed to recognize Ananias, spoke ironically, or acknowledged the office despite the man's conduct. The clear point is that Paul cites Scripture and refuses to ground his defense in contempt for God's Law.
- **Resurrection is more than a courtroom tactic.** Paul's identification with Pharisee resurrection hope divides the council, but Acts repeatedly shows that this is also the genuine center of the case. His claim is that Israel's hope has been clearly begun in the risen Jesus.

Speech 3: Paul Before Felix

PASSAGE Acts 24:10-21

CLASSIFICATION Formal forensic defense; political apologia

Paul answers the legal charges one by one and openly admits that he follows the Way. He can defend his innocence while still bearing witness to Christ. His hope of resurrection explains both his worship and the case against him.

STRUCTURE

- Paul denies provoking riots.
- His accusers cannot prove their charges.
- He openly confesses belonging to the Way.
- He worships the God of Israel.
- He believes the Law and Prophets.
- He shares the hope of resurrection.
- He strives to maintain a clear conscience.

SIGNIFICANCE

- Christianity is not presented as rejection of Israel's God or Scriptures.
- The resurrection explains the hostility against Paul.
- Paul joins innocence under the law with theological confession.

- His later discussion of righteousness, self-control, and judgment confronts Felix personally.
- The gospel addresses rulers morally rather than flattering political power.

EXPANDED TEACHING NOTES

- **The defense separates facts that can be checked from heated charge.** Paul notes the brief time since his arrival, denies disputing in the Temple or stirring crowds, and challenges the accusers to produce evidence. Luke portrays Christian witness as capable of open public review.
- **Confession of the Way is central rather than hidden.** Paul denies rebellion against the government but not Christian identity. He worships the ancestral God, believes the Law and Prophets, and hopes in resurrection. Legal defense does not require concealing the claim about God that generated the conflict.
- **Resurrection carries effects on daily conduct.** Hope in a resurrection of both just and unjust leads Paul to strive for a blameless conscience before God and people. Future judgment is not guessing about dates and events. It governs present conduct.
- **The absent Asian accusers weaken the case against him.** Those who originally encountered Paul in the Temple are not present to prove the charge. The only sustainable issue is Paul's declaration concerning resurrection before the council.
- **Felix is eventually placed under the message he judges.** Paul reasons about righteousness, self-control, and coming judgment—subjects that address the governor's moral life. The prisoner refuses flattery and confronts power with accountability before God.

Speech 4: Paul Before Agrippa

PASSAGE Acts 26:2-29

CLASSIFICATION Forensic defense; apologetic testimony; missionary proclamation

This final major defense brings Paul's main points together. He speaks about Israel's promise, his past as a persecutor, Jesus' call, repentance, the prophets, and the Messiah's suffering and resurrection.

STRUCTURE

- Paul describes his Pharisee background.
- He identifies the promise to Israel as the reason for his trial.
- He recounts his persecution of Christians.
- He describes his encounter with the risen Jesus.
- Jesus commissions him to Jews and Gentiles.
- His mission is to open blind eyes and turn people from darkness to light.
- Paul preached repentance demonstrated by changed conduct.
- The prophets foretold the suffering and resurrection of the Messiah.
- The risen Messiah announces light to Israel and the Gentiles.

SIGNIFICANCE

- This is the climax of Paul's defense speeches.
- Paul's mission is grounded in direct calling from God.
- His message fulfills Moses and the Prophets.
- His gospel contains both forgiveness and transformation.
- Paul is legally a prisoner but rhetorically becomes the evangelist.
- Agrippa is moved from judging Paul to being confronted by Paul's message.

Central teaching statement: *Paul's defenses do more than prove his innocence. They show that the Christian mission is the fulfillment of Israel's hope.*

HOW PAUL'S DEFENSE BUILDS

- **Israel's promise frames the entire defense.** Paul is judged for hoping in what God promised to the ancestors and what the twelve tribes hope to attain. Christianity is presented not as abandonment of biblical hope but as the claim that resurrection has begun in the Messiah.
- **The persecutor's commission displays complete change brought by God.** Paul once believed he must oppose Jesus' name, imprisoned believers, supported executions, and pursued them abroad. The meeting with the risen Jesus transforms the persecutor into a servant and witness, making his mission an example of the grace he proclaims.
- **The commission defines salvation through several clear changes.** Eyes are opened. People turn from darkness to light and from Satan's authority to God. They receive forgiveness and an inheritance among those made holy by faith in Christ. The imagery joins new understanding, liberation, pardon, belonging, and holiness.
- **Repentance is expected to produce fitting deeds.** Paul's preaching summons Jews and Gentiles to repent, turn to God, and perform works consistent with repentance. Changed conduct is not an alternative basis of forgiveness but the needed result of a genuine turn.
- **Prophetic fulfillment centers on suffering and resurrection.** Paul claims to say nothing beyond Moses and the Prophets: the Messiah would suffer and, as first to rise from the dead, proclaim light to Israel and the nations. The mission's breadth follows the scriptural Messiah's victory.
- **The courtroom setting becomes a direct appeal.** When Festus interrupts, Paul answers rationally and appeals to Agrippa's knowledge of the prophets and public events. Agrippa can no longer remain merely an evaluator of Paul. He must face the claim based on the prophets himself.

LESSON 10

The Kingdom Proclaimed "Without Hindrance"

God's guidance, Israel's hope, and the mission that continues from Rome

Lesson movement: *God protects Paul through the storm so he can reach Rome. Paul explains that he is innocent of crime and is chained because of Israel's hope. Acts ends with Paul preaching God's kingdom. Paul is a prisoner, but the gospel moves forward freely.*

Speech 1: Paul During the Storm

PASSAGE Acts 27:21-26

CLASSIFICATION Prophetic exhortation; deliberative reassurance; providential announcement (message about God's guidance)

This speech on the ship is not a missionary sermon, but it still shows Paul as God's witness. God has promised that Paul will stand before Caesar. That promise gives hope, while the people must still follow wise instructions.

MAJOR POINTS

- Paul acknowledges that his earlier warning was ignored.
- He urges the passengers to take courage.
- An angel has assured him that he must stand before Caesar.
- God will preserve those traveling with him.
- Paul expresses confidence in God's promise.
- The ship will be lost, but the passengers will survive.

SIGNIFICANCE

- God's care and guidance carries the mission toward Rome.
- Paul appears less like a helpless prisoner and more like God's authoritative witness.
- God's promise does not eliminate human action. The passengers must later follow instructions.
- The preservation of the passengers displays mercy extending through Paul's mission.

EXPANDED TEACHING NOTES

- **The promise concerns mission before it concerns comfort.** The angel's message assures Paul that he must stand before Caesar. The passengers are preserved in connection with that divinely appointed testimony, so rescue serves the advance of witness toward Rome.
- **Paul's confidence rests on the character of the promising God.** He can urge courage because he belongs to and serves the God who spoke, and he believes events will occur exactly as announced. Faith is confidence in God's word amid circumstances that still appear fatal.

- **God's care and guidance includes loss and preservation.** The promise does not say the voyage will become painless: the ship will be destroyed and the travelers will be driven onto an island. God's faithfulness is measured by fulfillment of his stated purpose, not by removal of every hardship.
- **Divine certainty works through necessary means.** Later, when sailors attempt escape, Paul warns that the others cannot be saved unless the sailors remain aboard. Luke comfortably joins an unconditional God's promise with urgent human actions that God uses to bring the promised end.
- **The prisoner becomes the practical leader.** Paul offers the trustworthy explanation, exposes danger, encourages food, gives thanks, and directs action. Narrative authority shifts toward God's witness even while Roman custody remains in effect.

Speech 2: Paul to the Jewish Leaders in Rome

PASSAGE Acts 28:17-20

CLASSIFICATION Jewish apologia; introductory forensic defense

Before teaching about God's kingdom, Paul clears up a possible misunderstanding. He has not abandoned Israel. He is in chains because he believes the very hope promised in Israel's Scriptures.

MAJOR POINTS

- Paul has done nothing against Israel or its customs.
- Roman authorities found no capital offense.
- Jewish opposition forced his appeal to Caesar.
- Paul is imprisoned because of "the hope of Israel."

SIGNIFICANCE

- Paul does not arrive in Rome as an enemy of Israel.
- The gospel is identified with Israel's promised hope.
- Paul's imprisonment results from witness, not criminal activity.

EXPANDED TEACHING NOTES

- **Paul initiates contact with Rome's Jewish leadership.** Rather than withdrawing after repeated opposition, he summons the local leaders within three days. Israel continues to receive first opportunity even in Rome, the Gentile center of the Roman Empire.
- **The defense distinguishes disagreement from disloyalty.** Paul denies acting against the people or ancestral customs and notes that Roman examination found no capital offense. His appeal to Caesar was a necessary act of self-defense, not an accusation that Israel should be condemned.
- **The chain is interpreted through hope.** Paul's confinement becomes a visible sign of suffering for "the hope of Israel." The phrase gathers resurrection, fulfillment in the Messiah, and promised restoration into the reason based on faith for his imprisonment.

- **The introduction prepares a hearing based on Scripture.** By clarifying his posture toward Israel, Paul creates space for the later full-day exposition from Moses and the Prophets. The legal apologia leads naturally into effort to persuade people about the gospel.

Speech 3: Paul's Final Kingdom Exposition

PASSAGE Acts 28:23-28

CLASSIFICATION Jewish missionary proclamation; kingdom discourse; scriptural apologia; prophetic warning
Luke closes with Paul spending a full day trying to persuade his listeners. Some believe and others refuse. Isaiah's warning explains this response, and the message continues to the Gentiles.

STRUCTURE

- Paul explains the kingdom of God.
- He attempts to persuade them concerning Jesus.
- He argues from Moses and the Prophets.
- Some are persuaded.
- Others remain unbelieving.
- Isaiah 6 explains hardened hearing and sight.
- God's salvation is announced to the Gentiles.

SIGNIFICANCE

- Acts ends as it began: with the kingdom of God.
- Jesus is proclaimed from the whole scriptural story.
- The gospel continues to go to Israel even as it advances among Gentiles.
- Unbelief cannot stop the mission.
- The final word of Acts is effectively "unhindered."
- Paul is confined, but the word of God is not.

HOW ACTS REACHES ITS CONCLUSION

- **Kingdom and Jesus belong to one exposition.** Paul explains the kingdom of God while persuading concerning Jesus from Moses and the Prophets. Luke does not present kingdom preaching as an alternative to Christ-centered proclamation. Jesus is the one in whom God's reign and promises are interpreted.
- **The long hearing shows patient explanation.** Paul reasons from the Scriptures from morning until evening. He does not make an unsupported claim and then leave. His message is urgent, but he still takes time to explain the evidence carefully.
- **The divided response repeats a narrative pattern.** Some are persuaded while others refuse belief. Acts repeatedly records both faith and resistance, preventing large numbers from becoming the only measure of faithful proclamation.

- **Isaiah 6 interprets unbelief as both a moral choice and God's judgment.** Dull hearts, closed ears, and shut eyes describe more than an lack of evidence. The citation exposes responsible resistance while also placing that resistance within the pattern in the prophets already present in Israel's Scriptures.
- **The Gentile announcement widens the audience without canceling Israel's story.** God's salvation is sent to the Gentiles, who will listen, yet Paul's entire Roman ministry has begun by summoning Jewish leaders and arguing from Israel's Scriptures. The movement is expansion through Israel's Messiah, not replacement by a different message.
- **“Without hindrance” is Luke's final final message of the story.** Paul remains under guard, but he welcomes all who come and proclaims the kingdom and the Lord Jesus with boldness. Political confinement cannot place the gospel itself in chains, leaving the reader inside an unfinished mission.

Final Synthesis

One Gospel, Adapted to Every Audience

Audience	Starting point	Central movement	Required response
Jerusalem Jews	Prophecy and recent events	Crucifixion -> resurrection -> exaltation	Repent and be baptized
Temple worshipers	Covenant and prophetic promises	Rejected Servant -> risen Author of Life	Repent and turn
Jewish authorities	Their rejection of Jesus	God proves the rejected stone is his chosen one	Recognize salvation in Jesus
Cornelius's household	Jesus' public ministry	Death -> resurrection -> Jesus as judge of all	Believe and receive forgiveness
Sanhedrin before Stephen	Israel's history	Rejected deliverers -> rejection of the Righteous One	Cease resisting the Spirit
Synagogue audiences	Israel, David, and Scripture	Promise -> Jesus -> resurrection	Believe and be justified
Pagan audiences	Creation and God's care	Idolatry -> accountability -> judgment	Turn from idols and repent
Christian elders	Paul's ministry and departure	Grace -> watchfulness -> faithful care	Guard yourselves and the flock
Courts and rulers	Paul's testimony and innocence	Israel's hope -> risen Christ -> Gentile mission	Believe the prophets and Christ

Audience	Starting point	Central movement	Required response
Rome	Kingdom and Scripture	Israel's hope -> Jesus -> worldwide mission	Hear and believe

The Great Pattern of Acts

Narrative movement: *Promise -> fulfillment in Jesus -> rejection and crucifixion -> resurrection -> being raised to honor and authority -> apostolic witness -> repentance and forgiveness -> Spirit-empowered mission to the nations*

The speeches are not merely interruptions in Luke's narrative. They interpret the events around them. The miracles display the power of the risen Jesus, the speeches explain what the miracles mean, and the resulting responses advance the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome.

MAIN TEACHING CONCLUSIONS

- **Events create questions. Speeches supply interpretation.** Pentecost, healings, Gentile reception, persecution, trials, and deliverance do not explain themselves. Luke repeatedly places speech beside event so that readers learn to see God's care and guidance, miracle, and opposition through the resurrection of Jesus.
- **The same gospel receives many different responses.** Some crowds repent. Authorities threaten the apostles, philosophers mock, households receive the Spirit, governors delay, and elders weep. Luke shows that faithful preaching does not control the response. The church must depend on God.
- **Witness is both a message and a calling.** Peter, Stephen, and Paul do not merely repeat content. They embody testimony through courage, suffering, integrity, and persistence. In Acts, the truth announced shapes the life of the announcer.
- **God moves the mission forward through events that look like defeats.** The rejected Messiah is raised to glory. Stephen's death scatters witnesses, a persecutor becomes an apostle, prison opens doors to rulers, and chains bring Paul to Rome. Again and again, God uses obstacles to advance his word.

Selected Academic Sources

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