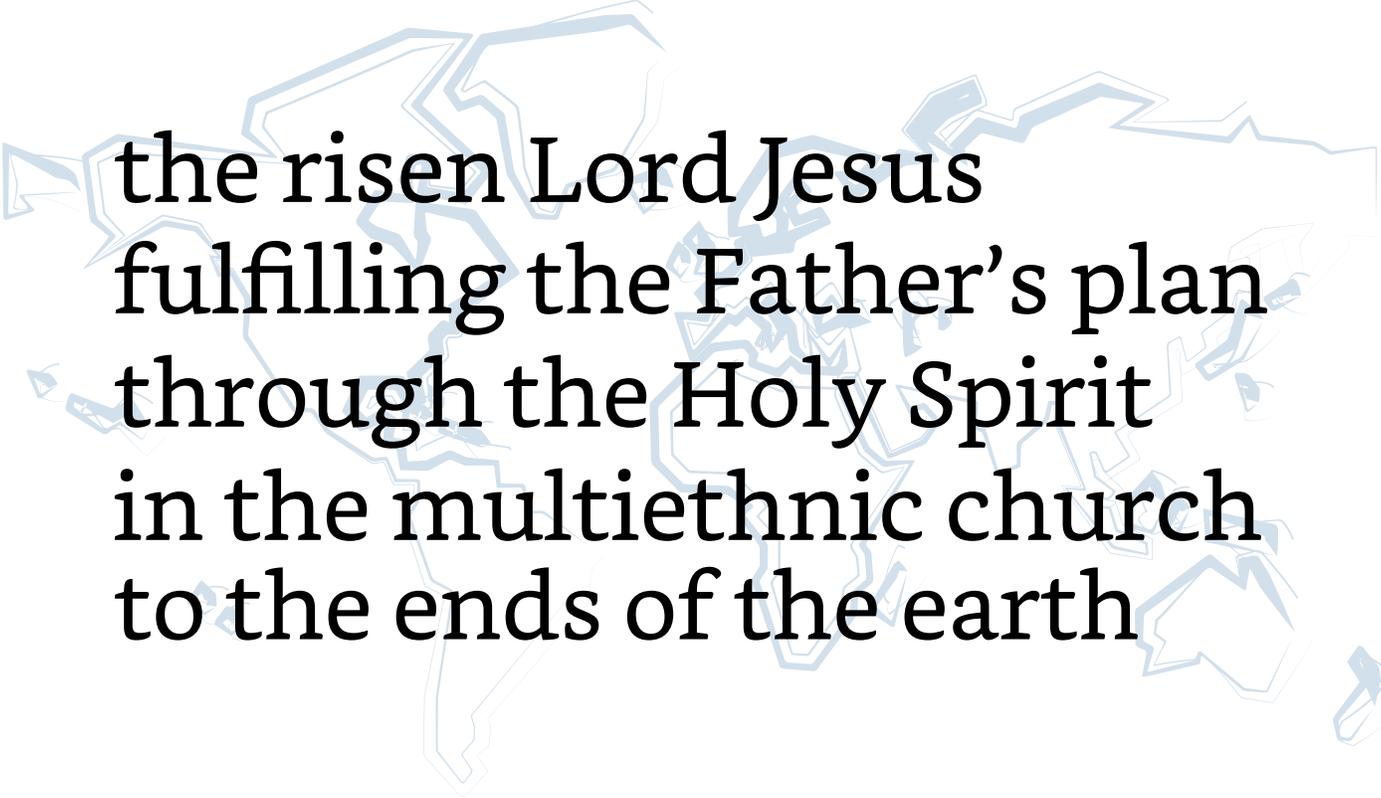


THE BOOK OF ACTS



the risen Lord Jesus
fulfilling the Father's plan
through the Holy Spirit
in the multiethnic church
to the ends of the earth

PROSPECTUS/INTRO TO THIS CLASS

“Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” Jerusalem was buzzing. Many before had claimed to be someone great — but once they were killed their followers scattered and nothing came of the movement they started. But something different happened with Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was unjustly tried and killed; yet, instead of causing the Jesus movement to disperse, it exploded. Within a matter of months of Jesus’ death there were thousands of Jews worshipping and following the commands of Jesus. Why?

“This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.” In Luke’s previous book, he recorded the things Jesus began to do and teach to provide certainty of the things God had been accomplishing among them. Now that Jesus is ruling at the right hand of the Father, Acts continues where Luke’s first volume left off — providing assurance that, despite messiness and tribulation, the crucified and risen Jesus continues to fulfill the Father’s mission through the Holy Spirit who Jesus has given to the church.

Acts is often read primarily as source material for questions regarding a number of “issues” - including laying on of hands, gifts of the Spirit, baptism, church organization and government, etc. Though we can learn about these things in a secondary way, answering these questions was not Luke’s primary intention. Instead of primarily using Acts to nail down “issues,” we will instead...

- Perceive into how Luke crafts his account as a fulfillment of God’s plan — in the order of Isaiah’s prophecies, other scriptures, and Jesus’ life
- Draw parallels between the theoretical teaching of the epistles and lived-out the narrative of Acts.
- Be encouraged by and have certainty of the triune God’s mission: see how the Father, the risen Lord Jesus, and the Holy Spirit work(ed) to spread the good news of God’s kingdom on earth through the church.
- Be emboldened by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the gospel of Jesus and increase God’s rule on earth.
- Repair broken versions of the gospel with the original good news of Jesus’ death and — most notably in Acts — his resurrection and ascension.
- Grapple with the need for tribulations to enter God’s kingdom — now inaugurated but not yet consummated.
- See how the original good news broke down barriers to form a united, though not uniform, church.

INTRODUCING ACTS (I)

PURPOSE: ASSURANCE

- Acts is part 2 of Luke's endeavor to offer *certainty* that — despite the turbulence — God's preordained plan is at work. Luke provides assurance of this through an ordered narrative: *in the chaos God's mission is going to the ends of the earth*.
- "Luke provides certainty through an ordered narrative that God has fulfilled his promises to Israel and the nations in Jesus Christ." (Schreiner, *The Mission of the Triune God*, 23)
- "The bumpy start of the community of God is the plan of God." Satan tries to thwart God's word, but this only propels the word forward (Schreiner, 23).
- **Below:** a modification of Schreiner's "Uncertainty in Acts" (pg. 24 — I don't see gender conflict/challenges in Acts as prominently as he does). The outside circles represent uncertainty or pressures on the mission of God and church of Jesus.



INTRODUCING ACTS (II)

Below: Schreiner's theological themes (pg. 27) — this is the theological flow and narrative throughout Acts and are themes that span the book.



“Fulfilled among us.” (HCSB, NIV, NLT, NET) Luke uses the language of Scriptures to offer order to the chaos: God’s plan is going according to plan. For those who know Isaiah and the rest of the Scriptures — whether laws, promises, stories, etc. — this will become evident when reading Acts simply by turning on this mental switch. For example: Acts shows Babel reversed, Deuteronomy 18 come to fulfillment, the Moses to Joshua and Elijah to Elisha transition repeated, Jesus’ trials repeated in Paul, and far more. Luke shows that history is repeated, laws are obeyed (i.e., “there will be no poor among you” — Deut. 15:4), and promises are fulfilled to [shockingly] show that God’s mission is indeed at work in the church. The mission of God is going forth to the ends of the earth in advance of the day when God’s glory and knowledge will fill the earth. Schreiner is so bold as to assert: “Nothing — not a single narrative — falls outside the banner of fulfillment and God’s plan.” (pg. 36)

INTRODUCING ACTS (III)

OUTLINE (by Alan Thompson)

- A. ACTS 1:1-2:41** - Prologue: foundations for the church and its mission
- B. ACTS 2:42-6:7** - The church in Jerusalem
- C. ACTS 6:8-9:31** - Wider horizons for the church: Stephen, Samaria, and Saul
- D. ACTS 9:32-12:24** - Peter and the first Gentile convert
- E. ACTS 12:25-16:5** - Paul turns to the Gentiles
- F. ACTS 16:6-19:20** - Further expansion into the Gentile World
- G. ACTS 19:21-28:31** - To Jerusalem and then to Rome¹

SUMMARY (by Darrell L. Bock)

“Luke-Acts reassures Theophilus and its readers. The program of God that has reached out in mission to Gentiles with salvation is part of his long-promised program. The key moves in Jesus’ coming and the mission of the new community to Gentiles result from God’s direction, fingerprints, and scriptural promise. Whether it be in Jesus’ praising the faith of those outside of Israel, his direct call to Paul in making him a minister to Gentiles, or God’s direction of Cornelius to Peter and Peter to the Gentile centurion, God has shown not only that the long promised new era come with the Spirit sent by Jesus, but also that this promise extends by ancient divine design to the nations.

“Luke-Acts is ultimately a book about God and his activity through Jesus, in whose name much in Acts takes place. As exemplary as many figures are in these books, the real heroes in these volumes are God, Jesus, and the Spirit. The focus of the theology is on them as the Father has sent the Son to give the Spirit of God’s people to enable them to carry out their collective calling. In doing so, the people are equipped for a life of mission in honoring God. The community has taken the gospel into the world and evidenced reconciliation with God. They have also reflected the efforts at reconciliation between others that grows out of the gospel. In their response of repentance and faith, they turn to God in love for his grace and in love for their neighbor. Theology and values in life are inseparably connected in Luke-Acts. At the hub stands the activity of Jesus Christ and the divine attestation to him through his ministry depicted in Luke. In Jesus’ resurrection-ascension to God’s right hand, God shows the kingdom hope to be alive and well.”²

¹ Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus*, 68-69

² Darrell L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts*, 95

ACTS 1

1. (1:1-2) “All that Jesus began to do and teach...” In his first volume, Luke has not written about all Jesus ever did, but rather all he began to do and teach. We will see Luke recording many things: what apostles did, what the church did, and how the world responded. But, if we read carefully, we will see this book cannot merely be summed up as “The Acts of the Apostles” or “The Acts of the Early Church.” We will see the Father’s plan acted out by means of the risen Lord Jesus who pours out the Holy Spirit (given to him by the Father, 2:33) who renews and continues the mission in the church (and certainly in Jesus’ holy apostles). Acts records, among other things, some of what Jesus continued to do from heaven. *How all might this perspective benefit us while interpreting Acts? While living it out in our own day?*

2. (1:3) “He presented himself alive to them... by many proofs...” If we only had the Gospel accounts, we might think Jesus only interacted with the apostles on three or four brief occasions after his resurrection, but here it is evident that the apostles had up to 40 days with Jesus (cf. Ex. 24:18) — rubbing their eyes to be sure of what they saw. And Jesus offered many proofs he was alive (and not a spirit — Luke 24:39). *How all is Luke’s record of this time period significant?*

3. (1:3) “... and speaking about the kingdom of God.” The prophets depict the kingdoms of men as arrogant, weak, unjust, and beastly (Dan. 7) in comparison to God’s rule. But the Scriptures foresaw a day when God would act decisively so that all earth would be full of the rule, fame, and glory of the Lord. At times, as in Daniel 2, this day is pictured as God’s heavenly kingdom filling the earth. Elsewhere, as in Isaiah or Psalm 72, this day is depicted as kingdom power returning to Israel for the glory of God’s name — imperfectly foreshadowed in Solomon’s rule.

When Jesus came, it was evident that God’s kingdom power was invading what had become enemy territory to rescue those who were oppressed by Satan, sin, and evil people. Jesus’ carried God’s kingdom authority to forgive sins, heal sickness, cast out demons, and proclaim world-changing truth (i.e., Luke 5:24; 10:17-20; 11:20; Acts 10:38). And some struggled to see the kingdom was really present (Luke 17:20-21). But that’s because this was only taste of what was to come in the fullness of God’s kingdom — a mustard seed that would grow, leaven that would spread. These sign-acts anticipate the day when God would finally and fully rescue his people from all their sins and enemies (Luke 1:71, 74). No one will fail to see the kingdom’s full consummation when Jesus comes from heaven to restore everything the prophets spoke about (Dan. 7; Luke 17:22-24; Acts 3:21). The kingdom of heaven will fill the earth (Rev. 11:15-19).

Here in Acts 1:3 Jesus speaks to the apostles at length about God's kingdom. This is only the beginning of a kingdom of God/restoration of Israel focus in Acts. Jesus is likely teaching them the very kingdom message they will proclaim throughout Acts: "the kingdom of God" and "Jesus" are the content of Philip's and Paul's teaching (Acts 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23). By the end of Acts, Paul is proclaiming this message unhindered in Rome (in the heart of Daniel's fourth beast). This is not the ends of the earth, but "all roads lead to Rome." The future is bright.

And, of course, this is not merely the proclamation of a kingdom message but the enacting of a kingdom reality. When this message is received, the dominion of God's heavenly king is enacted and God's fame and obedience fill a little more of the earth (i.e., Psalm 2:8; 72:8; Isa. 5:26; 41:5; 49:6; Micah 5:4; Zech. 9:10, etc.). The God of heaven is taking over earth (Dan. 2:35, 44-45).

While Acts is often read only as "the growth of the church" — which, it is that — we need to also see this as part of the prophesied kingdom reality now coming to pass in its infancy: the rule of God is filling the earth and rescuing to the ends of the earth by means of God's plan in Jesus, the Spirit, and the church. *How all is this vision of God's kingdom mission to the ends of the earth significant for interpreting and applying Acts? Have you heard readings of Acts or of the gospel or the story of the Bible that contrast with this? Explain.*

4. (1:6-8) "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" The apostles want to know if the fullness of the kingdom will be restored to Israel *now*. Many often shake their heads here: "They can't stop thinking about a physical kingdom." But consider that the apostles may be asking a well-informed question and that maybe *we* misunderstand the prophets and God's kingdom.

- *First*, drawing a *harsh* physical-spiritual dichotomy may be ill-informed for many reasons — including the vagueness of these terms (what do we mean by physical? spiritual?) and the fact that Jesus in part disrupts those categories: God who is spirit became human.
- *Second*, Luke is providing assurance (Luke 1:1-3). God will still need to correct the apostles (*cf.* Acts 10), but if they still have no understanding of God's kingdom after 40 days of discussions and a minute before Jesus departs, this does not provide much confidence in what follows.
- *Third*, Jesus has criticized the apostles (*cf.* Luke 9:55, etc.), and yet he does not criticize them here. He corrects not their understanding of the kingdom's *nature* but their desire to know the kingdom's *timing*. "It is not for you to know the times..."
 - The Pharisees also questioned Jesus about the timing of God's kingdom (Luke 17:20-24). Jesus' reply reveals two periods of time/events related to God's kingdom. On one hand, the kingdom is here right now and it has not begun to come in obvious ways (17:20-21); on the other hand, when the kingdom is consummated at the coming of the Son of Man, you won't be able to miss him (or the kingdom; 17:22-24; Daniel 7).
 - But the "when" of that final day is according to the Father's plan and not for them to know. Peter will later say that all things will be restored when Jesus comes from heaven (Acts 3:21; *cf.* 1:11), but all they need to know for now is that the Holy Spirit will soon empower them for the next step in this kingdom plan.

- *Fourth*, God's kingdom is not from this world and does not operate like worldly kingdoms (John 19:36), but the Psalms and Prophets did foresee God's kingdom filling the earth. Further, the language of restoring the kingdom to Israel parallels Simeon's desire for "*the consolation of Israel*" and "*glory to your people Israel*" and Anna's anticipation of "*the redemption of Jerusalem*" (Luke 2:25, 32, 38; cf. 24:21). Certainly, we should not interpret the prophets in flatly literal ways (i.e., dispensational premillennialism). But we should also avoid putting the prophets through vague "spiritualized" interpretations as well. God intends us to look to the prophets for hope and instruction until the day they speak of dawns (2 Tim. 3:14-17; 2 Pet. 1:19); the less familiar we are with the prophets the easier it is to misunderstand Jesus, the Gospels, and the kingdom as spirituality devoid of materiality and to dismiss the apostles' question.

The apostles simply wanted to be clued into the *when* of that final victory of God's kingdom in Israel, but Jesus replies that this knowledge is on a need to know basis. (Certainly, Acts 10ff makes it evident that the apostles were still at this time defining Israel ethnically on the basis of Torah and circumcision, and that would need to change). *How all does this understanding of God's kingdom — its nature and its timing — impact our understanding of God's mission? Our hope? Acts?*

5. (1:4-8) "Wait for the promise of the Father... you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit... and you will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth." One is struck here by the command to *wait* until the Holy Spirit comes. It appears they are not to begin their mission of witnessing to and enacting the death, resurrection, and reign of Jesus *until* the Spirit comes upon them. *How all does this affect our read of Acts and our understanding of the kingdom mission today? How does the bringing of the kingdom by witness to Jesus contrast with other ways people have sought to bring the kingdom?*

THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. It is to the church's benefit that Jesus leaves, or else the Holy Spirit will not come. The promise of the Holy Spirit stirred ancient hopes for those who knew Scripture. The Holy Spirit hovered over the chaotic waters and brought life to creation; the Holy Spirit empowered leaders to conquer enemies; the Holy Spirit gave fresh revelation of God's will. The prophets saw a day when the Spirit would be poured out on the people and the land to bring everything that was dead to new life — hearts, bodies, communities, and lands. The Spirit upon Jesus and eventually upon all believers signals the first fruits of the Spirit's coming and of the new creation.

THIS JESUS WILL COME IN THE SAME WAY. Cataclysm for God's people is foreseen in Zechariah 13:7-14:5 which suddenly ends when Yahweh goes out to fight for his people against the nations. "On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives... The Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him." More could be said here, but simply note that the two men in Acts say Jesus will come again in the same way he went into heaven, and note from Acts 1:12 — in connection with Zechariah 14 — where the apostles were with Jesus when he ascended into heaven: the Mount of Olives.

6. (1:9-11) "Why do you stand looking into heaven?" Get into the apostles' heads and attempt to answer this question. What all might they be thinking as they gaze into heaven? How all does the reply of the two men help them (and us) with similar feelings?

7. (1:15-22) "The Scripture had to be fulfilled..." Peter insists that what the Holy Spirit spoke by the mouth of David concerning *Judas* had to be fulfilled and he cites Psalm 69:25 and 109:8 as evidence that Judas would leave behind his share in the ministry and even that someone should take his place. If you read Psalm 69 and 109 from a strictly historical-contextual perspective, this it is hard to agree with Peter here. *What basis is there for seeing Judas' betrayal of Jesus, his death, and his later replacement in the Psalms and life of David? How all can this impact how we read the Scriptures and see Jesus?*

8. (1:21-26) *What all do you find to be significant about what happens here?*

9. *What else have you observed from Acts 1? What other questions do you have?*

ACTS 2

1. *Before continuing to more carefully examine Acts 2, read this chapter quickly and reflect on it from a high-level perspective. Reflect on Acts 2 in light of the following Scriptures and/or events.*

The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9)

Moses' Ascension/Return from Mt. Sinai with the Law (Exodus 19-32; see note)

Pentecost Feast (Exodus 23:16; Leviticus 23:15-21, etc.; see note)

Jealousy for the Spirit on Moses (Numbers 11:26-29)

Joshua follows Moses (Numbers 27:16-23); **Elisha follows Elisha** (2 Kings 2)

The New Exodus (Deut. 30:1-10; Ps. 106:47; 147:2; Isa. 11:10-13; Jer. 23:3; Ezek. 36-37, etc..)

The Feast of Weeks/Harvest/Pentecost/Shavuot takes place in late spring when the grain/wheat harvest starts coming in. A firstfruits offering is brought to the Lord at this time. Pentecost is preceded by Passover when an offering was brought from the very first bits of fruits on the first Sunday of Passover (Lev. 23:9-16; 50 days before Pentecost); Pentecost is followed by the feasts surrounding the ingathering (trumpets, atonement, tents) when all crops are harvested. Jewish tradition puts the giving of the Law at Sinai on Pentecost (cf. Ex. 19:1).

2. (2:1-13) [In light of what has come before in the history of God's people] *What all do you find to be significant about what happens here?*

3. (2:14-21) *This far, according to Peter, what is the significance of what they are seeing — these people [miraculously] proclaiming the mighty works of God in their own tongues? (note “wonders” and “signs”:
2:19, 22, 43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 14:3; 15:12)*

4. (2:22-36) (a) *What is the heart or aim of Peter's message here? How ought this to form our gospel living and proclamation?*

(b) *On what bases does he argue this? If you see any significance to the various evidences Peter lays out, note and explain them here*

5. (2:37-47) *What all strikes you as significant and instructive here — from Peter's conclusion, to the response, to the formation of the community of those who believed?*

ACTS 3:1-4:31

1. (ch. 3; cf. Isa. 35:6; Lk. 5:17-26; Acts 14:8-11) Read through this chapter and related Scriptures — *what all do you find to be the significance of this sign?*

2. (ch. 3) This sign is an opportunity to insist on repentance (*cf. 2:19-20*). *Carefully note the various ways Peter uses the OT Scriptures to explain these days and future days to motivate repentance. How all does Peter read their moment — where they are in the fulfillment “timeline.”*

3. (4:1-31; cf. Lk. 22:66-71) *Who all is annoyed here (and earlier with Jesus) and why all are they so annoyed? How all can this prepare us for today as we also do good and proclaim Jesus?*

4. (4:1-31; cf. Lk. 12:11-12) *How all do Peter, John, their friends, and God respond to this opposition? How all does this speak to us as we do good and proclaim Jesus?*

A SUPERIOR TEMPLE. In 6:13 Stephen is falsely accused of speaking against the temple and the law (*cf. Mt. 26:61; Mk. 14:58*). Stephen may have criticized the temple, but the accusation appears to be overblown at the least. While this sensitivity to the temple appears to come out of nowhere, there's much to do with the temple from 2:46-7:60. The believers meet, teach, and do signs in and around the temple. In fact, with the Holy Spirit in them, we know from the epistles that they are a temple (*Eph. 2; 1 Cor. 3, 6; 2 Cor. 6; 1 Pet. 2*). And this new temple is stealing the old temple's thunder: the presence of God dwells in the church through the Spirit (2:2-4, 38; 4:8, 13, 31), sins are blotted out (2:38; 3:19; 1 Kin. 8:46-52), the sick are healed (5:12-16; Lev. 12-15), there are no poor among them (4:34; Deut. 15:4), rebels are judged (5:1-11; Lev. 10:1-3), and more. One temple made by God is set alongside a temple made by hands, and it is apparent one should overtake the other. More could be said, but keep your eyes open for how Luke paints this superior temple within a temple and city within a city.

ACTS 4:32-5:16

1. (4:32-37; cf. Deut. 14:22-15:23, esp. 15:4-5; Luke 12:32-34; 14:33; Phil. 1:27-2:11) *What all strikes you as significant and/or instructive about this summary of the life and activity of the community of believers? As we seek to live out this reality, how should and shouldn't this play out?*

2. (5:1-11; cf. Gen. 3; Lev. 10:1-3) This account clearly contrasts the previous paragraph and may parallel the judgments on Nadab and Abihu in the tabernacle (among other judgments). *But what all do you find to be significant and instructive about this account and Luke's inclusion of it?*

Schnabel writes, "The church is the place of God's presence. Insofar as Ananias and Sapphira wanted to deceive the apostles and the other believers, they were lying to God." He continues, "Deceiving the church is not simply deceiving the pastors, or the other members, but God himself, who is present in the church through his Spirit." (Acts, Kindle Loc 8203-8218)

3. (5:12-16; cf. Luke 8:43-48) *Take time to meditate on this oft forgotten and impressive summary statement. What all strikes you as interesting, significant, or instructive here?*

THE CHURCH'S TEMPLE-LIKE GLORIFICATION. With other temple comparisons present around this section, another may be here. Peter, the apostles, and the assembly are esteemed here in the highest possible (and appropriate) way. Their glorification is reminiscent of what God said would happen to Israel in the Law and Prophets (Deut. 26:18-10; Isa. 55:3-5; 60:1-3, 13-14; 66:18-21, etc.). Both the judgment and the wonders make it evident that the Father, Son, and Spirit dwell in this assembly as in a temple (Eph. 2:19-22, etc.). The presence of God is a wondrous and fearful thing. You might want to keep away from for fear of death (5:5, 10-11, 13; Ex. 20:18; Num. 17:12-13). And, yet, you might hope to nick it and be blessed (Luke 8:43-48; 2 Sam. 6:11; 2 Ki. 13:21, etc.). As the cloud settled on the tabernacle (Ex. 40:35), as the power of the Most High overshadowed Mary (Lk. 1:35), as the cloud of God's presence overshadowed the apostles on the mount (Lk. 9:34), maybe God's powerful healing presence is with Peter when he overshadows (same Greek word in LXX and Luke-Acts) and heals them. Note who is provoked to jealousy (5:17). Regardless, the manner in which God dwells in, works through, and glorifies his people here is cause for wonder (Isa. 60:1-4). Living waters are splashing out of the temple, into the streets, and out to the surrounding towns (Ezek. 47:1-12; John 7:37-39).

ACTS 5:17-7:60

1. **(5:17-42) EXTERNAL.** *What all strikes you as significant or instructive here? (parallels 4:1-31)*

2. **(6:1-7) INTERNAL.** *What all strikes you as significant or instructive here? (parallels 4:32-5:16)*

3. **(6:8-7:60) Big picture:** *What are the key messages in Stephen's sermon? How all does his sermon fit within the context leading up to this moment? What else stands out to you from this account?*

ACTS 8

1. (8:1-8; cf. Deut. 4:27; 30:1-5; Zech. 10:8-10; 1 Thess. 4:13-18, etc.) For hundreds of years the Jews longed for God to gather them back to himself at Jerusalem (per numerous prophecies), and these new Jewish Christians have tasted that for years. But, now, suddenly, persecution scatters them. Scattering, exile, and gathering is a common theme in the Bible: people are forced to leave God's presence and land — anticipating the day when God will gather them back. But now this experience of exile and scattering is renarrated for God's people in Jesus. *How all does Luke play on theme and upset our prophetic expectations? How all is it important and instructive to connect this experience of God's people in Christ with the larger historical pattern?*

2. (8:4-25) *What all do you believe this account is crafted to teach? What all stands out to you as significant or instructive from this account? (cf. Samaritan history in 2 Kings 17; prophecy in Ezekiel 37:15-28)*

3. (8:26-40) *What all do you believe this account is crafted to teach? What all stands out to you as significant or instructive from this account? (cf. Isaiah 52:13-53:12; 56:3-8; note the setting and Isaiah's theme — ch. 35; 41:18; 43:16-21; 44:3-5; note the OG Ethiopian eunuch in Jer. 38:7ff)*

ACTS 9

Briefly review the prospectus to remind yourself of our goals for this class. The goals may serve as helpful interpretive prompts — i.e., read Acts in light of Jesus, Old Testament history and prophecy, Paul's epistles, etc. These are not intended to limit what you may see or what we may discuss, but rather to provide some direction and inspiration to read Acts in a fresh light.

1. (9:1-19) Jesus' appearance to Saul is big for Luke — it is told on three occasions in Acts. *What all stands out to you as significant or instructive from this account of Jesus' appearance to Saul?*

2 (9:20-31) It's one thing for Jesus to appear to Saul, what Saul will do and how the church and Israel may respond are another thing (*cf.* Jonah). *What all stands out to you as significant or instructive here?*

3. (9:32-43) The account now returns to focus on Peter until the end of chapter 12. *What all stands out to you as significant or instructive here?*

MANY CHARACTERS, ONE LORD AND SPIRIT. All the back and forth between different characters may feel a bit disorienting — Acts moves from highlighting Peter (1-5) to Stephen (6-7), Philip (8), Saul (9:1-31), before returning to Peter (9:32-12:19) and then to Paul the rest of the book. But, when compared to a book like Kings, Acts is refreshing. The main characters certainly find themselves in difficult situations — as in Kings — but Luke demonstrates them on the same mission, following the same Lord Jesus, and being empowered by the same Spirit. There's no rivalry or prolonged infighting. There are many workers in the kingdom, but, in the end, the Father, the Lord Jesus, and the Spirit are the heroes of this story that keep it going from Acts 1 to 28 and on into our day.

ACTS 10-11

- 1. Who moves along the events of Acts 10-11? Why all may this be significant?*
- 2. Explain Peter's logic and what moves Peter to go with these Gentiles. How all did the cleanliness and dietary laws of Leviticus appear to impact Israel's understanding of themselves and the nations?*
- 3. Considering the nature of further discussions in Acts 15, Galatians, etc. - why did there appear to be no concern about Ethiopians and Samaritans obeying Christ?*
- 4. What all causes the "circumcised" with Peter and in Jerusalem to conclude that God had granted repentance to the Gentiles? How all can this continue to be significant today? (cf. Eph. 4:1-6, etc.)*
- 5. What all is the function of Luke relaying to us the gospel's proclamation in Antioch and of the sending of relief to Judea in 11:19-30?*
- 6. How all can Acts 10-11 affect our vision of God's plan and the body of Christ? What all else stands out to you from these chapters?*

ACTS 12

Acts presents a story of God's kingdom *going* to the ends of the earth — inaugurated but not yet complete in its reach and influence. Jesus has been enthroned as king and he's waiting from that time for his enemies to be made a stool for his feet and he's also sending forth his word to save and reconcile people to him. The kingdom proclaimed by the prophets has begun (the seed has been planted in the dirt; the leaven in the dough), but it is not yet consummated (it hasn't yet filled the earth; all things are not yet restored; judgment has not yet been brought; God's will is not yet fully done on earth as in heaven). The kingdom is now, but not yet. *Read this chapter and both (1) reflect on how all this chapter demonstrates the the tension described above and how all we ought to live in light of that tension and (2) note and explain anything else that strikes you as significant (cf. Psalm 2, 72, 110; Dan. 3-7, etc.).*

ACTS 13

1. (13:1-12) Acts 13 marks a major shift to now focus almost entirely on the gospel's advance by the mouth of Paul and those with him. *What all strikes you as significant as the church receives direction by the Spirit and as Paul, Barnabas, and John [Mark] preach in Cyprus?*

Note the diversity of the teachers listed in 13:1. Barnabas and Saul are both Hebrews. Simeon was almost certainly black (i.e., his nickname, "Niger"). Lucius was from Cyrene — modern day Lybia (North Africa), and Manaen was a life-long friend of Herod [Antipas] the tetrarch (the one who beheaded John the Baptist, not the one in Acts 12 who beheaded James). Different places, looks, languages, cultures are represented here.

2. (13:13-43) Proclamations of the gospel can start to run together in our minds after awhile so that we may lose both their uniqueness and their similarities. As time permits, compare this proclamation with previous ones so you can see — *what is different? what is the same?*

Acts 2 — *the Spirit is given by the Lord Jesus whom you crucified but God raised up (unlike David); repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the Spirit.*

Acts 3 — *this man was healed by Jesus who is the prophet like Moses that all the prophets told about; repent and receiving be blessed by the Lord before he comes from heaven to bring full restoration.*

Acts 7 — *jealous of the church, apostles, and prophets, you think the presence of God is limited to the temple (unlike what we see from history and Scripture); you resist the Spirit now as our fathers have.*

Acts 10 — *Jesus had the Spirit, did good, healed those oppressed by the devil; they put him to death, God raised him up, we are witnesses and preach: he will judge all, but you may believe and be forgiven.*

Summarize Paul's message. What strikes you as significant from this proclamation of the gospel?

3. (13:44-52) Note the rejection of the Jewish leaders and how Paul and Barnabas handle this. Note also their use of Isaiah 49:6. *What all can we learn from this as we proclaim the gospel today?*

ACTS 14

1. (14) *What stands out to you as you consider how the gospel both comes to and impacts cultures?*

2. (14) *What stands out to you as you consider what we can expect until we enter God's kingdom?*

3. (14) *What all else stands out to you as interesting, significant, impactful, or instructive from this chapter?*

ACTS 16

1. (16:1-5) Timothy is circumcised so he can accompany Paul and Silas on their circuit to encourage the churches and deliver the decision reached at Jerusalem that circumcision is not required for salvation and entrance into the church. *What's going on? What significance might these examples have for us today?*

2. (15:36-41;16:6-10) In these accounts Paul and his companions *decide* to go out with the word, *are prevented* by the Spirit in some places, *receive a vision* of a man in Macedonia, and the group *concludes* God called them to Macedonia. While these accounts serve to transition the story of the gospel's spread to the West, we all know transitions are very difficult and disorienting as we seek to do God's will. *As you consider this, do you take any learnings from these accounts?*

3. (16:11-40) It could be said that the image of Isaiah 61:1 is faintly printed in the background of the Philippi incidents from vs. 16 on: *"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound."* Philippi was distinguished as a colony of Rome — the supposed height of Roman culture outside of Rome. It's citizens were free from taxes and free to govern themselves; and yet...

- Paul casts out a spirit from a slave girl who was treated as property to enrich her owners;
- Paul and Silas were unjustly attacked by a crowd, stripped, beaten, and thrown in prison before the bonds of all the prisoners are released;
- The jailer trembles with fear because he is doomed to certain execution, but this turns to salvation and rejoicing at belief in the gospel.

How all can this vision of God's power and of the gospel to set people free impact our vision of how the kingdom of God may touch lives and cultures today? How do we go about mediating that? And not? How all may this be received?

4. (16:11-40) *What else stands out to you as significant from this section?*

ACTS 17

1. (17:1-9) *What do you make of the mob's accusation against Paul and his companions? Reason carefully here — how does their accusation match up with reality? Compare with Psalm 2, 72, 110, etc. to help. What would be a perfectly balanced and proper representation of Paul and his message and of the reality he's proclaiming? How all does this help us understand the relationship between Jesus, Christians, and governing authorities? (avoid the common tendency here to over-spiritualize Jesus' kingship and kingdom)*

2. (17:1-15) *Consider both those who believed in Thessalonica and those Jews who came to belief in Berea. How all should their coming to believe in Jesus and their continued faith in him be exemplary to us today?*

3. (17:16-34) Though Paul's sermon in the Areopagus may at times be seen as the pleasant persuasion of eager seekers, a careful read of Luke's setup may give a different impression (the perspective below is based on Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 27-33). The philosophers refer to Paul as a *babbler* (*spermologos* — i.e., *Paul is an ignorant philosophical poser*). Athenians knew of Yahweh, but when they hear him talking about "Jesus" and "Resurrection" they misunderstand him as a *preacher of foreign divinities* bringing *new teaching* and *strange things* to their ears. This is not a compliment. This conjures up memories of another Athenian philosopher who received the death penalty for rejecting the polis-approved gods and for introducing "new," "strange" gods — Socrates. Paul is immediately *taken* to the Areopagus and asked for account of his teaching. This is no mere venue change to allow the intelligentsia to hear him better — Paul is being examined by the council (v. 34). This sets a scene of tension, danger, and *irony*: these Athenians who spend their time hearing new things are poised to slap Paul with the charge of teaching of new gods. *What is the thrust of Paul's message in this precarious situation? What all stands out to you as significant from his approach/message? Do you see ways we might use similar reasoning today?*

4. (17:30-32) *The Greeks believed in afterlife — why mock upon hearing of the resurrection of the dead?*

ACTS 18-19

CLAUDIUS AND THE JEWS. Luke tells us in 18:2 that Claudius commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. Suetonius (~AD 120) explains that this happened “because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus.” (Lives of the Twelve Caesars, Volume 5) If this is a reference to Jesus the Christ, this speaks to the large impact the gospel was having on the world then. “World upside down” may not be an exaggeration.

1. (18:1-17) Paul’s time in Corinth appears to be full of conflicts and conversions. *What all strikes you as significant or instructive as we find ourselves often walking through similar seasons? (cf. Ezek. 33:1-5)*

2. (18:24-19:7) Close to 30 years have passed since Pentecost — the gospel and John’s earlier call to repentance have reached far, but not completely. *What’s the nature of Apollos’ lack of understanding (18:24-28)? And what of these other disciples (19:1-7)? What appears to be theologically lacking here? What can we learn as we deal with theological misunderstandings — whether in ourselves or in others?*

3. (19:8-41) Often the Prophets and the reality of God’s kingdom are spiritualized (i.e., an exclusively interior question of whether Jesus is king over a person’s heart). *And yet, how all was the city of Ephesus demonstrably and publicly impacted by Paul and the Christians? How all did this impact come about? (and how all did it not?) How all can this help us understand our role and vision of the kingdom in the world?*

ACTS 20:1-21:16

A CHRISTLIKE JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM. Paul's focus now begins to transition to what awaits him at Jerusalem. This and the rest of Acts will bear a number of general similarities to the story of Jesus. Just as Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51) Paul is "hastening to be at Jerusalem" (Acts 20:16; now for Pentecost, not Passover). Just as Jesus warns that he will suffer at Jerusalem, so Paul is warned repeatedly that he will face similar experiences at Jerusalem. While Paul's life will take a Christlike slant (as it always has — 2 Corinthians 4), there are differences as well. Paul will not avoid testifying in Jerusalem, but if he can avoid some suffering and death, he will speak up. Further, Jesus' disciples were confused by Jesus' predictions of his suffering (Peter: "Never!"); but with Paul, however little we like it or even understand it, we actually have reason to expect it since the Lord suffered and died in Jerusalem (cf. Luke 9:23-27). The challenge is understanding that Paul will suffer, it is not desiring it and not knowing exactly what fate awaits him or the gospel in the fledgling churches he has helped plant.

1. (20:1-21:16) Despite Paul knowing the path he is on is difficult and full of suffering, Paul is resigned to go to Jerusalem nonetheless. *Why? How all does this strike you? What lessons are there for us in this?*

2. (20:17-38) *What all strikes you as instructive or significant from Paul's words to the elders of Ephesus?*

3. (20:1-21:16) *What all else strikes you as interesting or noteworthy from 20:1-21:16? (Points of interest you might probe, question, and explore — gathered to break bread on the first day of the week (20:7), the Holy Spirit's varied (?) witness (20:22-23; 21:4, 11-14), Philip's prophesying daughters (21:9), etc.)*

ACTS 21:17-26:32

Paul's Defenses

Ch. 22:1-21 — Conversion, etc. to Jerusalem mob after temple event; *interrupted regarding Gentiles*

Ch. 23:1-10 — Brief words to Jewish council with Roman Tribune; *argument over resurrection*

Ch. 24:10-21 — Defense to the Governor Felix; *interrupted regarding resurrection, then judgment*

Paul appeals to Caesar before Festus in ch. 25:6-12

Ch. 26 — Conversion, defense before King Agrippa and Festus; *interrupted regarding resurrection*

1. (21:17-26:32) *Look at these chapters as a whole and hone in on what is really being disputed here. What all are the Jews accusing Paul of in these chapters? And what all may they actually concerned about? What all are the Roman authorities concerned about? (note how familiar this trial feels to Jesus' trial)*

2. (23:6; 24:15, 21; 26:6-8, 22-23;) *Despite various accusations against Paul, Paul insists he is actually on trial for the resurrection (of Jesus and of all). Why all does Paul see that this really comes down to a dispute over resurrection? Reading what Paul says, how all did Israel view resurrection and how has that impacted Paul's vision of what God has done in Jesus? What are the various responses?*

3. (23:1-5) *Carefully re-read the skirmish that breaks out in the Sanhedrin council. What do you make of Paul's condemnation of the high priest? What do you make of his "I did not know?" and "apology?"*

4. (25:10-11, 18-21; 26:24-32) *What do you make of Festus' and Agrippa's judgment of this whole matter? Are they reasonable to be dismissive of the whole case? Why all does Paul ultimately appeal to Caesar?*

ACTS 27-28

1. (27:1-28:16) The lives of Paul, Aristarchus, Luke, and the rest of the ship are in constant danger in this voyage to Rome. These three men are subject to the foolish decisions of the centurion and the ship owner and to violent winds and waves that upend all plans. They are swept along the seas in hunger and total darkness. When they finally near land, Paul and the rest of the prisoners are nearly killed. And when they land on Malta, Paul is bitten by a snake and appears sure to die. And yet, God had assured Paul they would reach Rome (23:11; 27:23-25), so Paul trusted God's word, and God delivered them safely as promised. Paul is a very different prophet than Jonah — who ended up storm-tossed and in the sea because he fled God's will. Paul has firmly planted his life on the Lord's side, what should he fear? For good reason, the seas often serve as a stand-in for the untamed chaos of the world, for malevolent spiritual powers, and for the rebellious nations to whom God's people are often subjected. Whether we are living clearly on God's side or not, our very lives and futures and that of our family and friends will at times hang in the balance. *Remembering what all we are promised (which may not include safe voyage), consider this account, consider Jonah's account as a contrast, and consider Romans 8:28 as well — what all can we reflect on and learn as we consider the wild, chaotic nature of our lives and of the future?*

JONAH AND PAUL. Jonah did not care about the pagans in Nineveh or on the ship he boarded. He fled God's will and apathetically slept through the storm because he knew the voyage was doomed. And Jonah would rather die than obey God's will ("Hurl me into the sea"). In contrast, Paul cared for the pagans to whom he was sent in Rome and those with whom he travelled. Paul is the reason they are all saved from the storm, not the reason they are storm-tossed in the first place. Paul mediates God's blessing to the nations, not a curse. Also compare Paul with Jesus (Luke 8:22-25; 9:16-17)

BEATING THE SAILORS AT THEIR GAME. Paul has been on the defensive, but that changes here. He gives sound counsel (v. 10), encourages everyone with a vision (v. 21-26), ensures the centurion keeps everyone on board (v. 30-32), feeds the ship with bread (v. 33-38), the prisoners' lives are spared on account of the Centurion's favor toward Paul (v. 42-44), and God saves everyone on Paul's account (v. 24, 44). The church has God's presence more potently than the temple. Philip/Paul beat Simon/Ephesus at their magic, Peter/Stephen/Paul read and live out Scripture better than the Jews. Paul beats the philosophers in Athens at philosophy, and "this scene represents a parallel act of narrative aggression." (Schreiner, 103; he credits Loveday Alexander, *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Context*, 84) The Lord repeatedly demonstrates his superiority in his servants so all might be humbled and ask, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

2. (28:1-10) You never know what kind of reception you'll when landing on an unknown island. Yet, the Barbarians on Malta show unusual kindness to these 276 voyagers. "Barbarians fulfill Greco-Roman virtue expectations more than the elite in Philippi, the philosophers in Athens, the powerful in Ephesus, and the sacred in Jerusalem." (Schreiner, *The Mission of the Triune God*, 104; he credits Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. 4, 24:1-28:31, 3664) We don't read of Paul verbally preaching the gospel here (though he may have), but they clearly witness its power in Paul and are very responsive (contra Luke 6:10-11; 11:15; 13:14). *Reflect on what happens here and also on Romans 1:14 (cf. also Matt. 21:31-32 and 1 Cor. 1:26). What all can we learn here as we do good? proclaim the gospel? form church-communities?*

3. (28:17-31) *Reflecting on what has come before and what will come later, how all does this reflect a fitting "end" to Luke-Acts?*