

Bible Study - Acts

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Of the many miracles recounted in Acts, none has more formal resemblance to the miracles of Jesus in the Gospels than this one. There is one major difference—Jesus healed by His own authority; Peter healed by the “name” of Jesus, which was indeed by Jesus’ authority at work through the agency of the apostles. Perhaps more striking still are the parallels between this story, Jesus’ healing of a paralytic (Luke 5:17–26), and Paul’s healing of a lame man at Lystra (Acts 14:8–11). Indeed, in Acts most of the miracles of Peter have their counterpart in similar works of Paul in the latter half of the book.¹¹ In this way Luke showed that the work of Christ begun in his earthly life (cf. Acts 1:1) continued in the work of the young Christian community. In Acts the miracles were always in the service of the word, confirming God’s presence in the spread of the gospel or as a sign that enabled faith. Nowhere is that more evident than in this healing of the blind beggar.

3:1 The first two verses provide the setting. Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer. They were often together in the early portion of Acts (3:1, 3, 11; 4:13, 19; 8:14).²² Peter did all the speaking and acting, with John merely standing in the background.

John’s presence is sometimes explained as based on the Jewish law that at least two witnesses are necessary to confirm any testimony (cf. 2 Cor 13:1). The practice may be traced to Jesus’ sending his disciples out on mission by pairs (Luke 10:1), a practice that still retains its wisdom and validity. Peter and John are said to have gone *up* to the temple. There were various accesses to the temple, some of which involved a descent. Whether one actually ascended or descended to the temple, the customary idiom was to “go up” for worship there. The word Luke

¹¹ For a treatment of the miracles in Acts, see the excurses in G. Schneider (*Die Apostelgeschichte*, HTKNT [Freiburg: Herder, 1980], 1:304–10) and R. Pesch (*Die Apostelgeschichte*, Teilband I: Apg. 1–12 [Zurich: Benziger, 1986], 141–48). See also P. J. Achtemeier, “The Lukan Perspective on the Miracles of Jesus: A Preliminary Sketch,” *JBL* 94 (1975): 547–62; F. Neiryck, “The Miracle Stories in the Acts of the Apostles,” in *Les Acts des Apôtres: Tradition, rédaction, théologie*, ed. J. Kremer (Gembloux: Duculot, 1979), 169–213; J. A. Hardon, “The Miracle Narratives in the Acts of the Apostles,” *CBQ* 16 (1954): 303–18.

²² John was almost certainly the disciple John, the son of Zebedee. Some interpreters have identified him with John Mark, based on the testimony of Papias that he was the disciple and interpreter of Peter (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 3.39). When Luke introduced him to the narrative in Acts, however, he was careful to distinguish him as “that John who is also called Mark” (Acts 12:12). Assuming John was the “beloved disciple,” the Fourth Gospel is an independent witness to this pairing of Peter and John (13:23–25; 20:2–8; 21:20–22).

used for the temple throughout this narrative is *hieron*, i.e., the broad term for the entire temple complex.

The time of the apostles' visit was the "ninth" hour, three in the afternoon, i.e., the hour of prayer. It was also the time of the evening *Tamid*, one of the two sacrifices held daily in the temple.³³ These had become prescribed times of prayer, and people would come to the temple at the sacrifice times to observe the ceremony and pray. The largest crowds would thus have been found at the times of sacrifice, as Peter and John must have been well aware; for they went to the temple for prayer and for witness.

3:2 Verse 2 introduces the one who would be healed. He is described as "crippled [*chōlos*, lame] from birth [literally, 'from his mother's womb']." The fact that he was born lame makes his healing all the more remarkable (cf. 4:22). This man was no recent "psychosomatic" cripple but one who was congenitally lame. When Peter and John arrived at one of the temple gates, this man was in the process of being carried and placed there to beg for alms from those entering the temple.

That he would have been carried there so late seems strange, for the afternoon *Tamid* was the final stage of the daily temple worship; the crowds would soon have been gone for the day. Still, it was one of the two major periods of worship, and many would have come to the temple at precisely this time to express their devotion to God. It was prime time for receiving alms. The rabbis taught that there were three pillars for the Jewish faith—the Torah, worship, and the showing of kindness, or charity.⁴⁴ Almsgiving was one of the main ways to show kindness and was thus considered a major expression of one's devotion to God. With their minds set on worship, those who entered the temple for the evening sacrifice and prayer would be particularly disposed to practice their piety by generously giving alms to a lame beggar.

Where did all this take place? Luke described the gate as the "gate called Beautiful." Unfortunately Jewish literature has no reference to a gate called "beautiful." From the third century on, it has been identified with the Shushan gate, which was located on the eastern wall of the temple precincts and was the main access for those approaching the temple from the Kidron Valley. There are serious problems with this identification, however. It was primarily an access for those coming to the temple from the east outside Jerusalem, and Acts has given the picture that the apostles were no longer residing at Bethany, east of the city, but were staying in Jerusalem (cf. 1:14; 2:1). Further, access to the Shushan gate was extremely steep and treacherous because it was located on the eastern wall at the top of the precipitous cliff overlooking the Kidron valley. Few would have chosen such a hazardous entrance to the temple, and it would not have been a good spot for begging.⁵⁵ A more likely identification thus seems to

³³ Josephus recorded that the two daily sacrifices took place in the morning and at the ninth hour (*Ant.* 14.65; cf. Num 28:4). There also was a third time of prayer, probably at sunset. See O. Holtzmann, "Die Taglichen Gebetsstunden im Judentum und Urchristentum," *ZNW* 12 (1911): 90–107.

⁴⁴ *M. Abot* 1:2.

⁵⁵ The Shushan gate provided immediate access to Solomon's Colonnade where Peter delivered his speech (v. 11). This observation offers plausible grounds for identifying it as the place where the healing took place. For arguments favoring the Shushan gate, see K. Lake and H. J. Cadbury, *The Beginnings of Christianity, The Acts of the Apostles*,

be one of the gates that led into the sanctuary proper. Josephus spoke of ten gates in the sanctuary. Nine, he said, were overlaid with silver and gold; but the tenth “was of Corinthian bronze and far exceeded in value those plated with silver and set in gold.”⁶⁶ So massive was this gate that when it was closed each evening, it “could scarcely be moved by twenty men.”⁷⁷ This seems to be the same gate identified in the rabbinic literature as the Nicanor gate.

There is some discrepancy between the sources about the exact location of this gate. Josephus placed it at the far eastern access to the sanctuary, leading from the court of the Gentiles (the outer courtyard) into the court of the women. The rabbinic sources place it at the eastern access to the court of the men of Israel, thus between the court of the women and that of the men. Many scholars see Josephus as giving the correct location, since he was writing from living memory, whereas the rabbinic writings date from a period long after the destruction of the temple.⁸⁸ This seems to be the most likely spot for Peter’s encounter with the lame man. He lay at the beautiful gate with its magnificent doors of Corinthian bronze, begging at the entrance to, but still definitely outside, the sanctuary.

3:3–5 Verses 3–5 relate Peter and John’s encounter with the lame man. “Alms, alms,” he begged, like a stuck phonograph record, as he would have uttered hundreds of times a day. This time the response was different. Typically, donors would flip a coin in his direction as they hastened into the temple, scarcely giving him a glance. This time the would-be benefactors stopped in their tracks. Peter fixed his gaze on him (*atenizō*). “Look [*blepō*] at me,” he said. This obviously was not going to be a chance encounter, so the man responded by giving his total attention (*epechō*) to Peter.⁹⁹ Perhaps he expected a display of unusual generosity. Would this be his day? Yes, it would be, but not as he might think.

3:6a Verse 6 is the heart of the passage, the one detail that sets this story apart from the usual narrative: “I have no silver or gold.” Peter perhaps cast his glance up at the magnificent doors that towered above the poor beggar. They had no silver or gold either, with their beautiful craftsmanship in solid Corinthian bronze. They were too precious to be marred with an overlay that would only detract from their beauty. All the other gates of the sanctuary were gilded. Not this one. Some things are more precious than silver or gold. The beggar was soon to learn this lesson of the “Beautiful” gate.

4:32 and D. Hamm, “Acts 3:1–10: The Healing of the Temple Beggar as Lucan Theology,” *Bib* 67 (1986): 305–19.

⁶⁶ Josephus, *War* 5.201 (cf. 5.198, 201–06; 2.411).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.293.

⁸⁸ G. Schrenck, “ἱερός, κ.τ.λ.” *TDNT* 3:236; E. Schürer, “Die *Thura* oder *Pulē* Horaia Acts. 3, 2 und 10,” *ZNW* 7 (1906): 51ff. The view that the rabbinic location (between courts of women and men) is correct is argued by E. Stauffer, “Das Tor des Nikanor,” *ZNW* 44 (1952–53): 44–66. For a full discussion of the issues, see K. Lake, *Beginnings* 5:479–86.

⁹⁹ Hamm, “Acts 3:1–10,” 314–15, suggests that this concentration of words for “fixing one’s attention” points to the deeper significance of the healing narrative in its total context. The miracle sets the stage for the gospel (3:12–26), which is the truest basis of “healing” in a spiritual sense.

3:6b–10 That more precious something is related in vv. 6b–8, the gift of healing. “In the name of Jesus” Peter commanded the man to walk. The reference to “the name” is not incidental. In the biblical sense a name is far more than a label. It represents a person and is an extension of that person’s being and personality. To invoke the name of Jesus is to call upon his authority and power.¹¹⁰⁰ In a real sense, then, Jesus through Peter continued his healing ministry. With a healing touch common to miracle narratives, Peter grasped the man’s right hand and lifted him up. It is almost as if at this point the man needed all the encouragement he could get.¹¹¹¹ The man felt the new strength surging through his feet and ankles.¹¹²² He jumped to his feet and began to walk. With his increasing awareness of the miracle that had happened to him, he entered the sanctuary with Peter and John. Before, as the lame beggar, he sat in the court of the Gentiles at the gate to the sanctuary. Day by day he sat there at the threshold to the place of worship, but he could not enter. He was lame, blemished, and denied access to the inner courts (cf. Lev 21:17–20; 2 Sam 5:8).¹¹³³ At this time not only had he received physical healing, but he had found spiritual acceptance as well. For the first time he was deemed worthy to enter the house of worship. This theme will repeat itself in Acts. Those who were rejected as unworthy for worship in the old religion of Israel found full acceptance in the name of Jesus, whether a lame beggar, an Ethiopian eunuch, a woman, or a Gentile.

No wonder the man was filled with such joy. He began walking, jumping, and praising God. For the first time he could really praise God in the place of praise, in God’s house. Luke perhaps gave a veiled reference to the man’s healing being a sign of the messianic times that had come in Jesus. He used a rare word (*hallomai*) for the man’s jumping, a word found in the Septuagint text of Isa 35:6 with reference to the messianic age: “Then will the lame leap like a deer.” The people who were present at the temple witnessed the transformation. They knew the man for the lame beggar he had been and saw what he had become as he leapt about in the temple praising God. They were filled with awe and amazement at what they saw, and that wonder prepared them for Peter’s explanation.

3:11 Verse 11 is transitional, linking the healing narrative in the temple with Peter’s sermon from Solomon’s Colonnade. Solomon’s Colonnade lay along the eastern wall and thus across the

¹⁰¹⁰ “The name” represents many aspects of the authority and presence of Christ in Acts: healings and miracles (3:6, 16; 4:7, 10, 30), baptism into his lordship (2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5), forgiveness of sins (10:43), the power for witness (4:17f.; 5:28, 40), even persecutions (5:41; 9:16; 15:26). The “name” represents the abiding presence of Christ in the community of believers. See W. Willimon, *Acts*, INT (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988), 45. Commitment to Christ is essential to invoking the power of Jesus’ name. There is no magical efficacy to it, as Acts 19:13–22 illustrates.

¹¹¹¹ A. T. Robertson, *WP* 3:42.

¹²¹² Verse 7 has often been used to support the “medical language” theory for Lukan authorship. The terms used here, however, are more literary vocabulary than technical medical language. See *Beginnings* 4:34.

¹³¹³ See B. Reicke, *Glaube und Leben der Urgemeinde: Bemerkungen zu Apg. 1–7* (Zurich: Zwingli, 1957), 64–65.

court of the Gentiles and some distance from the sanctuary.¹¹⁴⁴ Although Luke did not mention any exit from the sanctuary, one has to assume that the group exited the temple by way of the beautiful gate, traversed the court of the Gentiles, and reassembled at Solomon's portico.¹¹⁵⁵ The scene was now set for Peter's speech. The healed man was there as living evidence of the miracle, holding fast to Peter and John. The crowd likewise came running to the scene with a mixture of curiosity and awe. Peter was not about to miss this opportunity for witness.

2. Peter's Sermon from Solomon's Colonnade (3:12–26)

¹²When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? ¹³The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. ¹⁴You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. ¹⁵You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see.

¹⁷"Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. ¹⁸But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. ¹⁹Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, ²⁰and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. ²¹He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. ²²For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. ²³Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.'

²⁴"Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. ²⁵And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' ²⁶When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."

Comparison of this sermon with Peter's sermon at Pentecost reveals many of the same elements. The elements in common are the address ("Men, Israelites"), beginning the sermon by correcting a false impression, reference to God's "glorifying" Jesus, a contrast of Jesus' death with his resurrection, reference to the apostles' witness to the resurrection, the responsibility of the Jerusalemites for Jesus' death, extensive proofs from the prophets, references to Jesus'

¹⁴¹⁴ Although a part of the Herodian temple, the colonnade was attributed to Solomon because he was the first to fortify the eastern wall and erect a colonnade inside it. See Josephus, *War* 5.185. Christians evidently often gathered there (cf. Acts 5:12), and Jesus was found there in the Fourth Gospel (John 10:23).

¹⁵¹⁵ The Western text solved this problem by adding the participle ἐκπορευομένου to v. 11, thus noting that they "exited" the temple.

exaltation and God's divine purposes, and an appeal for repentance. The two sermons contain significant differences as well. For example, the scriptural proofs in the Pentecost sermon aim at establishing the messianic status of Jesus. Those in this sermon are aimed at the need for the Jews to repent and accept Jesus as the one sent from God. A far greater proportion of this sermon is devoted to the appeal. Also there are new elements in this sermon: an emphasis on faith, a softer treatment of the Jewish responsibility for Jesus' death, and a number of striking, perhaps early Jewish-Christian titles for Jesus, such as Servant, Holy and Righteous One, Author of life, and Prophet-like-Moses.¹¹⁶⁶ The speech itself falls into two main portions. First, Peter established the relationship between the healing of the lame man and the basic Christian proclamation of the death and resurrection of Christ (3:12–16). Then he appealed to the Jews to repent and accept Christ as the Messiah sent from God (3:17–26).¹¹⁷⁷

3:12 Verses 12 and 16 go closely together. Verse 12 raises the question about the power behind the man's healing. Verse 16 provides the answer. In between is inserted the basic kerygma of the death and resurrection of Christ and the Jewish responsibility in those events. The basic function of vv. 13–15 is to establish the Jewish guilt in rejecting Jesus. The remainder of the sermon is basically an appeal to repent and affirm Christ.

Peter began by seeking to correct any misunderstanding that he or John had healed the man by their own power or piety. No, it was faith in the name of Jesus that healed the man (v. 16). But how could the name of Jesus have such power? Verses 13–15 answer that question. The power is his by virtue of his glorification (v. 13) and his resurrection (v. 15). The "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" had glorified his servant Jesus, raising him from the dead (v. 15). The patriarchal formula was a familiar one in Judaism (cf. Exod 3:6). It is perhaps not by accident that the same formula appears in Luke 20:37, a passage that deals with the resurrection. God is the God of the living. The glorification refers to Christ's exaltation to God's right hand. As the glorified, risen One, Christ has the power to grant healing in his name.

3:13–15 One is struck by the unusual title "servant" (*pais*) applied here to Jesus. It is not a common title for Jesus in the New Testament, occurring only here and in v. 26 and twice in chap. 4 (vv. 27, 30).¹¹⁸⁸ The usage seems to be basically liturgical in chap. 4, for it is applied there to David as well as Christ (v. 25). Here in chap. 3, particularly in a context dealing with the *death* of Jesus, it is tempting to see an allusion to Christ as the suffering servant of Isaiah. This

¹¹⁶⁶ On the whole subject see R. F. Zehnle, *Peter's Pentecost Discourse: Tradition and Lukan Reinterpretation in Peter's Speeches of Acts 2 and 3*, SBLMS 15 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971).

¹¹⁷⁷ Adapted from J. Schlosser, "Moise, Serviteur du Kerygme apostolique d'après Ac. 3, 22–26," *RSR* 61 (1987): 17–31.

¹¹⁸⁸ Though the title *παῖς θεοῦ* is confined to Acts, the servant psalms are quoted throughout the NT (Matt 8:17; 12:18–21; Luke 22:37; John 12:38; Acts 8:32f; Rom 10:16; 15:21) and perhaps alluded to in significant places such as Jesus' baptism (Mark 1:11 and parallels), Jesus' "ransom" saying (Mark 10:45), and the last supper (Mark 14:24). There are many additional places where the concept of Jesus' suffering servanthood appears, notably in 1 Pet 2:22–25; 3:18. See J. D. Williams, *Acts*, GNC (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 59; *Beginnings* 5:364–70; J. Jeremias, "παῖς θεοῦ," *TDNT* 5:677–717.

becomes even more likely when one considers the possible allusions to the servant psalms that run throughout vv. 13–14, in the references to “glorification” (Isa 52:13), the “righteous one” (Isa 53:11), and being “handed over” or “delivered up” (*paradidomi*, twice in LXX of Isa 53:12).¹¹⁹⁹

Finally, the most likely prophecies of Christ’s suffering, referred to in 3:18, would be those of Isa 52:13–53:12, the passage quoted in Acts 8:32–33. The suffering servant concept is prominent throughout the New Testament. Perhaps the reason the title only occurs in the early chapters of Acts is that the Greek word used in Isaiah for servant (*pais*) can be translated “son” as well and so was assimilated into the more familiar “son of God” confession in the Greek-speaking church. Indeed, that very tendency appears in the *King James Version* of Acts 3:13, 26. The emphasis in the use of a servant Christology in Acts 3:13, 26 is not on the vicarious death but on the election of Christ as servant. God has chosen him, sent him, and exalted him. The Jewish guilt lies in their rejection and denial of God’s chosen servant.

Even though God glorified Jesus, the Jerusalemites did the opposite, handing him over to death and disowning him before Pilate (v. 13b). The best commentary on this statement is the passion narrative in Luke 23:13–25. There Pilate is shown to have attempted to release Jesus three times, each being rebuffed by the Jews. So here Pilate is said to have decided to let him go. Both here and in the Gospel, Pilate was primarily a witness to the guilt of the Jerusalem Jews. He “surrendered Jesus to their will” (Luke 23:25). Likewise the Jewish request for Barabbas, a “murderer,” is fully set forth in Luke 23:18–19, 25. One should not miss the irony in v. 14. The Jerusalemites requested that a murderer be released to them, for they were themselves murderers. They killed “the author of life” (v. 15). But the seeming defeat of the cross ended in victory: “God raised him from the dead.” Peter and John were themselves witnesses to the reality of his resurrection. The guilt of the Jerusalem Jews was well established. Their real guilt was, however, not so much in their delivering God’s chosen one to death as in their denial of Jesus (vv. 13–14). Peter continued to emphasize this in the remainder of his sermon. God sent the Christ to bless them, the sons of the covenant (v. 25), but they disowned him.

In vv. 14–15 three additional terms are applied to Christ—the Holy One, the Righteous One, and the Author of life. The Holy One is a title in the Old Testament applied to Elisha (2 Kgs 4:9) and Aaron (Ps 106:16, RSV). In the New Testament it appears to be a messianic term. Demons (Mark 1:24) and men (John 6:69) confessed Jesus as “Holy One of God.” It occurs also in 1 John 2:20 (“holy one”) and in Rev 3:7 (“him who is holy”) as a designation for Christ. There is some evidence for the messianic use of Righteous One prior to Christianity; it appears as a title for the Messiah in *1 Enoch* 38:2; 46:3; 53:6 and *Pss. Sol.* 17:35. In Zech 9:9, a Christian *testimonium* (cf. Matt 21:5), the messianic King is described as “righteous.” The title appears also in Acts 7:52 and 22:14. Finally there is the term “author [*archēgos*] of life.” The term occurs only here, in 5:31, and twice in Hebrews (2:10; 12:2). The word has a double nuance, meaning either leader/pioneer or author/originator. In this passage either meaning could be applied. Christ is either the author, the originator and source of life, or he is the leader in the resurrection-life,

¹⁹¹⁹ See J. E. Menard, “*Pais Theou* as Messianic Title in the Book of Acts,” *CBQ* 19 (1957): 83–92; J. Dupont, *Salvation of the Gentiles*, trans. J. Keating (New York: Paulist, 1979), 142.

the firstborn from the dead (cf. 26:23). The term is not a messianic title as such but an apt summary of the work of Christ in a context that deals with resurrection.

3:16 Having established that Christ has been exalted by God in light of his resurrection, and consequently that he is now in the position to dispense the divine Spirit and power, Peter answered his original question about the power behind the lame man's healing (v. 16). The Greek is complex and somewhat obscure, but the NIV probably renders it as clearly as it can be by separating it into two parallel statements, both of which emphasize two things active in the man's healing—faith and the name of Jesus. Ultimately the name, the power of Jesus, healed the man—not Peter's or John's power. But the power of Jesus worked through faith. Whose faith? That of the apostles or that of the man? Perhaps Luke deliberately left it open. Surely Peter worked by faith. But what about the man? If he had little faith to begin with, the miracle that led him to this point—clinging as he did to the apostles (v. 11)—was already bringing about in him the greater miracle of faith in Christ, the Author of life. Perhaps this is what Luke wanted us to see by emphasizing faith alone rather than the possessor of faith. For after all, faith is the greatest miracle of all, and that miracle stood open to all in Solomon's Colonnade that day.

The concluding portion of Peter's sermon can be divided into two parts, both relating to the need for the Jews to repent. Verses 17–21 give the basic call to repentance and the blessings God will grant them as a result. Verses 22–26 give scriptural support for the appeal.

3:17–18 One is struck by the conciliatory tone of vv. 17–18. The Jews in Jerusalem acted "in ignorance" when they did not recognize Jesus as the Holy and Righteous One, the anointed Servant of God. In actuality he was the author of life for them, but they sent him to his death. This was a sin of ignorance. Had they known him for who he truly was, "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor 2:8). Such sins were considered by the Jews as forgivable sins and were distinguished from conscious, intentional sins, which the Old Testament describes as those done "with a high hand" (RSV). Means of atonement were available for sins of ignorance, but not for intentional, deliberate sins (cf. Num 15:27–31). Jesus himself had recognized their ignorance in crucifying him and had already prayed for their forgiveness (Luke 23:34). Thus, Peter was offering the Jerusalem Jews a second chance. Once they had disowned the Christ. It was, however, a rejection in ignorance. Now they could accept Christ and be forgiven. Should they fail to do so once Peter gave them a full understanding of Christ's true identity, it would be a wholly different matter, a deliberate, "high-handed" rejection.

In these passages that deal with the Jewish responsibility for Jesus' death, it should be borne in mind that there are four mitigating emphases. One is this emphasis on ignorance. A second is that Acts nowhere contains a blanket condemnation of the Jews: only the Jerusalem Jews are given responsibility in Jesus' death. In Paul's speeches to the Jews of the dispersion, he never charged them with any guilt in Jesus' crucifixion but made clear that only the Jerusalemites were responsible (cf. Acts 13:27–28; cf. Luke 13:33–34). Third, the Gentiles are shown to have shared in the culpability ("lawless men," 2:23; Pilate, 3:13). Finally, the suffering of the Messiah was bound up with God's own divine purposes (v. 18): God foretold it, the prophets had spoken it, and the death of Christ fulfilled it. The mystery of the divine sovereignty worked through the tragedy born of human freedom to bring about God's eternal purposes for the salvation of humanity (cf. 2:23f.). God took the cross, the quintessence of human sin, and turned it into the triumph of the resurrection. But where did the prophets predict this suffering of Christ? Luke referred to such predictions often (cf. Luke 24:46; Acts 17:3; 26:22f.; significantly

also 1 Pet 2:21f.). The servant psalm of Isa 52:13–53:12 immediately comes to mind, but the early Christians did not fail to note many other Old Testament passages as finding their ultimate realization in the passion of Christ (e.g., Jer 11:19; Zech 12:10; 13:7; Pss 22; 31; 34; 69).

3:19–20 Peter gave the call to repentance (v. 19) with two expressions: “repent” (*metanoēō*) and “turn to God” (*epistrephō*). The Jerusalem Jews were to have a complete change of mind, turning from their rejection of Christ and turning, or “returning,” to God. In rejecting God’s Messiah they had rejected God’s purpose for them. Accepting the Messiah would thus be a return to God. In vv. 19b–20 Peter gave the threefold result of their repentance: (1) their sins would be forgiven, (2) the “times of refreshing” would come upon them, and (3) God would send the Messiah whom he had appointed for them. The forgiveness of sins is clear enough.²²⁰⁰ Throughout Acts repentance is closely connected with forgiveness; indeed it is the basis for forgiveness (cf. 2:38).

The main sin Peter laid upon the Jerusalem Jews was their sin of ignorance in rejecting the Messiah. True forgiveness could only have come from their turning to God by accepting his Messiah. Then only would “the times of refreshing” come from the Lord. The phrase “times of refreshing” (*anapsyxis*) is difficult. The basic meaning of the word is the cooling off that comes from blowing, like the refreshment of a cool breeze. This rare biblical word occurs only here and once in the Septuagint (Exod 8:11), where it refers to the relief that came to Egypt after the plague of frogs ceased. It appears in the Jewish apocalypse 4 Ezra 11:46, where it refers to the final messianic times of Israel’s redemption. What is unclear is whether it indicates a temporary period of respite during the period of messianic woes preceding the end time or whether it pictures the final time itself. Probably the latter is intended. The term is likely synonymous with the concept of “restoration” in v. 21²²¹¹ and reflects Jewish messianic expectation. It was particularly appropriate to Peter’s sermon to the Jews in the temple square. The same can be said for the third result of their repentance—God’s sending the Messiah to them (v. 20). This seems to reflect a common Jewish expectation that the Messiah would only come on the repentance of Israel. The reference is surely to the Messiah, as the presence of the articles indicates, “*the* Christ,” the Anointed One. He is described as having been “appointed for you,” i.e., “you Jews.”

3:21 Verse 21 concludes Peter’s appeal with an explanation for why the Messiah was not then present. He must remain in heaven until the final time when God will restore everything.²²²² The best commentary on this concept is to be found in 1:6–11. The concept of restoration is basically the same as that about which the disciples questioned in 1:6. The

²⁰²⁰ Here forgiveness is expressed as “wiping out” (ἐξαλείφω), a word used in a similar sense in Col 2:14 of the wiping out of a debt or IOU.

²¹²¹ See E. Schweizer, “ἀνάψυξις,” *TDNT* 9:664–65.

²²²² The word “restoration” (ἀποκατάστασις) can also mean *establishment* of something formerly envisioned or agreed upon, such as the payment of money due. With such a meaning, the phrase could be rendered “the establishment of all the things which the prophets predicted.” This seems the more likely since “all the things written/spoken” is a standard phrase used in Luke-Acts when referring to prophecy (Luke 18:31; 21:22; 22:37; 24:44; Acts 13:29; 24:14). See G. Lohfink, “Christologie und Geschichtsbild in Apg. 3:19–21,” *BZ* 13 (1969): 223–41.

Messiah's present location in heaven presupposes the ascension and return at his Parousia (1:9–11). The question still remains: does 3:19–21 presuppose a Jewish messianic concept that understood the first coming of the Messiah as being predicated upon the repentance of Israel? The passage could surely be so viewed if taken in isolation from its context.²²³³ In the context of Peter's sermon, however, something quite different is expressed. The difference lies in the reference at the opening of his sermon to Jesus' death and resurrection. The Messiah indeed has come as the glorified Servant, the Holy and Righteous One of God. But the Jerusalem Jews did not receive him as Messiah; they disowned him. He is indeed the Messiah appointed by God, but they failed to recognize and receive him as their Messiah. The Messiah will come again to restore his kingdom to Israel (Rom 11:25–26). Whether that will be a time of refreshing for Israel depends very much on their repentance and reception of Jesus as the Messiah.²²⁴⁴ What was true for the Jews in Solomon's Colonnade still holds true today. Only in receiving the Christ of God by repentance and turning to him is there forgiveness, refreshing, and restoration.

3:22–23 Still continuing his appeal, Peter then gave the negative side. Jesus is depicted as the "prophet like Moses" whom God will "raise up" and the people must heed (v. 22). Whoever does not listen to him will be utterly rooted out from the people (v. 23). This is basically a quotation of Deut 18:15, 19, supplemented by Lev 23:29. The passage in Deuteronomy gives Moses' promise that after he is gone God will continue to speak to Israel by raising up prophets who will speak his word.

Already before the coming of Christ, this passage was being interpreted messianically in some Jewish circles. Evidence exists, for instance, that the Qumran community expected a prophet like Moses as a part of their messianic expectation, and the Samaritans hoped in a prophet-messiah called the Taheb.²²⁵⁵ In his Gospel, Luke often likened Jesus to a prophet (cf.

²³²³ Verses 19–21 do appear to reflect a very old Jewish-Christian Christology. J. A. T. Robinson describes it as an "embedded fossil": "The Most Primitive Christology of All?" *JTS*, n.s. 7 (1956). O. Bauernfeind suggests that it is based on a Jewish messianism that saw Elijah coming as forerunner to the Day of the Lord, an expectation that entered Christianity by way of Baptist circles: *Kommentar und Studien zur Apostelgeschichte* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1980), 65–69; "Tradition und Komposition in dem Apokatastasis Spruch Apg. 3, 20f.," *Abraham unser Vater* (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 13–23. See also C. H. H. Scobie, who sees a Samaritan theology here: "The Use of Source Material in the Speeches of Acts III and VII," *NTS* 25 (1979): 399–421. For opposing viewpoints see D. L. Jones, "The Title *Christos* in Luke-Acts," *CBQ* 32 (1970): 71–73 and C. F. D. Moule, "The Christology of Acts," *Studies in Luke-Acts*, ed. L. Keck and J. L. Martyn (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 168–69.

²⁴²⁴ Whether or not one should speak of a "new Israel" or a "restored Israel" in the theology of Acts is an issue of heated scholarly debate. What is certain is that Acts depicts Christianity as being in full continuity with Israel. It is comprised of those who accept Jesus as Lord and Messiah, including Gentiles. Only those Jews who hear and respond in faith to Christ (3:22–23) have membership in the people of God.

²⁵²⁵ 4QTestim 5–8; 1QS 9:11. See J. de Waard, "The Quotation from Deuteronomy in Acts 3, 22, 23 and the Palestinian Text: Additional Arguments," *Bib* 52 (1971): 537–40.

Luke 4:24; 7:16, 39; 24:19), and in Stephen's speech the Mosaic-prophetic typology is treated in detail (cf. Acts 7:37).

Two motifs in the tradition of Deuteronomy were particularly applicable to Christ. One was the prophetic motif. A new prophet would come, a newer and greater prophet than Moses—one whom the people must hear. The second was the reference to God's "raising up" (*anistēmi*) this prophet. In the original context of Deuteronomy the word simply meant *to bring forth*, but in application to Christ it was sure to be seen as a reference to his resurrection. Most significant of all, use of this text shows Moses himself to have been one of the prophets who witnessed to Christ. Leviticus 23:29 originally dealt with those in Israel who refused to observe the Day of Atonement. They were to be "rooted out," totally "cut off" from the community. The application to Christ means that those who do not listen to him and turn to him in repentance will no longer be a part of the people of God (v. 23b; cf. Heb 2:3).

3:24–25 Moses was not the only prophet who predicted the Christ. "All the prophets from Samuel on" did so (v. 24).²²⁶⁶ Samuel was considered the first prophet after Moses, with Moses being the very first (cf. 13:20). Thus all the prophets foretold these days, i.e., the days of salvation, the coming of Christ. For whom did the prophets speak if not for Israel? The Jews themselves were "the heirs of the prophets" (v. 25). With their fathers God established his covenants. To take comfort in their privileged position was easy. John the Baptist had already warned them of the danger of relying on their descent from Abraham and membership in the covenant community (Luke 3:8). Here Peter reminded them of the content of the covenant with Abraham: "Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed." It was not Peter's concern to emphasize the missionary imperative implicit in this promise to Abraham (Gen 12:3).²²⁷⁷ At this point he probably was largely unaware of it himself; God had to prod him pretty hard to witness to Cornelius (chap. 10). What Peter was concerned to do was to convince his Jewish hearers that God's covenant with Abraham was fully realized in Jesus.

3:26 The word "offspring" is singular here. Much as in Gal 3:16, the Abrahamic covenant is related to Christ. He is that sole offspring in whom blessing would come. First and foremost, he was Israel's Messiah. God sent him "first to you" (v. 26). Verse 26 serves as a suitable closure to the sermon because it recapitulates various earlier themes: the servant role of Christ (v. 13); God's "raising him up," with its overtone of resurrection (vv. 15, 22); the need for the Jews to repent and "turn" (v. 19). God sent his servant to them, to fulfill God's blessing to Abraham by turning each of them from their evil ways.²²⁸⁸ There is significance in the little word "first," just as there is in Abraham's blessing extending to "all peoples on earth." It may have taken the

²²⁶⁶ The Greek is obscure. One possible translation is to take the *καὶ* before *κατήγγειλαν* as intensive: "All the prophets who spoke, from Samuel on, also proclaimed these days" (i.e., in addition to Moses).

²²⁷⁷ Of significance is that the Hebrew version of Gen 12:3 is followed here in giving "families" (*πατριάι*) rather than "tribes" (*φύλαι*), which is found in the Septuagint. The Septuagint reading can be taken to refer only to the tribes of Israel. Acts follows the tradition that relates the blessing to all the peoples of the earth.

²²⁸⁸ The *ἐν τῷ* clause of 3:26b could be either transitive (God turning each) or intransitive (each turning from). The NIV follows the transitive alternative and rightly so: conversion itself is a gift of God.

apostles some time to fully realize the implications of the missionary imperative, but there it is. Peter was primarily concerned with the Jews. The gospel was preached to them first. Soon it would reach far beyond the boundaries of Judaism “to all the peoples on earth.”

3. Peter and John Before the Sanhedrin (4:1–22)

Up until this point in Acts, there had been no resistance to the Christians on the part of the Jews. Indeed, the picture has been that of the general acceptance and favor accorded them by the people (cf. 2:47). In chap. 4 the picture changes. Not, however, with the people. They still were responding favorably to the message of the apostles, indeed, in an overwhelming way (cf. 4:4). It was the officials who turned against the apostles, and not even all of them. The primary enemy was the priestly Sadducean aristocracy for whom the Christians were a serious threat to the status quo. Twice they arrested the apostles. The first time occurred here, as they descended upon Peter and John in the course of their witness in the temple square. This time the two apostles were given a “preliminary hearing” in their proclamation of Christ. Because the apostles did not heed this warning and preached Christ all the more, the Sadducees were enraged, and they arrested and tried all the apostles (5:17–42).²²⁹⁹

This section falls into two natural divisions, corresponding to the arrest of the apostles (4:3) and their release (4:21). The first section treats the arrest, interrogation, and defense of Peter and John (4:1–12). The second relates the deliberations of the court, the warning to the apostles, their response, and their release (4:13–22).

(1) Arrested and Interrogated (4:1–12)

¹The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. ²They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. ³They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. ⁴But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.

⁵The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. ⁶Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest’s family. ⁷They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: “By what power or what name did you do this?”

²²⁹⁹ Scholars have often felt that the trial scenes in Acts were redundant and perhaps based on separate sources of a single trial. (For a recent adaptation of this view see Reicke, *Glaube und Leben*, 55–114.) An alternative explanation maintains that in certain cases it was necessary for Jewish courts to give persons a preliminary hearing in which they were apprised of the culpability of their actions and warned against continuing them. If they failed to heed the warning, they were formally tried. That well fits the picture of the two trials in Acts 4–5. See I. H. Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, TNTC (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1980), 97.

⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, ¹⁰then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹He is

“ ‘the stone you builders rejected,
which has become the capstone.’

¹²Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

THE ARREST (4:1–4)

4:1 Peter’s sermon was suddenly interrupted by an official contingency comprised of priests, the captain of the temple guard, and Sadducees, who “descended upon” the apostles.³³⁰⁰ That Luke used the plural “while *they* were speaking” is interesting. It was Peter’s sermon that was interrupted. As always he was the spokesman, but the plural shows that John was not silent. Like all the apostles, he also was bearing his witness to Christ.

The priests who were present in the arresting company were perhaps those who were on duty that day for the evening sacrifice.³³¹¹ The captain of the temple (*stratēgos*) was probably the official whom the *Mishna* designates the *sagan*. The *sagan* had extensive duties, which included assisting the high priest in all ceremonies and serving as his alternate in such capacities. Ranking second in the priestly hierarchy, he was always chosen from one of the families of the priestly aristocracy. Indeed, serving as *sagan* was viewed as a stepping-stone to appointment as high priest. The *sagan*’s involvement in this scene is particularly appropriate since he had ultimate responsibility for order in the temple grounds and had the power to arrest.³³²² His linkage with the Sadducees here is also quite natural. Representing the priestly aristocracy, he belonged to their ranks.

The Sadducees were clearly the powers behind the arrest of the two. Josephus listed them as one of the three “schools of thought” among the Jews of the first century, along with the Pharisees and Essenes (*Ant.* 13.171). The origin of their name is disputed but may go back to Zadok, the high priest in Solomon’s day.³³³³ The Sadducees of the first century represented the “conservative” viewpoint. They rejected the oral traditions of the Pharisees and considered only the written Torah of the Pentateuch as valid. They considered the concepts of demons and angels, immortality and resurrection as innovations, believing in no life beyond this life.

More important than their theology, however, was their political orientation. Coming largely from the landed aristocracy, they were accommodationists with regard to the Roman

³⁰³⁰ NIV “came up to” is too mild. The Greek ἀφίστημι is a stronger word—“come upon suddenly, descend upon.”

³¹³¹ The temple police as such were Levites. These may be included here under a generalized meaning of “priests.” See J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem at the Time of Jesus*, trans. F. H. and C. H. Cave (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 209–10.

³²³² *Ibid.*, 161–63.

³³³³ The Sadducees were certainly not Zadokites. The last legitimate Zadokite priest fled to Leontopolis in Egypt in the second century B.C. All the high priests from then on were non-Zadokite. See R. Meyer, “Σαδδουκαίος,” *TDNT* 7:35–54.

occupation of Israel. Possessing considerable economic interests, their concern was to make peace with the Romans, preserve the status quo, and thus protect their own holdings. In return the Romans accorded the Sadducees considerable power, invariably appointing the high priest from their ranks, who was the most powerful political figure among the Jews in that day. The prime concern of the Sadducean aristocracy, of whom the high priest was the chief spokesman, was the preservation of order, the avoidance at all costs of any confrontation with the Roman authorities.

4:2 The Sadducees' annoyance at Peter and John's witness to the resurrection was not so much theological as political, as was generally the case with the Sadducees. Note the wording in v. 2: not "they were proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus" but "they were proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead." The idea of a general resurrection was an apocalyptic concept with all sorts of messianic overtones. Messianic ideas among the Jews of that day meant revolt, overthrow of the foreign overlords, and restoration of the Davidic kingdom. There had been such movements before (cf. 5:36–37), and the Romans had put them down. There would be many more in the future. In fact, the worst fears of the Sadducees were indeed realized when war broke out with the Romans in A.D. 66, with terrible consequences for the Jews.³³⁴⁴ Here, with the large crowds surrounding Peter and John, their fears were aroused. The notes of Peter's sermon alarmed them: resurrection, Author of life, a new Moses. These were revolutionary ideas. The movement must not spread. It must be nipped in the bud.

4:3 So they arrested Peter and John and placed them "in jail" until next morning.³³⁵⁵ The Jewish high court, the Sanhedrin, had jurisdiction over matters of temple violation. It met regularly each day, with the exception of Sabbaths and feast days. Since it was now already evening and the Sanhedrin had already recessed, Peter and John would have to be detained until the court reconvened in the morning.

4:4 Verse 4 comes almost as an intrusion in the narrative. It is not so. The interruption had been the arrest. Luke returned to Peter's temple sermon. Despite adversities the sermon was no failure. Many did respond and place their faith in the Author of life. So much was this the case that the total number of Jewish Christians came to 5,000.³³⁶⁶ Not only does this serve as a suitable climax to the sermon of chap. 3, but it also serves as an introduction to the trial scene of 4:5–22. The Sadducees tried their best to stop the witness of the apostles. They did not

³⁴³⁴ F. J. Foakes-Jackson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, MNTC (New York: Harper, 1931), 32.

³⁵³⁵ The Greek εἰς τήρησιν is ambiguous and could mean either *in detention* or *in the keep* ("in jail," NIV). The Jews did not punish by imprisonment, but prisoners could be detained in jail pending trial.

³⁶³⁶ Notice the steady progression from 120 (1:15) to 3,000 (2:41) to 5,000 (4:4) to "many thousands" (21:20). Many commentators (e.g., E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971], 220) would see this as referring to male converts only (ἄνδρες), but we have already shown that this term in Acts does not necessarily exclude women. See chap. I, n. 54; also Robertson, *WP* 3:50. As to the population of Jerusalem being sufficient to include so many converts, see chap. I, n. 135. Hanson estimates the population as being perhaps a quarter million: R. P. C. Hanson, *The Acts*, NCB (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 76f. (n. 4).

succeed. The Christian message was finding too much acceptance with the people. The rulers raged, but it was all in vain (4:25).

THE COUNCIL'S INQUIRY (4:5–7)

4:5 The next morning the council convened to hear the apostles, just as they had tried Jesus in a morning session (Luke 22:66). At this point Luke did not use the term Sanhedrin, but it appears at v. 15. The term was also used of minor, local courts; but the reference here was to the supreme court of the land, which held the jurisdiction over the temple area. Exactly where it met is uncertain. Josephus indicated that it met outside the temple precincts and just to the west of it, while the rabbinic sources placed it within the temple area in a room especially designated for it on the south side of the forecourt.³³⁷⁷ Its origin seems to date to Hellenistic times when Israel was a client-nation and no longer had a king as its supreme political authority.

Matters regarding local jurisdiction were entrusted by the Hellenistic overlords to a council of Jews, which developed into the Sanhedrin of New Testament times. It seems to have consisted of seventy-one members, based on Num 11:16, counting the seventy elders mentioned there plus Moses as presiding officer. The presiding officer in the New Testament period was the high priest. At first the Council seems to have consisted primarily of the leading priests and lay elders from the aristocracy. From the time of Queen Alexandra (76–67 B.C.), however, Pharisees were admitted on the Council. Probably always in the minority, the latter still had considerable clout because of their popularity with the people (cf. Josephus, *Ant.*13.298).

The picture of the assembly here in v. 5 comports well with the known composition of the body. It consisted of the ruling priests, the elders, and the scribes. Luke used the term “rulers,” but this almost certainly refers to the priestly representation on the Sanhedrin. Verse 6 mentions four of these plus an unspecified additional number of members from the high-priestly families.³³⁸⁸ The “elders” were the lay members from the Jewish aristocracy, probably comprising the bulk of the entire body and being of Sadducean persuasion. The “teachers” were the scribes, students of the law and responsible for interpreting it before the body. Most scribes were of Pharisaic outlook, so it was likely in this group that the Pharisees were represented on the Sanhedrin.

4:6 In v. 6 Luke gave an “aside” that mentions by name several of the high-priestly group represented on the Council. Annas is named as high priest. Actually, Annas was high priest from A.D. 6–15, and at this time (early A.D. 30s) his son-in-law Caiaphas was the reigning high

³⁷³⁷ *Beginnings* 5:477f. On the Sanhedrin site, cf. also E. Lohse, “συνέδριον,” *TDNT* 7:860–71; E. Schürer, *History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, new rev. English version, ed. G. Vermes, F. Millar, and M. Black (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1974), 2:199–226.

³⁸³⁸ Jeremias suggested that these “high priests” on the Sanhedrin were not only ex-high priests like Annas but also the high-ranking temple officials like the *sagan*, the gate-keeper, the captains of the courses, and the treasurer. Such a usage would explain the frequent use of the plural term “high priests” (64 times) in the NT when technically there was only one high priest at a time: *Jerusalem*, 175–81.

priest.³⁹⁹ Luke's attribution of the title to Annas may reflect the actual state of affairs. Annas was the most powerful political figure among the Jews at that time. Five of his sons, one grandson, and a son-in-law all acquired the rank of high priest. He may well have been the power behind the scenes, calling all the shots.⁴⁰⁰ Caiaphas, Annas's son-in-law, was high priest from A.D. 18–36, the longest tenure of any high priest during New Testament times. He seems to have struck it off well with Pilate, since he survived the entire period of the latter's term of office. He and his father-in-law were instrumental in the conviction of Jesus (John 11:49f.; 18:13f.).⁴¹¹ At this time they were considering a pair of his followers whom they probably saw as equally threatening to the peace and consequently to their own considerable interests.

There is no known John among those who held the office of high priest. Codex Bezae, however, reads "Jonathan" in this verse. If one follows that variant, he would then be the Jonathan, son of Annas, who served as high priest in A.D. 36–37. No record exists of an Alexander who served as high priest in the New Testament period. He may have belonged to one of the families of the priestly aristocracy.

4:7 The interrogation began with the apostles being brought before the Council. The Greek says literally "in the middle" (v. 7), which comports well with the rabbinic statement that the Sanhedrin sat in a semicircle: "The Sanhedrin was arranged like the half of a round threshing-floor so that they might all see one another. Before them stood the two scribes of the judges, one to the right and one to the left, and they wrote down the words of them that favored acquittal and the words of them that favored conviction."⁴²² The question was then posed to the apostles: "By what power or what name did you do this?" The verb is plural, as if the Court asked the question in unison; but one would assume that the high priest, as presiding officer, served as spokesman in beginning the interrogation. Some interpreters assume that the question has to do with the man's healing, but the main reason for the arrest had been the preaching of the apostles (v. 2). They were concerned about the source of the disciples' teaching and the possibility that their emphasis on the resurrection could lead to a major messianic insurrection with serious political repercussions. They were concerned about authority, proper accreditation, law and order, keeping the peace.⁴³³

PETER'S RESPONSE (4:8–12)

4:8 The question as to the "name" behind their preaching was a question of accreditation and authorization, but Peter could not let this one get by. The lame man was healed by the name of Jesus. If the Sanhedrin wanted to know about that name, he would tell them all about

³⁹⁹ Compare Luke 3:2, where the same coupling occurs: "During the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas." High priests retained their title and membership on the Sanhedrin for life, even after removal from office (Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 157).

⁴⁰⁰ Annas had a considerable economic empire as well, both inside and outside the temple. See P. Gaechter, "The Hatred of the House of Annas," *TS* 8 (1947): 3–34.

⁴¹¹ Some have argued that there were two Sanhedrins at this time, one religious and one political. According to this view it was the political, not the religious, leaders who tried both Jesus and the apostles; e.g., S. Zeitlin, *Who Crucified Jesus?* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1942), 68–83, 180–88.

⁴²² *M. Sanh* 4:3.

⁴³³ B. Reicke, *Glaube und Leben*, 76f.

it. Instead of the expected defense, Peter gave them a sermon.⁴⁴⁴⁴ In fulfillment of Jesus' promise (Luke 12:11f.), he was given a special endowment of the Holy Spirit to bear his witness with boldness.⁴⁴⁵⁵

Verses 9–12 comprise a minis sermon on “the name that brings salvation.” It begins with the reference to the name raised by the Sanhedrin and repeated by Peter (vv. 7, 10), which is linked to the word “saved” with regard to the healing of the man (v. 9). These two concepts are brought back together at the conclusion, with the reference to salvation in no other name (v. 12). The crux of the sermon is a play on the Greek word *sōzō*, which means both physical “salvation” in the sense of healing (v. 9) as well as the spiritual, eschatological sense of salvation (v. 12).⁴⁴⁶⁶ The physical “salvation” of the lame man through the name of Jesus is thus a pointer to the far greater salvation that comes to all who call upon his name in faith.

4:9 In many ways Peter's testimony before the Sanhedrin is a condensed form of his address in Solomon's Colonnade. It began with a reference to the healing of the lame man (v. 9). The crowd in the temple wondered about the source of the lame man's healing, and Peter pointed to the name of Jesus. The Sanhedrin wanted to know about the name, and Peter pointed them to the healing of the lame man. The two go together: wholeness, salvation, is in the name of Jesus; the name of Jesus brings wholeness. Peter's words contain a bit of irony. The rulers were worried about the political dangers of the “name” the apostles were preaching. “This name is not destructive,” said Peter; “it brings good things; it brings wholeness” (author's paraphrase). Peter underlined his point. “Be very sure of this,” he said, “you and everyone else in Israel.”⁴⁴⁷⁷

4:10–11 Peter was ready to preach to all, even the Sanhedrin. But like the crowd in the Colonnade, the judges in the Sanhedrin rejected the *name* that could bring them salvation. Peter repeated the familiar kerygmatic formula: “Whom you crucified, but whom God raised.” Indeed, it is by the very fact that God has exalted him that the power had come for healing the man. The themes are the same as before: the healing name of Jesus, which proves his resurrection and points to his salvation, the guilt of the Jews who rejected him. Also, as before, there is a proof from Scripture, this time from Ps 118:22. It establishes the guilt of the Sanhedrin. They were the “builders,” the leaders of the nation,⁴⁴⁸⁸ who rejected the very rock on

⁴⁴⁴⁴ C. W. Carter and R. Earle (*The Acts of the Apostles* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959], 59) note how Peter scarcely fit the normal defendant before the Sanhedrin, whom Josephus described as submissive and wearing a black mourning garment (*Ant.* 14.172).

⁴⁴⁵⁵ The aorist participle *πλησθεῖς* is used for special moments of inspiration as here (cf. Luke 1:15, 41, 67; Acts 13:9). It is to be distinguished from the reception of the Spirit, which abides on every believer (2:38), as well as from the adjective form *πλήρης* (“full of the Spirit”) used of especially spiritual persons (Jesus, Luke 4:1; Stephen, Acts 6:5; 7:55; Barnabas, 11:24).

⁴⁴⁶⁶ For full treatments see Hamm, “Acts 3:1–10,” 306; I. Foulkes, “Two Semantic Problems in the Translation of Acts 4:5–20,” *BT* (1978): 124–25.

⁴⁴⁷⁷ The phrase *γνωστὸν ἔστω* is emphatic, aimed at getting one's attention (cf. 2:14; 13:38; 28:28).

⁴⁴⁸⁸ “Builders” is used in rabbinic writings for teachers, and in the Qumran writings it is used for leaders of the community.

which God's people are to be built.⁴⁴⁹⁹ Very early Ps 118:22 came to be viewed by the Christians as pointing to Christ, the one rejected by his own people, whom God made the crowning stone of his people.⁵⁵⁰⁰ This text also appears in Luke 20:17 as well as in 1 Pet 2:7 and in both passages is linked to other Old Testament texts that incorporate a "stone" motif. Many see this as evidence that the early Christian community made collections of Old Testament texts that were applied to Christ.⁵⁵¹¹

4:12 All Peter's sermons to this point ended with an appeal, but there seems to be none here. The appeal, however, is present implicitly. If there is salvation in no other name (v. 12), then obviously one must make a commitment to that sole name that brings salvation. But the appeal is even stronger than that. Peter switched to the first person at the end of the verse, "by which we must be saved," amounting to a direct appeal to the Sanhedrin. Peter had been bold indeed. He had come full circle. They asked for the name in whom his authority rested. He answered their question. It was the name, the power of Jesus. He directed the charges. The Council had rejected the one who bore this powerful name. The ultimate verdict rested with them. Would they continue to reject the one whom God had placed as the final stone for his people, the only name under heaven in which they would find their own salvation? The final verdict would rest in their own decision.

(2) Warned and Released (4:13–22)

¹³When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. ¹⁴But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. ¹⁵So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. ¹⁶"What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name."

¹⁸Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. ²⁰For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

⁴⁴⁹⁹ Verse 11 is not an exact quote from the LXX. The verb ἐξουθενέω is used instead of the LXX's ἀποδοκιμάζω. Ἐξουθενέω has a nuance of rejecting despitefully, with contempt, thus making for a sharper application to the crucifixion. Likewise, ὑμῶν ("you") has been introduced before "builders," making for a more direct reference to the Sanhedrin.

⁵⁰⁵⁰ The κεφαλὴ γωνίας (v. 11) can be either the final stone (capstone) that completes a building or the cornerstone around which the whole building is erected. NIV follows the influential article by J. Jeremias ("γωνία," *TDNT* 1:791–93) in rendering "capstone."

⁵¹⁵¹ These are usually referred to as "testimonia." See J. R. Harris, *Testimonies* (Cambridge: University Press, 1916).

²¹After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. ²²For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

4:13–14 Peter had borne his testimony. It was now time for the Council to deliberate. They assessed the evidence (vv. 13–14). First, there was the courage, the sheer freedom with which Peter spoke.⁵⁵²² They hardly expected this from men who had no formal education in matters of the law, who were ordinary laymen.⁵⁵³³ Then there was the fact that they had been with Jesus. He too had been just a “commoner” but also with an amazing boldness and knowledge beyond his training. But he too had been a dangerous person, a threat to their peace; and they consequently had condemned him to death. Finally, there was the healed man, standing with them before the Tribunal. Whether he was there voluntarily in support of Peter and John or whether he had been summoned as a witness, we are not told. In any event there he was, standing there, “exhibit A,” a “known sign” (v. 16). He was hard to overlook. It was hardly a clear-cut case. The Council sat in silence. At this point there was nothing they could say. Indeed, Jesus’ promise was being fulfilled before the apostles’ eyes (Luke 21:15).⁵⁵⁴⁴ The irony can scarcely be missed—the accused spoke with utter boldness and freedom; their accusers sat in stony silence.

4:15–17 When the Sanhedrin ordered Peter and John out of the courtroom (v. 15), they were following normal procedure. Their custom after hearing the witnesses was to dismiss them in order to have as clear and open a discussion among themselves as possible.⁵⁵⁵⁵ In this instance they were at something of a loss. They really had no charge to lay upon them. Further, the accused were popular with the people, for the news about healing of the lame man had already spread throughout Jerusalem. There was only one thing they could do—they could threaten. They would warn the apostles to no longer speak “in this name” (v. 17).

4:18–19 Although only implicit at this point, this would also establish culpability should the apostles decide to transgress the interdiction of the court (cf. 5:28). So the apostles were brought back into the court and given the warning. They were no longer “to speak and teach in the name of Jesus” (v. 18). The warning was given in narrative style rather than in direct speech, perhaps Luke’s way of underlining the timidity of the Council on the whole matter. The response

⁵²⁵² NIV “courage”; the Greek word *παρρησία* means *boldness, openness, freedom in speaking*.

⁵³⁵³ NIV “unschooled,” *ἀγράμματος*, often has the meaning *illiterate* but came to mean merely *uneducated*, which is the likely meaning here. The other word is *ἰδιώται* (“ordinary,” NIV), meaning *private person, a layperson, nonprofessional*.

⁵⁴⁵⁴ There is likely a conscious parallel here, since Luke used the same verb (*ἀντειπεῖν*, “answer back”) both here (v. 14) and in Luke 21:15.

⁵⁵⁵⁵ Reicke, *Glaube und Leben*, 73–76. As to how Luke had access to such information on a closed session, one could readily deduce their discussion from the decision rendered the two apostles. G. Stählin (*Die Apostelgeschichte*, NTD 5 [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962], 74) reminds us that the Christians may well have had friends on the Sanhedrin such as Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea. Even Paul could have been present, since students of the law had access to deliberations of the court.

of Peter and John was in direct discourse; it was bold and almost defiant: “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God.”

4:20–22 The response was much the same as that given by Socrates to his Athenian accusers who warned him to desist from his teaching. The saying had become quite proverbial, however, and was widely used by Jews and Greeks.⁵⁵⁶⁶ It would seem a bit ironic if these unlearned and common men (v. 13) were throwing the words of the Greek philosopher at them. The stronger irony, however, is in the boldness of the apostles and the timidity of their accusers. The apostles could only speak of what they had seen and heard (v. 20). They were the eyewitnesses of Jesus’ entire ministry (1:21f.), the witnesses to his resurrection (2:32; 3:15). Peter and John had no choice but to defy the court’s order, for it had “stepped in between the conscience and God.”⁵⁵⁷⁷ The court had no alternative but to threaten them further and release them (v. 21). They could find no grounds for punishing them at this point, and they feared the apostles’ popularity with the populace.⁵⁵⁸⁸ The man, born lame, was over forty years old (v. 22), so the miracle was particularly striking; and the people took it for what it was, an act of God, a sign. The little word “sign” should not be overlooked in the Greek text of v. 22. That is what the man’s healing had been—a sign to the temple crowd in Solomon’s Colonnade that attracted them to the gospel and ultimately to faith. It had been a sign to the Sanhedrin as well, a pointer to the sole name in which salvation (ultimate “healing”) is to be found. There is no record of response for Peter’s appeal to the Sanhedrin, as there was for his temple sermon (v. 4). Here for the first time is found a theme that will recur throughout Acts—the rejection of the Messiah by the Jews. For many of them, particularly their official leadership, he was, and continued to be, the stone rejected by the builders.

4. The Prayer of the Community (4:23–31)

²³On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. ²⁴When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. ²⁵You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

“ ‘Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?

²⁶The kings of the earth take their stand
and the rulers gather together
against the Lord
and against his Anointed One.’

⁵⁵⁶⁶ Plato, *Apol.* 29d. Compare similar statements in 2 Macc 7:2; 4 Macc 5:16–21; and Josephus, *Ant.* 17.158f.

⁵⁵⁷⁷ Robertson, *WP* 3:53.

⁵⁵⁸⁸ The NIV is somewhat misleading. The Sanhedrin was not at a loss about “how” they should be punished. It could not find the grounds, the basis, the charges necessary for punishing them at all.

²⁷Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. ²⁹Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

³¹After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

Peter’s first sermon, at Pentecost, was followed by a glimpse into the common life of the Christians in Jerusalem (2:42–47). Here, after Peter’s witness before the crowd in the temple square and before the Sanhedrin, we are again given a glimpse into the life of the Christian community. Just as chap. 2 spoke of their common prayer life (2:42), here again the prayer of the Christians is emphasized, with the major difference being that what was mentioned in summary fashion in the former passage is here related concretely with an example of their prayers.

4:23 Verse 23 provides the setting and the linkage with the preceding narrative. After their release Peter and John returned “to their own people.” Many interpreters see this as referring only to the other apostles, viewing vv. 24–30 as the apostles’ prayer for boldness in their witness.⁵⁹⁹ The apostles, however, were not the only bold witnesses in Acts. Note Stephen (6:10) and Philip (8:5), to mention only the next two major witnesses in Acts. The whole community was involved in the proclamation of the word, and the community gathered for prayer when the apostles were in difficulty (cf. 12:12). That is the picture here—the Christians gathered to pray for the deliverance of the two apostles from the Sanhedrin. When Peter and John arrived on the scene, they informed them of the warning given by “the chief priest and elders.”⁶⁰⁰ The fellowship responded with praise to God for delivering the apostles (vv. 24–28) and a petition for courage to continue their bold witness in the face of such opposition (vv. 29–30).

4:24–28 Together they lifted their voices in praise to God. That they offered an occasional prayer of this nature in unison is unlikely. Luke was simply expressing that the whole community joined together in this prayer.⁶¹¹ God was addressed as “Sovereign Lord,” a common designation for God in the Old Testament and appropriate to this gathering of Jewish

⁵⁹⁹ J. Dupont, *Nouvelles Etudes sur les Actes des Apôtres*, Lectio divina 118 (Paris: Cerf, 1984), 51–52; R. B. Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles* (London: Methuen, 1901), 60; E. F. Harrison, *Interpreting Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 95.

⁶⁰⁰ Note that the scribes are not mentioned, who represented the Pharisaic viewpoint on the Sanhedrin. It was the chief priests and the lay aristocracy, the *Sadducees*, who threatened the apostles and constituted the real opposition to the Christian witness at this point in the narrative. The same would hold true for the trial scene in chap. 5.

⁶¹¹ Marshall (*Acts*, 103) suggests they may have followed the Jewish liturgical procedure of using a leader who prayed a phrase at a time, with the others repeating phrase by phrase.

Christians.⁶²² God was further addressed as Creator, Maker of heaven, earth, the seas and all that dwell in them, again in language thoroughly steeped in Old Testament phraseology (cf. Exod 20:11). More than that the whole form of the prayer has Old Testament precedents. Compare Hezekiah's prayer in Isa 37:16–20, where the same elements appear: God was addressed as Lord and Creator, there followed a reference to the threat of Israel's enemies, and the prayer concluded with a petition. It is in the petition that the major difference from the Christians' prayer appears. Hezekiah prayed for deliverance. The Christians prayed for courage.

In the community's prayer the reference to the threat of enemies is given in the form of a scriptural proof. The Scripture is in the exact Septuagintal rendering of Ps 2:1–2 and is presented as a prophecy, spoken by God through David under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.⁶³³ Most likely originally relating to God's triumph over Israel's enemies through the anointed king, the Christians came to see it as in a real sense prophetic of Christ.⁶⁴⁴ All the details of these first verses of the psalm were applicable to the passion of Christ, and the Christians did so in their prayer (v. 27). The raging nations represented the Gentile rulers and their cohorts, the soldiers who executed Jesus. The people of Israel were those who plotted in vain.⁶⁵⁵ Herod represented the "kings of the earth"; Pilate, the "rulers";⁶⁶⁶ and Christ, the "anointed" of God.⁶⁷⁷ Here again as in chap. 3 the title "servant" is applied to Jesus. Here in a prayer the term is primarily liturgical and is applied to David as well in v. 25.⁶⁸⁸ The theme of v. 28 is by now familiar. All the

⁶²⁶² The Greek word here (δεσπότης) is applied to God some twenty-five times in the Septuagint but only three times in the NT (cf. Luke 2:29; Rev 6:10). It is applied to Christ three more times (2 Tim 2:21; 2 Pet 2:1; Jude 4). It is quite common in the Apostolic Fathers. Perhaps the reticence of the NT writers to use it was due to its negative overtones of arbitrary rule, as the English cognate "despot" also bears.

⁶³⁶³ The Greek of Acts 4:25a is extremely difficult, being primarily a string of genitives with only the preposition διὰ before πνεύματος ἁγίου. For an intriguing solution see H. W. Moule, "Acts IV, 25," *ExpTim* 51 (1939–40): 396. Despite the grammatical difficulties, the meaning seems fairly evident. Two agencies are expressed: God spoke through the Spirit; the Spirit in turn spoke through David. (Codex Bezae construed it thus, placing a second διὰ before David.)

⁶⁴⁶⁴ There is evidence that Ps 2 was already viewed messianically in some Jewish circles prior to Christ (cf. *Pss. Sol.*, 17:25–27). See Jones, "Christos," 69–76.

⁶⁵⁶⁵ How would the phrase "in vain" apply? Marshall (*Acts*, 105) suggests that the opening of the prayer provides the answer. God is Creator (v. 24). He spoke these words of the psalm through David long before they came to bear in Christ. It was fruitless for them to scheme against a God who was their Creator and who even knew in advance of their scheming.

⁶⁶⁶⁶ The reference to Herod Antipas's involvement in Jesus' passion is only found in Luke among the Gospels (23:7–12).

⁶⁷⁶⁷ The term "anointed" as applied to Christ most likely refers to his being anointed with the Spirit at his baptism (Luke 3:22; 4:10; cf. Acts 10:38, the only other passage in Luke-Acts where Jesus is described as "anointed").

⁶⁸⁶⁸ The term is used throughout the OT in the sense of one who is at God's disposal, is his servant, much as Paul used the term δοῦλος ("slave, servant") to describe his own

plotting against God's anointed is in vain because God has already predetermined the outcome (cf. 2:23; 3:18). In the paradox of human freedom and divine sovereignty, despite all the raging of humanity, God's purposes prevail. They did so in Christ. They did so with the apostles before the Sanhedrin.

4:29–30 The community turned to its petition: "Now, Lord, consider their threats." Whose threats? The Sanhedrin's, of course. Just like the threats, plots, and rages against Jesus, the community viewed itself in much the situation he had experienced.⁶⁹⁹ The authorities had raged against him, and God made him to triumph in the power of his resurrection. So now the same temporal powers had raged and plotted against the apostles. Like Christ, God had delivered them. The Christians realized that the opposition was not over. The Sanhedrin continued to threaten them. One would expect them to ask God for further deliverance. They did not. Instead, they asked for more of the same, requesting of him boldness in witness and further miraculous signs. The request for miracle was not a request for power over their enemies. It was closely related to the request for boldness in witness.

In Acts the miracles are always in the service of the word. They are "signs" in the sense that they point beyond themselves to the ultimate power of the gospel message of Christ's resurrection and the salvation that is in him (4:12). That was amply illustrated in the miracle they experienced. The healing of the lame man started the whole train of events that took them before the Sanhedrin. The healing did not deliver them from danger; if anything, it provoked it. On the other hand, the healing first attracted those who listened to Peter's sermon in Solomon's Colonnade and responded to the word in faith. This is what the community prayed for—more signs to undergird the word, more boldness to proclaim it. They surely knew what the result would be—more persecution.

4:31 Their prayer was answered by the shaking of the house. Perhaps a shaking from thunder or a quaking of the earth, it gave them a tangible sense of God's presence and his response to their prayer.⁷⁰⁰ And their prayer was fulfilled at once. Immediately they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word with boldness, just as they had petitioned. This was not a "second Pentecost."⁷¹¹ They had already received the Spirit. The Spirit had

relationship to Christ. A "servant Christology" does not therefore seem as evident in chap. 4 as in chap. 3, although the passion setting of 4:27 may lend to such an interpretation. See J. Jeremias, "παῖς θεοῦ," *TDNT* 5:702–03. In the later Christian literature the term is common, especially in the Apostolic Fathers, and always in a liturgical rather than a Christological context.

⁶⁹⁹ There is an interesting lesson in hermeneutics here. The community continued to see the fulfillment of the psalm, not solely in Christ but in the continuing experience of the church. For this linkage between the experience of Christ and that of the church, see D. Hamm, "You Are Precious in My Sight," *The Way* 18 (1978): 193–203, and B. R. Gaventa, "To Speak Thy Word with All Boldness, Acts 4:23–31," *FM* 3 (1986): 76–82.

⁷⁰⁰ For shaking phenomena signifying the presence of God, see Isa 6:4; Exod 19:18; 4 Ezra 6:15, 29. Elijah's experience was not to find God in the usual expressions of theophany—wind, fire, and earthquake (1 Kgs 19:11–12).

⁷¹¹ Some of the older source critics argued that this is a parallel account of Pentecost due to a separate source treating the event. This passage is too different from the

helped Peter and John in a mighty way before the Sanhedrin. It was a fresh filling, a renewed awareness of the Spirit's power and presence in their life and witness. This was not an ephemeral ecstatic manifestation but a fresh endowment of power for witness that would continue (cf. 4:33).

5. The Common Life of the Community (4:32–37)

³²All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. ³³With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. ³⁴There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

³⁶Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), ³⁷sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

The previous episode exemplified the prayer life of the community with an actual incident. Luke returned to his summary style to further picture the life together, much as he did in 2:42–47. Many of the themes are the same, but there is considerable development of one theme in particular, the sharing of goods within the fellowship.

4:32–33 The opening two verses are almost identical with 2:43–44, only in reverse order. Together they characterize the community life as marked by four things: their unity in mind and heart (v. 32a), their sharing of their possessions (v. 32b), the power and witness of the apostles (v. 33a), and the grace of God, which rested upon them (v. 33b). The overarching concept was their unity, their being “one in heart and mind,” their fellowship in the Spirit (cf. *koinōnia* in 2:42).⁷²⁷² This served as the basis of their sharing of their possessions. The latter is described in two ways. First, “no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own.” The picture is one of unqualified sharing, of not claiming owner's rights, of saying “what's mine is yours.” The second expression is “they shared everything they had.” The Greek literally reads “everything was in common with them.” Taken by itself, this could refer to shared ownership; but in conjunction with the first expression, it also refers to a practice of freely sharing one's goods with another.

Many interpreters have seen Luke's description of the Christian practice here as reflecting Greek ideals, particularly in such phrases as “one mind” (*psychē mia*) and “all in common” (*hapanta koina*). The Greeks shared a common myth that in primitive times people lived in an ideal state in which there was no ownership but everything was held in common. Some attributed such a practice to the Pythagoreans, and Plato envisioned his ideal republic as one devoid of all private ownership. It is doubtful such a utopian ideal was ever realized among the

Pentecost narrative and too closely linked to the previous trial scene for such a suggestion to merit serious consideration.

⁷²⁷² “Heart and mind” is an OT expression, not found in Greek. In Hebrew thought the “heart” is the center of the will. Cf. Deut 4:29; 6:5; 11:18. B. Gerhardsson suggests that Deut 6:5 lies behind the whole of v. 32, with “might” taken in the common Hebraic sense as *means*: “*Einige Bemerkungen zu Apg. 4, 32,*” *ST* 24 (1970): 142–49.

Greeks, but for some Greeks communal ownership was a major part of their dream of a “Golden Age.”⁷⁷³³

More common than this myth was the Greek ideal of friendship according to which true friends held everything in common (*panta koina*) and were of “one mind” (*mia psychē*).⁷⁷⁴⁴ Aristotle is reputed to have defined a friend as “one soul dwelling in two bodies.”⁷⁷⁵⁵ Such expressions became commonplace and are found in Roman writers such as Cicero as well as the Hellenistic Jew Philo. Luke’s description would have evoked an immediate response in his Gentile readers. What they esteemed as an ideal had become a reality in the young Christian community. They were of one mind, for they shared freely with one another, truly common both in soul and in means. The main business of the community was, of course, the witness for Jesus; and this the apostles continued to do “with great power” (*dynamis*, v. 33). This power likely refers to their continuing performance of miracles, a further testimony to God’s answering their prayer (v. 30; cf. 5:12–16). “Much grace was upon them all,” primarily in God’s blessing on their lives and witness. On this note Luke’s general summary of the Christian life together ends (cf. 2:47). He then turned to a more thorough discussion of one particular aspect of their common life—their sharing of goods.

4:34–35 If v. 32 depicted the Christian sharing in terms of Greek ideals, verse 34a sets forth the Old Testament ideal: “There were no needy persons among them.” This is the ideal God established for Israel. According to Deut 15:4f., Israel was to keep God’s commands; and God would bless them; there would be no poor among them.⁷⁷⁶⁶ There is evidence that in New Testament times the text of Deut 15:4 was seen as a reference to the ideal final times when Israel would be fully faithful to the law and there would be no poverty in the land.⁷⁷⁷⁷ The Christians saw themselves as the people of God of the final times (cf. 2:17), they were experiencing God’s blessing (4:33), and they were striving to realize the ideal of a people of God with no poor among them.

Verses 34b–35 depict the means by which they sought to realize this ideal. Those who had lands or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds, and lay them at the apostles’ feet. The proceeds were then distributed to the needy among them. Repeated attempts have been made to see this as an early Christian experiment in community ownership. Sometimes a specific pattern has been suggested, such as the common ownership practiced by the Qumran

⁷³⁷³ For a full discussion with references, see Dupont, *Salvation of the Gentiles*, 85–102; H. J. Degenhardt, *Lukas Evangelist der Armen* (Stuttgart: *Katholisches Bibelwerk*, 1965), 168–72, 181–83; D. L. Mealand, “Community of Goods and Utopian Allusions in Acts II-IV,” *JTS*, n.s. 28 (1977): 96–99.

⁷⁴⁷⁴ Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 9.8.2.

⁷⁵⁷⁵ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 5:20.

⁷⁶⁷⁶ L. T. Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholar’s, 1977), 200. In Johnson’s view Luke used the motif of the community of goods to depict the Christians as the faithful Israel.

⁷⁷⁷⁷ This interpretation is reflected in the *Jerusalem Targum I* according to Dupont, *Salvation of the Gentiles*, 92.

covenanters.⁷⁷⁸⁸ There are many reasons to reject such suggestions. Every evidence is that the early Christian practice was wholly voluntary.

First, there was no transfer of ownership, no control of production or income, no requirement to surrender one's property to the community. The voluntary nature of the Christian practice is evidenced by the consistent use of the iterative imperfect tense throughout vv. 34b–35. This is how they “used to” do it. They “would sell” their property and bring it to the apostles as needs arose.

Second is the example of Barnabas in vv. 36–37. His sale of property would hardly be a sterling example if surrender of property were obligatory.

Third, in the example of Ananias and Sapphira, Peter clarified for Ananias that his sin was in lying about his charity. The land remained his to do with as he pleased; he was under no obligation to give the proceeds to the church (5:4).

Fourth, the picture of the central fund for the widows in 6:1–6 is clearly not an apportioning of each one's lot from a common fund but a charity fund for the needy.

Finally, there is the example of Mary in 12:12f. She still owned a home and had a maid. The Christians enjoyed the hospitality of her home. This was clearly no experiment in common ownership.⁷⁷⁹⁹

But what of the practice of laying the proceeds at the apostles' feet? The gesture was one of submission to another. At this point the Twelve were the representatives appointed by Christ as the foundation of the true people of God. The submission was not to them but to the one they represented. To lay one's gift at their feet was to offer it to Christ. The apostles certainly did not consider this an enviable role. They were all too glad to turn the responsibility over to others (cf. 6:2).

4:36–37 Luke concluded his treatment of the early Christian sharing with two specific examples—one to be followed (Barnabas) and one to be avoided (Ananias and Sapphira). Barnabas sold a field and placed all the receipts at the apostles' feet. Of more interest to us are the little details told about Barnabas here.

Luke had a way of taking characters who played a major role later in the book and introducing them early, but only briefly and in passing, as is the case with Barnabas here. His name was Joseph, and he was given the nickname Barnabas by the apostles. This was not insignificant in itself because the granting of a nickname was often seen as a sign of respect. (Compare Jesus giving Simon the nickname of Peter/Rock.) The problem is that Luke said the name meant *Son of Encouragement*. Now *bar* does mean *son* in Aramaic, but no scholar has ever been able to give a convincing derivation of “encouragement” (*paraklēsis*) from *nabas*.⁸⁸⁰⁰

⁷⁸⁷⁸ There is really no comparison to be made between the obligatory surrender of one's property upon initiation into the Qumran monastery and the voluntary Christian practice. See J. Fitzmyer, “Jewish Christianity in the Light of the Qumran Scrolls, *Studies in Luke-Acts* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 242–44; D. L. Mealand, “Community of Goods at Qumran,” *TZ* 31 (1975): 129–39.

⁷⁹⁷⁹ See D. P. Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor in Luke-Acts* (Linz: Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt, 1982), 207–09.

⁸⁰⁸⁰ All sorts of conjectures have been suggested, such as Bar-nabi (son of a prophet), or Bar-nawha (son of refreshment), or Bar-nebo (son of the pagan god Nebo), or

Etymologies aside, the important thing is how well the by-name fits the picture of Barnabas in Acts. He was the encourager, the advocate, the *paraklete* par excellence of all the characters in Acts. When the Christians in Jerusalem shied away from Paul after his conversion, Barnabas interceded and introduced him to them (9:26f.). When Paul refused to take Mark on his second missionary journey, Barnabas took up for Mark (15:36–39). When the Christians of Jerusalem became concerned over the orthodoxy of the Antiochene Christians in their witness to Greeks, Barnabas again served as intercessor, saw the gracious work of the Antiochene Christians, and encouraged them (11:20–23). Indeed, 11:24 well sums up the portrait of this “Son of Encouragement”: “He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith.”

We also learn that Barnabas was a Levite from Cyprus. Levites were officials in the temple cultus, subordinate in rank to the priests. Prohibited from offering sacrifices and barred entrance to the holy place, they served in such capacities as policing the temple grounds, keeping the gates, and providing the music at sacrifices and on ceremonial occasions.⁸⁸¹¹ According to ancient provisions (Deut 10:9; Num 18:20, 24), Levites were not supposed to own land, but that no longer seemed to apply in Barnabas’s day. (Indeed, Jeremiah, a priest, owned land [Jer 32:6–15].)

We are not told where the field was located, whether in Judea or his native Cyprus. Nothing was made of Barnabas’s Levitical status in Acts.⁸⁸²² He may never have served as a Levite. Such service was in no way compulsory for one of Levitical lineage.⁸⁸³³ Just how strong were Barnabas’s Cypriot roots we also are not told. Luke simply said here that he was a Cypriot by birth. His family may have moved to Jerusalem when he was quite young, and it is in and around Jerusalem where we find Barnabas active in the early chapters of Acts. On the other hand, it is probably not by chance that Paul and Barnabas’s mission work together began on the island of Cyprus.

6. A Serious Threat to the Common Life (5:1–11)

¹Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. ²With his wife’s full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet.

³Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?”

Bar-menahem (son of consolation). Obviously the last suggestion fits best, but there is no way one can derive *nabas* from *menahem*. Scholars who make this suggestion assume that Luke confused Barnabas with the Manaen whose name is listed along with his in Acts 13:1, but this is grasping at a straw. For further treatment see S. Brock, “Barnabas, *Huios Paraklēseos*,” *JTS* 25 (1974): 93–98; A. Deissmann, *Bible Studies* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1901), 308–10.

⁸¹⁸¹ R. Meyer, “Levites,” *TDNT* 4:239–41.

⁸²⁸² Luke may have seen some symbolical significance in Barnabas’s being a Levite. Levites were the subordinates in the temple cultus, and Barnabas was consistently depicted in Acts as being in the service of others, humble, and self-effacing.

⁸³⁸³ Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 213.

⁴Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God."

⁵When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. ⁶Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

⁷About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"

"Yes," she said, "that is the price."

⁹Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."

¹⁰At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

If Barnabas was a positive example of the community's sharing, the story of Ananias and Sapphira provides a sharp contrast. They too sold a piece of property, pledging the proceeds to the community of believers. But they held back part of the proceeds; and a terrible judgment followed, resulting in both their deaths. Perhaps no passage in Acts raises more serious difficulties for Christian readers. The judgment on these two seems so harsh, so nonredemptive, so out of keeping with the gospel. It will be necessary to return to this question; but in order to make an accurate assessment, it would be wise first to look at the passage itself and examine what it seems to say and what it does not say.

The passage falls into two natural divisions: the confrontation of Ananias (vv. 1–6) and the strikingly parallel confrontation with Sapphira (vv. 7–11). In both sections Peter, as the spokesman for the apostles, to whom the community funds were entrusted (4:35), did the confronting. It is striking that "equal time" is given to both the man and the woman. In both his Gospel and in Acts, Luke paired women with men, particularly in contexts of witness and discipleship. Here perhaps he was showing that along with discipleship goes responsibility; and this applies to all disciples, female as well as male. This would have been particularly noteworthy in the Jewish culture of the early Jerusalem church, where a woman's religious status was largely tied up with her father or husband and depended on his faithful execution of the religious responsibilities.⁸⁴⁴

Ananias was the first to be confronted. Although the first two verses refer to Sapphira's complicity and are in that sense introductory to both parts of the passage, the verbs are singular—he "sold a piece of property ... he kept back part of the money." There is a mild irony even in Ananias's name, whose etymology is "God is gracious." In light of the fearsome judgment that befell his own actions, the grace of God was surely his only hope.

5:1 Ananias had evidently sold a piece of land,⁸⁵⁵ like Barnabas, and also like Barnabas had pledged the full proceeds to the community. This can be assumed from the use of a rare Greek verb (*nosphizomai*, v. 2) to describe his action in holding back part of the money. The verb

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid., 359–76.

⁸⁵⁵ Verse 1 is ambiguous, referring to κτήμα, a possession; but v. 3 clarifies that it was a field, landed property (χώριου).

means to *pilfer, to purloin, to embezzle*. One does not embezzle one's own funds but those of another, in this instance those that rightfully belonged to the common Christian fund. Significantly, the same rare verb occurs in the Greek version of Josh 7:1–26, the story of Achan, who took from Jericho some of the booty “devoted” (i.e., set aside for God) for sacred use. Achan received a judgment of death from God himself, and Luke may well have seen a reminder of his fate in the similar divine judgment that came upon Ananias and Sapphira. They too had embezzled what was sacred, what belonged to the community in whom the Holy Spirit resided. One must assume either that the practice of the community was always to pledge the full proceeds of a sale or that Ananias and Sapphira had made such a pledge with regard to the sale of the field.⁸⁸⁶⁶

5:2–3 In any event, when Ananias placed the reduced portion at the apostles' feet, Peter confronted him with his duplicity (v. 3). How Peter knew it was an incomplete sum the text does not say. The emphasis on the Spirit throughout the passage would indicate that it was inspired, prophetic insight on Peter's part, just as the Spirit inspired Elisha to see his servant Gehazi's duplicity in accepting money from Naaman the leper (2 Kgs 5:26).⁸⁸⁷⁷ Peter knew that Ananias's gesture was a lie. He had not given his pledge but only a part. “Why have you embezzled [“kept for yourself,” NIV] a portion of the sale price? Why have you allowed Satan to enter your heart?” One must remember that the community was “of one heart and mind” (4:32). This spiritual unity lay behind their not claiming their possessions as their own, their sharing everything they had. They were the community of the Holy Spirit, and in this community they placed all their trust, found their identity and their security. But this was not so with Ananias. His heart was divided. He had one foot in the community and the other still groping for a toehold on the worldly security of earthly possessions. To lie with regard to the sharing was to belie the unity of the community, to belie the Spirit that undergirded that unity.⁸⁸⁸⁸ That is why Peter accused Ananias of lying to the Spirit. The Greek expression is even stronger than that—he “belied,” he “falsified” the Spirit.⁸⁸⁹⁹ His action was in effect a denial, a falsification of the Spirit's presence in the community.⁹⁰⁰⁰ All this had happened because he had allowed the

⁸⁸⁶⁶ J. D. M. Derrett suggests that what the couple held back was Sapphira's *ketubah*, the portion belonging to her as her bridal rights, which could come to her in the event she was divorced or widowed. This would explain her own involvement in the transaction (“Ananias, Sapphira, and the Right of Property,” *DownRev* 89 (1971): 225–32.

⁸⁷⁸⁷ Note also that Gehazi experienced a punishment-miracle by being struck with Naaman's leprosy (2 Kgs 5:27).

⁸⁸⁸⁸ L. Johnson, *Literary Function*, 207–08. F. F. Bruce notes that this concept of the ideal community being totally indwelt by the Spirit is found in Qumran texts that deal with the community of the end time: “The Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles,” *Int* 27 (1973): 166–83.

⁸⁹⁸⁹ F. Stagg, *The Book of Acts: The Early Struggle for an Unhindered Gospel* (Nashville: Broadman, 1955), 83.

⁹⁰⁹⁰ Many have sought to see the reference to Ananias's lying to the Spirit as indicating the “unforgivable sin” of blasphemy against the Spirit (Mark 3:28–29), but Ananias was not guilty of that, which is to attribute the works of God to Satan. Ananias was guilty of

archenemy of the Spirit, Satan, to enter his heart. Satan “filled” Ananias’s heart just as he had Judas’s (cf. Luke 22:3). Like Judas, Ananias was motivated by money (cf. Luke 22:5). But in filling the heart of one of its members, Satan had now entered for the first time into the young Christian community as well.

5:4 Peter reminded Ananias that he had been under no compulsion (v. 4). He did not have to sell his land. Even if he sold it, he still could have retained the proceeds. The act of dedicating the land to the community was strictly voluntary. Once pledged, however, it became a wholly different matter.⁹⁹¹¹ It had been dedicated to the community. In lying about the proceeds, he had broken a sacred trust. Ultimately, he had lied to God. Not that he had not betrayed the community. Not that he had not lied to the Spirit. Rather, to betray the community is to lie to the Spirit that fills the community, and to falsify the Spirit of God is an affront to God himself.

5:5–6 When Ananias heard these words, “he fell down and died” (v. 5). How did he die? Was it from shock from overwhelming guilt and remorse upon the exposure of his sin? Was he struck down by God?⁹⁹²² The text does not say. The note about the fear that came upon all who heard about it, however, would indicate that they at least saw the hand of God in it all. The manner in which his funeral was handled would likewise indicate that a divine judgment was seen in the whole affair. The young men arose,⁹⁹³³ wrapped up his body,⁹⁹⁴⁴ and carried him outside the city to bury him.⁹⁹⁵⁵ They wasted no time in ceremony, for they were back in three hours (vv. 7, 10).

duplicity, lying, greed, hypocrisy—but not of blasphemy. See P. Menoud, “*La Mort d’Ananias et de Saphira (Acts 5, 1–11)*,” *Aux Sources de la Tradition Chrétienne: Melanges offerts à M. Maurice Goguel* (Neuchatel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1950), 146–54.

⁹¹⁹¹ F. Scheidweiler emends the οὐχὶ to οὐκ ὀ, thus changing the question to a declaration: “What remained was not yours, nor when sold was it at your disposal” (“Zu Act. 5:4,” *ZNW* 49 [1958]: 136–37). B. Capper argues that the phrase ἐν τῇ σῆ ἐξουσίᾳ is a terminus technicus and indicates that the early church had a practice much like Qumran of holding a novice’s funds in trust until he became a full member and the funds would be merged into the common fund (“The Interpretation of Acts 5:4,” *JSNT* 19 [1983]: 117–31).

⁹²⁹² Derrett (“Ananias, Sapphira,” 229–31) speaks of the rabbinic category of death “at the hands of heaven,” special cultic offenses which were not covered by specific laws and punishments but which were seen to come under divine retribution; and he suggests that Ananias and Sapphira may fall in this category. He adds that such deaths were often viewed as having atoning efficacy for the sin involved and in no way excluded one from the life to come.

⁹³⁹³ Some see in the Greek word for young men (νεώτεροι) a reference to a special order of “youngers” as opposed to “elders.” There is no evidence in the NT for such an order, and the “elders” do not appear in Acts until 11:30.

⁹⁴⁹⁴ “Wrapped up” seems the most likely translation of συστέλλω, which could also be translated “snatch up” or “carry away.”

⁹⁵⁹⁵ Only prophets and kings were buried within Jerusalem and few of those. Burial was generally outside the walls, where the corpse was laid in a cave, which explains why the young men could complete the procedure so quickly.

This was most unusual procedure. Burials were often fairly hasty in Palestine, but not that hasty, not, that is, except for death under unusual circumstances, such as suicides and criminals—and judgments from God.⁹⁹⁶⁶

5:7 About three hours later Sapphira appeared on the scene. Just where the scene was we are not told. Luke told the story with the greatest economy. We are also not told who was present. Were all the apostles there? Only Peter is mentioned. How many of those upon whom fear came (v. 5) were actually present to hear the confrontation? We must assume that at least the young men were there with Peter and Ananias (v. 6). For all we are told, in this scene it may have been a matter of only Peter and Sapphira. Where had she been all this time? Why had she not been informed of her husband's death? Why did she now appear; was she looking for her husband?

Luke was not interested in such details. His only goal was to point to the grim outcome of her duplicity with her husband. She joined him in the conspiracy with the funds. She would join him in death.

5:8 Peter confronted her about the sale price, just as he had confronted Ananias. "Is this the price you ... got for the land?" he asked her (v. 8). "Yes," she replied. We are again left with questions. Did Peter mention the actual sale price or the reduced sum Ananias had brought? In giving an affirmative answer, was Sapphira conforming her guilt by continuing the lie? That is the most likely event, and most interpreters so take it. Yet if Peter had mentioned the actual full sale price, then her response would have been an admission of guilt, a confession.

5:9–10 In any event, with neither Ananias nor Sapphira did Peter pronounce a curse. His questioning of Sapphira left her the opportunity of repentance, and one can probably assume the same for Ananias. Peter's role was to confront—not to judge. The judgment came from God. But Peter had to lay before her the consequences of her action. She had joined with her husband in "testing" the Spirit of the Lord. This time the expression was not of lying to the Spirit but of testing him, to see how far he would go in his tolerance.⁹⁹⁷⁷ Not very far, was Peter's answer: "The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also." This was the first Sapphira had heard of her husband's death, and she fell down immediately at Peter's feet, dead.

Peter's words scarcely sound redemptive. He was fulfilling the prophetic role of the divine mouthpiece, pronouncing God's judgment on her for her complicity with her husband. She may have died of shock; but if so, it was inevitable, for Peter already knew and informed her that her doom was sealed. One can scarcely miss the irony of the situation. Now she lay at Peter's feet, in the place of her money. She had joined her husband in conspiracy. Now she would join him in the grave.⁹⁹⁸⁸

5:11 Sapphira's story is bracketed by the same epitaph as that of her husband (cf. v. 5b): "Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events." The repetition is

⁹⁶⁹⁶ So Derrett, "Ananias, Sapphira," 230.

⁹⁷⁹⁷ Seccombe (*Possessions*, 213) points out that the expression "testing the Spirit" with one exception (Isa 7:12) always in the OT refers to Israel's putting God to test in the wilderness: Exod 17:2; Deut 6:16; Pss 78:18, 41, 56; 95:8f. Is there an implicit wilderness motif for the "new people of God" in the Ananias and Sapphira story?

⁹⁸⁹⁸ L. Johnson, *Literary Function*, 209.

not by chance: it is the whole point of the story. The church is a holy body, the realm of the Spirit. By the power of this spiritual presence in its midst, the young community worked miracles, witnessed fearlessly, and was blessed with incredible growth. The Spirit was the power behind its unity, and its unity was the power behind its witness. But just as with God there is both justice and mercy, so with his Spirit there is also an underside to his blessing. There is his judgment. This Ananias and Sapphira experienced. The Spirit is not to be taken lightly. As the Spirit of God he must always be viewed with fear in the best sense of that word (*phobos*), reverent awe and respect. It might be noted that this is the first time the word “church” (*ekklēsia*) occurs in Acts, which denotes the people of God gathered as a religious community. Perhaps it is not by accident that it occurs in the context of this story. The church can only thrive as the people of God if it lives within the total trust of all its members. Where there is that unity of trust, that oneness of heart and mind, the church flourishes in the power of the Spirit. Where there is duplicity and distrust, its witness fails.

Overview. There have been numerous approaches to dealing with the severity of this passage. One has been to note the various parallels to this story elsewhere. In form this story can be classified as a “penalty miracle,” or miracle of divine judgment; and such stories are common in the Old Testament.⁹⁹⁹⁹ To those of Achan and Gehazi, one could add the incident of Nadab and Abihu in Lev 10:1f., who were consumed by the same “unauthorized fire” that they laid upon the censor, or the devastating judgment on Jeroboam delivered to his disguised wife by Abijah the prophet (1 Kgs 14:1–18). Even closer is the unhappy fate of the two elders whose lie about Susanna led to their own death rather than hers (Sus). The most apt Old Testament parallel is the provision for Israel’s purity, which one encounters frequently in Deuteronomy: “Root out the evil one from your midst” (author’s translation).¹⁰¹⁰⁰⁰ A number of recent interpreters have sought a closer parallel in the punishment the Qumran community enforced on those who held back goods from the common fund. As has already been noted, this is not a real parallel, since the early church seems to have had a voluntary system of sharing and not an enforced monastic community of goods like Qumran. What happened to Ananias and Sapphira is quite remote from the punishment meted to the Qumran member who failed to surrender all his property on entrance to the community. Such violators were excluded from the common meal for a period of a year and had their food rations cut by a quarter.¹⁰¹⁰¹¹

Other suggestions have sought to alleviate the judgmental note in the story of Ananias and Sapphira. It is often argued that their “lying to the Spirit” was the sin Jesus declared to be “unforgivable.”¹⁰¹⁰²² It has already been noted that Acts 5:1–11 simply does not depict Ananias and Sapphira’s sin in terms of blaspheming the Spirit, attributing the work of the Spirit to

⁹⁹⁹⁹ G. Theissen classifies this as a “rule miracle” and notes that it is the only example in the NT of a community rule enforced negatively by means of a punishment (*The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition*, trans. F. McDonagh [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983], 109).

¹⁰⁰¹⁰⁰ Deut 13:5; 17:7, 12; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21, 24; 24:7. Cf. 1 Cor 5:13.

¹⁰¹¹⁰¹ J. A. Fitzmyer, “Jewish Christianity,” 243.

¹⁰²¹⁰² So J. Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles*, rev. by W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, AB (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967), 41; Robertson, *WP* 3:61.

Satan.¹⁰¹⁰³³ Often it is said that the pair died of psychological fright. This can be neither proved nor disproved from the text, and it well may have been the case; but it does not alleviate the strong judgmental note of the text. Peter knew and told Sapphira beforehand that she was about to be carried feetfirst out the door. Luke's emphasis on the fear of the people would likewise indicate that they saw divine judgment in the incident, not just a couple's panic in being caught with the goods.¹⁰¹⁰⁴⁴

When all is said and done, there is no "comfortable" solution to the passage. It is a unique story. There is nothing like it elsewhere in Acts,¹⁰¹⁰⁵⁵ or for that matter in the New Testament. But nowhere in the story are Ananias and Sapphira condemned to eternal perdition. Their death did not necessarily involve their loss of salvation.¹⁰¹⁰⁶⁶ Still, the judgment that befell Ananias and Sapphira was severe, and one is all too aware that today's churches would be much emptier if such standards were consistently applied. It is part and parcel of Luke's ideal portrait of the early church in Acts. None of the standards fit the church of our experience—"one in heart and mind," no one "claimed that any of his possessions was his own." Luke depicted it as a unique period, the new people of God in Christ, filled with the Spirit, growing by leaps and bounds. There was no room for distrust, for duplicity, for any breach in fellowship.¹⁰⁷

The same Spirit that gave the community its growth also maintained its purity. This seems to have been Luke's point, for the Ananias and Sapphira story is bracketed by an emphasis on the unity of the community (4:32–35) and the power of the Spirit in its midst (5:12–16).

One must not pass the story off, however, as a unique phenomenon of the primitive church or an adjunct to Luke's ideal portrait of the church. If the incident makes us uncomfortable, it should. For one, it deals with money. Luke, who as a physician probably had known personally the pitfalls of wealth, of all the Gospel writers gave the strongest treatment of money's dangers. Ultimately the temptations of money ensnared Judas (Luke 22:5; Acts 1:18), the rich young man (Luke 18:18–23), and the rich fool (Luke 12:15–21). The same quest for material security trapped Ananias and Sapphira. Not only was it their undoing, but it also threatened the church.

¹⁰³¹⁰³ See n. 90.

¹⁰⁴¹⁰⁴ The same can be said for P. Menoud's view ("*La Mort d'Ananias et Sapphira*," see n. 90) that the story developed from the first deaths in the church and the consternation this created for the Christians who expected to still be alive at the Parousia. Luke's concern was not with deaths but with breach of fellowship, and the text must be dealt with in that light, i.e., in its context.

¹⁰⁵¹⁰⁵ There are other penalty miracles in Acts, but none are so severe. Elymas the magician lost his sight but only "for a time" (13:11); the sons of Sceva took a beating and lost their clothing, but that is all (19:16), though Herod's death and worm-eaten state could possibly be considered a penalty miracle (12:19b–23).

¹⁰⁶¹⁰⁶ Paul attributed deaths within the Corinthian community to a breach of fellowship and did not imply any loss of salvation (1 Cor 11:30).

¹⁰⁷ John B. Polhill, [Acts](#), vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 124–161.

Then, and now, the mark of any Christian fellowship is the relationship of its members to material matters. That is where its real heart and mind are revealed. This story reminds us of a further truth. The church, when it *is* the church, is a holy community, the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16f.). Disunity, duplicity, and hypocrisy always “believe” the Spirit and hinder his work. If the church is to have genuine spiritual power in its life and witness, it must be an environment of the Spirit, devoted to maintaining its sanctity and purity.

7. The Miracles Worked by the Apostles (5:12–16)

¹²The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon’s Colonnade. ¹³No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. ¹⁴Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. ¹⁵As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. ¹⁶Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed.

This third summary statement in Acts comes close on the heels of the second. That one emphasized the community of sharing practiced by the church (4:32–35). This one emphasizes the healing ministry of the apostles and bears out the divine response to their prayer for signs and wonders in 4:30. In structure the first statement, about the signs and wonders done by the apostles (v. 12a), connects directly with v. 15 and constitutes the main new emphasis in the summary statements—the healing ministry. Verses 12b–14 are a sort of parenthesis, continuing emphases that have been made in all the summaries—the effectiveness of the Christians’ witness and their favor with the people (cf. 2:47; 4:33). The whole passage, with its focus on the healing ministry and the growing acclaim of the people, prepares for the renewed concern of the Sadducees and their arrest of the apostles, just as the healing of the lame man (3:1–10) led to the first arrest (4:1–22).

5:12–14 Verses 12–13 are deceptively clear in the NIV. The Greek text is far more ambiguous. The first statement is clear enough: “The apostles performed signs and wonders among the people.” An example of such a sign has already been given with Peter’s healing the lame man (3:1–10). Now all the apostles were shown to be doing miraculous works. The miracles were performed among the Jewish populace (*laos*) and were “signs” that pointed to and prepared the way for the witness to the word. The Greek of v. 12b says that “they all” were accustomed to meet together in Solomon’s Colonnade. The NIV clarifies by adding “believers.” Some interpreters would see the “all” of v. 12b as referring only to the apostles and then see “no one else” in v. 13 as referring to none of the other Christians. This has the advantage of solving the seeming contradiction between vv. 13–14, where no one dared join the Christians, yet many new converts were added. It, however, raises the rather serious question of why the other Christians wouldn’t join the apostles in Solomon’s Colonnade. Were they afraid of their power after what happened to Ananias and Sapphira? Were they afraid of being arrested by the temple authorities? Such timidity is scarcely likely for the community that prayed so boldly in 4:23–31. It is probably best, and the most likely reading, to follow the NIV and see v. 12b as

referring to the other Christians joining the apostles in Solomon's Colonnade. Peter had preached there after the healing of the lame man (3:11), and it was likely the customary gathering place for the Christians. Other references to their preaching in the temple may well have been in this place just inside the eastern wall (cf. 5:20f., 25, 42).

The people were awed by the power of the apostles, seeing the miracles worked through their hands,¹⁰¹⁰⁸⁷ and perhaps having heard the report about Ananias and Sapphira. They did not run up and join the Christian band in the colonnade but kept a healthy distance (v. 13a).¹⁰¹⁰⁹⁸ Nevertheless they held the Christians in the highest regard. Luke was working with a paradox here. It is the same two-sidedness of the Spirit's power that had just been demonstrated in Ananias and Sapphira. The power of the miracles attracts. The awesome power of the Spirit that judges also demands commitment and responsibility. Before that power the crowd kept its distance with healthy respect, unless they were willing to fully submit to that power and make a commitment. Many did, Luke said, making it clear this time that men and women became disciples and were added to the growing community of believers (v. 14).

5:15 Verse 15 returns to the main theme of the summary, the healing ministry of the apostles. Again Peter was the representative. So widespread was the fame of his healing powers that people would bring their sick friends and relatives into Peter's presence in the hope that even his shadow might fall upon them. One is reminded of the woman who shared a similar hope that the fringe of Jesus' garment might heal her (Luke 8:44). In the ancient world a person's shadow was the subject of much superstition and was believed to represent his or her power and personality, to literally be an extension of their person.¹⁰¹¹⁰⁹ Whether or not they were healed by Peter's shadow Luke did not explicitly say, but the note underlines the strength of the apostle's healing reputation.

5:16 In any event, crowds came from all the surrounding villages to Jerusalem to be healed by the apostles. One is reminded of Jesus' own healing ministry as recorded in Mark 6:53–56 and the similar response of the people.¹¹¹¹¹⁰ At this point the apostles were still confined to Jerusalem. The people came to them from the outlying villages. Only later would they go forth from Jerusalem and take their gospel and their healing ministry into the villages of Judea (cf. 9:32–43).

¹⁰⁸¹⁰⁷ Verse 12a reads literally, "Many signs and wonders happened *through the hands of the apostles.*" Luke's wording was carefully chosen. Peter made clear that he himself did not heal the lame man (3:12); the apostles were merely the agents through whom God worked his miracles.

¹⁰⁹¹⁰⁸ A number of scholars have wanted to see "the rest" of v. 13 as referring to the Jewish officials, emending λοιπῶν to "Levites" (Hilgenfeld) or "elders" (C. C. Torrey), or "rulers" (M. Dibelius). Often this is combined with the view that κολλᾶσθαι should be translated "seize," giving the meaning that they dared not arrest the Christians for fear of their popularity with the people. See C. C. Torrey, "The 'Rest' in Acts v. 13," *ExpTim* 46 (1934–35): 428–29; D. Schwarz, "Non-Joining Sympathizers (Acts 5, 13–14)," *Bib* 64 (1983): 550–55.

¹¹⁰¹⁰⁹ P. W. van der Horst, "Peter's Shadow: The Religio-Historical Background of Acts v. 15," *NTS* 23 (1977): 204–12.

¹¹¹¹¹⁰ This Markan pericope is not paralleled in Luke's Gospel.

8. All the Apostles Before the Council (5:17–42)

As in 3:1–4:5, the apostles' healing led to their arrest by the temple authorities and to a hearing before the Jewish Sanhedrin. Many similarities exist between this section and other portions of Acts, especially the twofold trial scenes of 4:5–22 and 5:27–40 and the escape scenes of 5:17–26 and 12:6–11. This has led many scholars to postulate Luke's use of different sources that covered the same events,¹¹¹¹²¹ but this tends to overlook the real progression that takes place in the narrative. The conflict between the Christians and the Jews steadily intensified.¹¹¹¹³² With the growing success of the Christian witness, there is a heightened reaction on the part of the Jewish authorities—at first only a hearing, warning, and release (4:5–22). Now those on the Council would impose the death penalty (5:33) and were only thwarted in their intentions by the sage advice of a Pharisee (5:34–39). The apostles were again released, but this time the Council had them whipped before so doing (5:40). The conflict became even stronger with the killing of Stephen (6:8–8:2) and the resulting persecution of the Christians in Jerusalem (8:1); and it reached its apex in chap. 12, where the execution of James and the attempt to do the same to Peter found the support not only of the Jewish officials but the populace as well (12:3).

This second encounter with the Sanhedrin can be divided into three main parts: the initial arrest and its almost ludicrous result (5:17–26), the hearing before the Sanhedrin (5:27–40), and the release of the apostles with their continued witness (5:41–42).

(1) Arrest, Escape, and Rearrest (5:17–26)

¹⁷Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. ¹⁸They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. ¹⁹But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. ²⁰“Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people the full message of this new life.”

²¹At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.

When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles. ²²But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, ²³“We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.” ²⁴On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of this.

²⁵Then someone came and said, “Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.” ²⁶At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.

¹¹²¹¹¹ Any source analysis of Acts tends to be fairly subjective since there are no parallel sources to be compared with it as is the case with the Synoptics. See the discussion in the introduction.

¹¹³¹¹² This stress on the narrative development rather than on sources is effectively made by E. Haenchen, *Acts*, 254–56.

5:17–18 As before, the Sadducees were enraged by the apostles’ preaching. They were described as being “filled with jealousy,” undoubtedly over the tremendous success of the Christian witness (5:15–16). The word translated “jealousy” can also mean *zeal*, and there may well have been an element of zeal in their determination to stamp out this growing messianic movement before its increasing popularity aroused the concern of the Roman authorities and led to severe reprisals. The high priest was again the spokesman.¹¹¹¹⁴³ He was ultimately responsible for the proper maintenance of the temple precincts and its cultus, and so it was very much on his turf where the Christians were having all their success (cf. v. 12b). His cohorts in the local party¹¹¹¹⁵⁴ of Sadducees would have shared his concern for preserving the peace against such popular movements and supported him in putting the apostles in the public jail (v. 18).¹¹¹¹⁶⁵ One should not miss the irony of their being placed in the public jail, i.e., openly and for everyone to see. Soon they would be unable to find these very ones who were so openly placed in jail.

5:19–21a The miraculous escape of the apostles is told with the greatest economy here. In vv. 21b–26 it will be retold in far greater detail. The emphasis is placed on the total helplessness of the Jewish authorities. In this way the lesson of Gamaliel’s speech is illustrated vividly beforehand—“If it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men” (v. 39).

An “angel” of the Lord appeared to the imprisoned apostles at night, opened the prison doors,¹¹¹¹⁷⁶ and led them out (v. 19). The angel gave the apostles God’s instructions. They were to return to the temple and speak “the full message of this new life.”¹¹¹¹⁸⁷ They were to resume their witness, preaching the gospel that leads to life, the message of salvation.¹¹¹¹⁹⁸ The apostles went and did as the angel bade them, early in the morning when the crowds would be gathering in the temple to observe the morning sacrifice. They obviously were not concerned for their safety. They returned to the very spot where they had been arrested, preaching the

¹¹⁴¹¹³ One Old Latin manuscript reads *Annas* for the participle ἀναστάς, which begins v. 17, thus rendering “Annas the High Priest,” and Moffatt follows that variant in his translation. This is very much in keeping with Luke’s designation of Annas as high priest in 4:6, but it is too poorly attested to adopt.

¹¹⁵¹¹⁴ Josephus used the term “philosophies” to describe the three major parties within contemporary Judaism—the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes (*Ant.* 18.11). The rather awkward phrase “the existing sect” (ἡ οὖσα αἰρεσις) appears in v. 17, which seems to mean *the local sect* in accordance with the usage elsewhere in Acts for ἡ οὖσα (cf. 14:13; 28:17).

¹¹⁶¹¹⁵ Τηρήσει δημοσίᾳ could refer either to the “public jail” or to their being put “in jail publicly.”

¹¹⁷¹¹⁶ If it was the same prison in which Peter was later confined, two doors were involved (12:10).

¹¹⁸¹¹⁷ The Greek word ἄγγελος means *messenger*. In Acts angels are *God’s* messengers, speaking his words, performing his acts of deliverance—cf. 8:26; 10:3; 12:7, 23. Note also how consistently in Acts miraculous escapes from prison took place at night—12:6; cf. 16:25.

¹¹⁹¹¹⁸ In Acts the terms “salvation” and “life” are virtually synonymous. Cf. “life” in 3:15; 11:18; 13:46 with “salvation” in 4:12; 11:14; 15:11; 16:17, 30f.

same words of life for which they were arrested. Perhaps there is irony in their deliverance by the angel. Sadducees did not believe in angels.

5:21b–24 Now the interesting part of the story begins. The scene shifts to the Council chambers where the Sanhedrin had gathered for its morning session.¹¹¹²⁰⁹ The first item on the agenda was the interrogation of the apostles; so officers were sent to the jail to fetch them. But they were not there. The officers hastened back to deliver the startling news. The prison doors were securely locked. The guards were duly *standing* at their posts (and thus evidently awake). Yet there was no one inside. How in the world did they get out through locked gates, past the guards? The Council was at a total loss.

5:25–26 Finally someone arrived with the good news, or was it bad news? The prisoners hadn't totally escaped. They were on the temple grounds, back to their old tricks, teaching the people. Now the captain, the *sagan*, decided he had better handle the matter personally. After all, he was second in rank to the high priest himself and ultimately responsible for order on the temple grounds. Unusual circumstances like this had best not be left to lesser officials. So he went with his officers to gently persuade the apostles to accompany him to the Council chambers. He personally might have desired their execution by the usual procedure of stoning, but at this point he was more concerned about being stoned to death himself by the people, who held the apostles in the highest regard (cf. v. 13). One must not miss the irony in this entire fiasco.

The Sanhedrin was totally thwarted in its designs, totally helpless to control the situation. All was in God's hands. The only reason the apostles finally appeared before the Council was their own willingness to do so. And they were willing to do so because the events of the night had convinced them once more that they were very much in God's hands.

(2) Appearance Before Sanhedrin (5:27–40)

²⁷Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ²⁸"We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."

²⁹Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men! ³⁰The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. ³²We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

³³When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. ³⁴But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. ³⁵Then he addressed them: "Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men.

¹²⁰¹¹⁹ Luke used two expressions for the council in 21b, the "Sanhedrin" and the "full assembly (γεπουσία) of the elders of Israel." Some scholars argue that Luke referred here to two separate judicial bodies, but the terms are most likely parallel expressions for a single body, as the NIV indicates by the use of dashes.

³⁶Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. ³⁷After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. ³⁸Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. ³⁹But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”

⁴⁰His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

This second appearance before the Sanhedrin is significantly different from the first (4:5–22). That one only involved two apostles, Peter and John. Here all the apostles stood before the Council. There was no formal charge leveled against Peter and John; the questions mainly regarded their authorization (4:7). The apostles now were confronted with violation of the Council’s interdiction (5:28). The possibility of a verdict of death was not raised before, but at this point it became explicit (5:33). Most significant of all, there was no particular spokesperson for the Christians. Now there was, and he was a Pharisee (5:34–40). The trial scene falls into two rather balanced parts, focusing on the witness of the Christians (5:27–32) and the intercession of Gamaliel (5:33–40).

5:27–28 The trial began with the apostles being brought before the Sanhedrin. The Greek text has them “stood up” (*estēsan*) before the body, and this was the usual procedure, the defendants standing, the judges sitting. The high priest as presiding officer began the interrogation, charging the apostles with two offenses. First, they had broken the interdiction of the Sanhedrin and continued to preach “in this name.” Second, they were determined to lay the guilt for “this man’s blood” on them, the Jewish leaders.

What the high priest did not say is perhaps more significant than what he did say. He made absolutely no reference to the apostles’ escape. Was this out of total embarrassment? Further, he scrupulously avoided mentioning Jesus by name. Does this reflect that already at this early stage mentioning the name of Jesus was considered in some circles as blasphemous?¹²¹¹²¹⁰ In any event, there were formal charges this time. The apostles had been duly warned by the court not to continue further witness, and the interdiction had been fully ignored. They were unmistakably culpable.¹²¹¹²²¹ The high priest’s concern about being charged with responsibility for Jesus’ “blood” may have had more significance than appears at first sight. To “lay someone’s

¹²¹¹²⁰ In the period after the fall of Jerusalem (post A.D. 70), Christians were placed by Pharisaic orthodoxy under a formal curse or ban (the *birkat ha minim*), and uttering the name of Jesus was indeed considered blasphemy. It was scrupulously avoided in the rabbinic writings.

¹²²¹²¹ Jeremias’s theory for the necessity of a preliminary trial informing the defendant of his culpability has been critiqued by B. Reicke (*Glaube und Leben*, 105ff.), who pointed out that such a law applied only in capital offenses. However, Jeremias’s main point still seems to apply. In the first trial the Sanhedrin had no formal charges to make. In the second they did—the apostles had transgressed their interdiction. See J. Jeremias, “Untersuchungen zum Quellenproblem der Apostelgeschichte,” *ZNW* 36 (1937): 208–13.

blood” on someone is an Old Testament expression for a charge of murder and in accordance with the *ius Talionis* demanded the death of the guilty party.¹²¹²³² In essence the high priest was saying, “You are trying to get us killed for responsibility in this man’s death” (author’s paraphrase).

5:29 Peter, of course, was not trying to get the leaders killed but rather to get them saved. As in the first trial, his response was more of a witness than a defense. As then, he referred to the basic principle of obeying God rather than man (cf. 4:19), this time the form being even closer to that of Socrates’ famous quote in Plato’s *Apology* 29d. This principle underlies this entire section of Acts. Where God’s will lay in this instance was fully demonstrated in the escape with its command to resume the preaching in the temple. Not impeding God’s purposes would be the main thrust of Gamaliel’s speech. Peter had no choice. He had to remain true to the divine leading. His saying has continued to be used by Christians throughout the centuries, by Christian martyrs making the ultimate sacrifice in obedience to their Lord, and by power-hungry medieval popes exerting their influence over the secular rulers.¹²¹²⁴³ It is a dangerous saying, subject to abuse and misappropriation; and one should be as clear as Peter was about what God’s purposes really are before ever using it.

5:30–32 Peter’s witness before the Sanhedrin was basically a summary of the Christian *kerygma*, as it had been at his first trial (4:10–12). The basic elements are all there—the guilt of the Jewish leaders for crucifying Jesus, the resurrection and exaltation, repentance and forgiveness in his name, the apostolic witness. There are some differences in detail. Jesus’ crucifixion is described as “hanging on a tree,” probably in allusion to Deut 21:23, an Old Testament text the early Christians saw as pointing to Christ.¹²¹²⁵⁴

In v. 31 the exalted Christ is described as “Prince” and “Savior.” Neither term was new to Peter’s sermons. The first term occurred in his temple sermon (3:15), where it had the nuance of author or originator of the resurrection life. Here it has the sense of “leader” or “prince” but still in close connection with the new life he brings through repentance and forgiveness of sins. It is thus closely connected with the title “Savior,” which Peter had not used before. The concept of the salvation in his name, however, was at the very heart of his previous witness before the Sanhedrin (cf. 4:12). Here as there Peter’s purpose was the same—to demonstrate that Christ is indeed the risen Savior and to urge repentance and commitment to his name. Peter was issuing an invitation to the Sanhedrin. They had indeed sinned in hanging Jesus on the cross, but there is forgiveness and salvation for Israel in him. If they needed further proof that he is their deliverer, risen and exalted to God’s right hand, the apostles could bear eyewitness testimony to these realities (v. 32).

¹²³¹²² R. Pesch, *Apostelgeschichte* 1:216.

¹²⁴¹²³ An excellent summary of the use and abuse of this saying throughout Christian history is given by Pesch (*ibid.*, 1:222–24).

¹²⁵¹²⁴ Peter did not here use Deut 21:22f. to develop the idea of Christ’s becoming a curse for us, although that idea seems to be present in 1 Pet 2:24 and is fully developed by Paul in Gal 3:13. Compare further uses in Acts 10:39; 13:29. For the form of text behind the citations, see M. Wilcox, “Upon the Tree—Deut. 21:22–23 in the New Testament,” *JBL* 96 (1977): 85–99.

The pouring out of the Holy Spirit, so evident in all the miraculous works that were being accomplished, was bearing his own witness. Then as now, the Spirit is granted to all who obey God. Peter had been obedient, obeying God rather than man. Now his implicit appeal was that the Sanhedrin follow him in the same obedience.

5:33–34 The Jewish leaders were not the least inclined to respond to Peter’s appeal. Their reaction was quite the opposite. They were infuriated (*dieprionto*; lit., “sawn in two”). Some called for the death penalty, undoubtedly the Sadducees on the Council. Theologically they were not inclined to be convinced by Peter’s appeal to the resurrection, and politically Peter’s messianic message only served to further confirm that this was a dangerous, rabble-rousing group. They might have passed the verdict then and there had not a voice been raised urging moderation. It was a voice from the Pharisaic minority on the Council.

One wonders how much of a part politics played in the Sanhedrin’s decision on this particular occasion. Josephus said that the Sadducean officials usually yielded to the recommendations of the Pharisees because the latter enjoyed the support of the masses.¹²¹²⁶⁵ Gamaliel may have used this occasion as another opportunity to assert this Pharisaic ascendancy over the Sadducees. As a Pharisee he would have had more sympathy with the Christians theologically.¹²¹²⁷⁶ Pharisees believed in a coming Messiah, in the resurrection, and in a life after death, none of which the Sadducees accepted. The Pharisees also had an oral tradition of interpretation of the Torah that gave them considerable flexibility and openness to change. Not so the Sadducees, who accepted only the written Torah and were far more rigid and conservative in attitude. Such differences must have contributed considerably to Gamaliel’s more tolerant stance toward the apostles.¹²¹²⁸⁷

The Gamaliel in question here was Gamaliel I, who is referred to in several places in the rabbinic literature, though surprisingly sparsely for a man of his stature. He was the son or grandson of the famous Hillel and seemed to have been at the prime of his influence from about A.D. 25–50. Rabbinic tradition gives him the title of Nasi, or president of the high court, and has his son Simeon follow him in that role. His grandson Gamaliel II held the presidency after A.D. 90,¹²¹²⁹⁸ when the court met at Jamnia. Perhaps nowhere is the esteem in which he was held better expressed than in the following statement of the *Mishna*: “When Rabban Gamaliel the Elder died, the glory of the Law ceased and purity and abstinence died.”¹²¹³⁰⁹ For Christians he is best known through his pupil, Paul (Acts 22:3).

5:34–39 Gamaliel’s power in the Sanhedrin is subtly reflected in his ordering the apostles to be removed “for a little while.” Such matters were generally the prerogative of the high priest,

¹²⁶¹²⁵ *Antiquities* 18.17.

¹²⁷¹²⁶ In Acts the Pharisees are generally depicted as fairly sympathetic toward the Christians, in marked contrast to the picture in the Gospels, though in Luke the Pharisees played no real role in the crucifixion of Jesus. In Acts the Sadducees were the ones who mounted the real opposition, as here. See J. T. Sanders, *The Jews in Luke-Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 94–101.

¹²⁸¹²⁷ On the origins of the parties, see T. W. Manson, “Sadducee and Pharisee—The Origin and Significance of the Names,” *BJRL* 22 (1938): 144–59.

¹²⁹¹²⁸ *Beginnings* 4:60.

¹³⁰¹²⁹ *M. Sota* 9:15.

and his reference to “a little while” reflects his confidence that it wouldn’t take him long to sway the court. He began by urging the court to “consider carefully” what they were about to do to the apostles. Considering that the death penalty had just been suggested, he was implying that this might be a bit rash and bring unfortunate results down on them, particularly given the Christian popularity with the masses. There was a better way. Simply leave the movement alone. Leave it to God. If he was not in it, it would fizzle out (vv. 38–39).

5:36–37 To make his point, Gamaliel cited two examples of similar messianic movements in recent Jewish history. His reasoning was simple. Neither movement succeeded—God was not in them. The examples he chose, however, raise serious historical problems. These revolve primarily around the first example—Theudas. According to Gamaliel, this Theudas appeared “some time ago,” claiming to be somebody (cf. 8:9), raised a following of about 400 men, and was killed. With his death the followers scattered in every direction, and the whole movement ended. The only other Theudas during this period of whom there is record is mentioned in Josephus’s *Antiquities* (20.97–99). According to Josephus, this Theudas raised a considerable following from the masses, persuading them to take along all their possessions and join him at the Jordan River. Claiming to be a prophet, he insisted that at his command the waters of the Jordan would part (as in the days of Joshua). Getting wind of the movement, the Roman procurator arrived on the scene with a squadron of cavalry, took many prisoners, and beheaded Theudas, taking the trophy to Jerusalem (for a public object lesson).

If Luke and Josephus were talking about the same Theudas, there is a serious anachronism, for Josephus’s Theudas is dated during the procuratorship of Fadus, whose term began in A.D. 44, some ten to fifteen years later than the time when Gamaliel would have delivered this address. To make matters worse, Gamaliel then gave the example of Judas the Galilean, who he said arose after Theudas, when in fact Judas’s rebellion occurred in A.D. 6, nearly forty years earlier than Theudas’s movement.

Many approaches have been taken in dealing with this problem,¹³¹³¹⁰ but basically three possibilities emerge: (1) either Josephus was in error, (2) or Luke was responsible for the anachronisms, or (3) they refer to two different Theudas. It is unlikely that Josephus would have made such an error. He lived in Palestine during the period of Fadus and would have had personal recollection of such events as the movement under Theudas. This leads many scholars to attribute the anachronism to Luke.¹³¹³²¹ Obviously for those who are impressed with Luke’s

¹³¹¹³⁰ Josephus spoke of the sons of Judas the Galilean in the paragraph immediately following his account of Theudas (*Ant.* 20.102). It is sometimes argued that Luke used this section of Josephus and confused the sons with the father. This solves the problem of sequence between Theudas and Judas but raises others, not least of which would be a very late date for Acts. (*Ant.* was published in A.D. 93.) Though it often has been maintained, it is not likely Luke used Josephus. Where their matter overlaps, no literary relationship can be shown. For an entirely different solution, which would move the historical setting of Gamaliel’s speech to chap. 12 (ca. A.D. 44), see J. W. Swain, “Gamaliel’s Speech and Caligula’s Statue,” *HTR* 37 (1944): 341–49.

¹³²¹³¹ E.g., E. Haenchen, *Acts*, 257; H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, trans. J. Limburg, A. Kraabel, and D. Juel, *Her* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 42.

general historical accuracy elsewhere and who are not disposed to according him such a mistake, the third option remains the most viable route.

Although it is an argument from silence, there is solid basis for arguing that the Theudas of Acts may be a different person from the one mentioned by Josephus. For one, the Acts account is very brief and could be applied to any number of messianic pretenders. Apart from the name Theudas and the fact of his death, it has little in common with Josephus's account. All the colorful highlights are missing—the parting of the Jordan, the arrival of the cavalry, the beheading. Acts gives the modest following of 400 men; Josephus spoke of “the majority of the masses” following Theudas. Acts says they were dispersed; Josephus, that many were arrested.

A second consideration is that the name Theudas may be a nickname or a Greek form of a common Hebrew name. In such a case the Theudas of Acts may be identified elsewhere by a different, Hebrew name.¹³¹³³² Finally, Josephus spoke of innumerable tumults and insurrections that arose in Judea following the death of Herod the Great (4 B.C.).¹³¹³⁴³ Though he mentioned no leaders of these movements by name, this would be a plausible context for the Theudas incident mentioned in Gamaliel's speech.

Gamaliel's second example is less problematic. He referred to Judas the Galilean who arose “in the days of the census.” This is almost surely the same Judas who is referred to by Josephus in both his *Jewish War* and his *Antiquities*.¹³¹³⁵⁴ He started a major rebellion in protest of the census under Quirinius (A.D. 6–7), which was undertaken for purposes of taxation. Josephus did not mention his death, but Gamaliel referred to his being killed and all his followers being scattered. Although the original rebellion under Judas was stifled by the Romans, such was not the case with the general movement begun by Judas. According to Josephus, he laid the foundations of the Zealot movement within Judaism, a movement that would grow to such proportions that in less than twenty-five years after Gamaliel's speech, it would initiate all-out war with the Romans.

5:38–39 Gamaliel's point is clear (vv. 38–39). God will work out his will. A movement that has his backing will prevail. Otherwise it will abort. So leave these men alone, lest you find yourselves fighting God. At this point in time Gamaliel might also have been concerned about their finding themselves fighting the Jewish populace. In any event he enunciated a sound rabbinic principle: “Any assembling together that is for the sake of Heaven shall in the end be

¹³¹³³² Theudas is most likely a shortened form of a Greek name such as Theodotus or Theodosius, meaning *Gift of God*. Jews often adopted such Greek names that corresponded etymologically to their given Hebrew names. Hebrew names corresponding to Theodotus would be such common ones as Jonathan, Nathaniel, and Matthias. See C. J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1989), 162–63, n. 5. A similar argument sees Theudas as a possible Aramaic nickname meaning witness; P. Winter, “*Miszellen zur Apostelgeschichte*. 1. Acta 5, 36: Theudas,” *ExpTim* 17 (1957): 398–99.

¹³⁴¹³³ *Antiquities* 17.269, 285.

¹³⁵¹³⁴ *Antiquities* 18.4–10; 18.23; 20.102; *War* 2.433; 7.253. See M. Black, “Judas of Galilee and Josephus's ‘Fourth Philosophy,’ ” *Josephus-Studien* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1974), 45–54.

established, but any that is not for the sake of Heaven shall not in the end be established.”¹³¹³⁶⁵ Gamaliel’s advice was sound and yet also a bit ironical. Already his counsel was finding fulfillment—in the growing Christian community, in their signs and wonders, in their escape from jail just the night before. It had become obvious whose side God was on. Already the Council were finding themselves fighters against God.

5:40 The Sanhedrin concurred with Gamaliel’s advice. Again they released the apostles, but this time with a flogging. The flogging referred to was the customary punishment used as a warning not to persist in an offense. It consisted of thirty-nine lashes, often referred to as the forty less one (cf. 2 Cor 11:24). Based on the provision for forty stripes given in Deut 25:3, the practice had developed of only giving thirty-nine in the event of miscounting, preferring to err on the side of clemency rather than severity. It was still a cruel punishment. With bared chest and in a kneeling position, one was beaten with a tripled strap of calf hide across both chest and back, two on the back for each stripe across the chest. Men were known to have died from the ordeal.¹³¹³⁷⁶ As before, the apostles were warned not to continue their witness in Jesus’ name. This time the warning was reinforced with somewhat stronger persuasion.

(3) Release and Witness (5:41–42)

⁴¹The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. ⁴²Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

5:41–42 The apostles were not persuaded. They would continue to obey God rather than men. In fact, they rejoiced at having suffered for the name, very much in accord with the beatitude of their Lord (Luke 6:22f.). And the witness to the name continued—publicly in the temple and privately in the homes of the Christians. Luke seems to have used a common Greek rhetorical construction in v. 42 called a chiasm, which is most easily pictured as an A-B-B-A pattern. In the temple (A) and in homes (B), the apostles taught (B) and preached the gospel (A). Teaching was the task within the Christian fellowship, preaching the public task in the temple grounds. If there is any significance to his using such a device, it would be to give emphasis to the beginning and concluding elements. Their witness, their preaching of the gospel, was their primary task and occupation.¹³⁸

¹³⁶¹³⁵ *M. Abot* 4:11.

¹³⁷¹³⁶ *M. Mak.* 3:10–14. In some instances less than thirty-nine stripes were prescribed, with the sole provision that the number had to be divisible by three (in order to get the proportion of chest to back stripes to come out right). There is no reason to see less than the customary thirty-nine being given to the apostles.

¹³⁸ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 161–174.