

# ***“Exhorted!”***

Acts 2:14-41

February 1, 2015

**Intro:**        VIDEO: *“Expository Preaching”*

**1 Corinthians 2:4** = *My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power* (NIV)

**Review:**

- Acts 1 = **Equipped!**
  - a. *Vision, Fusion, Mission, Ascension*
  - b. *Unified!* – “continually devoted...one accord”
    - Faithful obedience
    - Joyful obedience
    - Prayerful obedience
  - c. *Acts 1:8* – waiting to be actualized!

➤ Acts 2:1-13 = **Empowered!**

- a. Holy Spirit comes...
- b. Christ's Promise arrives
- c. Paraclete empowers!

Timeless Truth:

***Christians are empowered to proclaim***  
***Christ!***

**Preview:**

*I. Explain - the Miracle*

*II. Exalt - the MESSIAH*

*III. Exhort - the Missionaries*

**Faith comes by hearing... Romans 10:8-17**

*“THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART”—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, **9**that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; **10**for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. **11**For the Scripture says, “WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.” **12**For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; **13**for “WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.”*

***14**How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? **15**How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!”*

***16**However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, “LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?” **17**So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.*

**T/S:**

# ***Explain:*** the Miracle...

1. Need
2. Nature
3. Nurture

## ***Peter's Preaching/Proclamation***

***14***But Peter, ***taking his stand*** with the eleven, ***raised his voice*** and ***declared to them***: “Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words.

## **Definition of KERYGMA**

Transliteration of the Greek word that ***means proclamation or preaching***. Depending on the context, it may refer to either the content proclaimed or the act of proclaiming.

**The book of Acts is largely the record of apostolic preaching. Preaching has always remained central to the church's mission.**

**At the very outset of His ministry, "Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (Matt. 4:17).**

For starters... here in v.14, we see that Spirit-filled preaching and proclamation are both:

- A. Forceful, and
- B. Beneficial

***15“For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day;***

- A. Logical
- B. Topical (meet them where they are...)

***16but this is what was spoken of thru the prophet Joel:***

- A. BIBLICAL
- B. Prophetical (speaking on behalf of God!)

### ***A. Need***

- \* Romans 3:23 & 6:23
- \* Acts 1:8...
- \* His witnesses need His power

*17'AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,' God says, ' THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND; AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS; 18EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT And they shall prophesy.*

### ***B. Nature***

- \* Holy Helper
- \* Christ's Comforter
- \* Power-giving Paraclete

**VIDEO: “Filled with the Spirit”**

***19’AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE  
AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BELOW,  
BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE.***

***20’THE SUN WILL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS  
AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD,  
BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL  
COME.***

- A. Expository
- B. Supernatural
- C. Universal (invitation)

***21’AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON  
THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.’***

- A. Simple
- B. GOSPEL

## ***C. Nurture***

- \* Ministers & Ministry(s)
- \* Mission & Missionaries
- \* Message & Messengers

T/S: link Acts 2:21 & John 6:44

## ***Exalt:*** the Messiah

1. Incarnation
2. Substitution
3. Resurrection
4. Ascension
5. Infiltration

A. His ***Incarnation*** (life = 1 verse)

***22“Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—***

**\*\*\* CHRISTOLOGICAL!**

B. His ***Substitution*** (death = 1 verse)

***23*** ***this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.***

- A. “Compatible”
- B. Providential
- C. CONFRONTATIONAL

C. His ***Resurrection*** (9 verses)

***24*** ***“But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.***

***25*** ***“For David says of Him,***

***‘I SAW THE LORD ALWAYS IN MY PRESENCE;***

*FOR HE IS AT MY RIGHT HAND, SO THAT I WILL NOT BE SHAKEN.*

*26‘THEREFORE MY HEART WAS GLAD AND MY TONGUE EXULTED;*

*MOREOVER MY FLESH ALSO WILL LIVE IN HOPE;*

*27BECAUSE YOU WILL NOT ABANDON MY SOUL TO HADES,*

*NOR ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.*

*28‘YOU HAVE MADE KNOWN TO ME THE WAYS OF LIFE;*

*YOU WILL MAKE ME FULL OF GLADNESS WITH YOUR PRESENCE.’*

- A. Biblical
- B. Expository
- C. HOPE-full

*29“Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.*

- A. Personal
- B. Experiential
- C. Logical

***30“And so, because he was a prophet and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT one OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS THRONE, 31he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY.***

\*\*\* Informational

***32“This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.***

\*\*\* Testimonial

D. His ***Ascension***

***33“Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.***

- A. Missional
- B. Confirmational
- C. Trinitarianal
- D. Triumphal
- E. Accountable

**34**“For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: ‘THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, “SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, 35UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET.””

\*\*\* Apocalyptal

E. His ***Infiltration*** (Spirit)

**36**“Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.”

\*\*\* CONFRONTATIONAL!

T/S = **1 Corinthians 15:1-4!**

**1**Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, **2**by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. **3**For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, **4**and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

# ***Exhort:*** the Missionaries

1. Relent
2. Repent
3. Respond
4. Remind
5. Remain

## **A. Relent**

Martin Luther put it this way:

*“Thus when you hear a sermon by the Apostle Paul or by me, you hear God the Father Himself. And yet you do not become my pupil but the Father’s, for it is not I who is speaking; it is the Father. Nor am I your schoolmaster; but we both, you and I, have one Schoolmaster and Teacher, the Father, who instructs us. We both, pastor and listener, are only pupils; there is only this difference, that God is speaking to you... through me. That is the glorious power of the divine Word, through which God Himself deals with us and speaks to us, and in which we hear God Himself.”*

***37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?”***

\*\*\* Spirit-filled (v37)

## ***B. Repent***

***38 Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.***

- A. Instructional
- B. THE Gospel

## ***C. Respond***

**This call to preach is best summed up in the words of Paul in [1 Corinthians 1:17-25](#):**

*“For Christ did not send me to baptize, **but to preach** the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, that the cross of Christ should not be made void. For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside." Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

**39***“For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.”*

- A. Evangelical
- B. Universal
- C. Invitational
- D. Providential

### ***D. Remind***

***40And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!”***

- A. Multi-dimensional
- B. Remedial
- C. Consequential
- D. Emotional!

VIDEO: *“What Is Preaching”* (Piper)

### ***E. Remain***

***41So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.***

- A. Graceful
- B. Merciful
- C. Effectual

T/S:

Mark 16:15

**Personal mandate to PROCLAIM!**

*He said to them,*

***"Go into all the world and  
preach the gospel  
to all creation."***

Close:

Mark 16:15 + Acts 1:8 = personal!

Spirit filled proclaiming is:

# ***EXPLAINING***

## **I. Forceful & Biblical...**

- *Beneficial*
- *Logical*
- *Topical (answers a Q)*
- *Prophetical*
- *Expositional*
- *Prophetical*
- *Supernatural*
- *Universal (appeal)*
- *GOSPEL*

# ***EXALTING***

## **II. Christological & Confrontational...**

- *“Compatible”*
- *Responsible*
- *Providential*
- *Biblical, Prophetical, Expository*
- *Hopeful*
- *Personal/Experiential*
- *Logical*
- *Informational*
- *Testimonial*
- *Confirmational*
- *Accountable*
- *Trinitarian*
- *Triumphal*
- *Missional*
- *Eternal*
- *Confrontational*

# ***EXHORTING***

### III. Instructional & Providential...

- *Spirit-filled*
- *THE Gospel*
- *Instructional*
- *Evangelical*
- *Universal/Invitational*
- *Habitual*
- *Multi-dimensional*
- *Effectual*

*Both Spirit-filled preaching & proclamation are sharing THE Gospel! (vv.14-41)*

No more... No less...

***No matter what!***

**1 Corinthians 2:4** = *My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power*

Amen & AMEN!

**Let's Pray**

## Research & Study Notes:

**NOTE:** vv.12-13 = review and “direct context” of Peter’s sermon...

Let’s start today with a **quick questionnaire:**

(for Christians & non-Christians alike)

*assuming anything is possible...*

- What do you want?
- What do you need?
- If you could have more of “anything” what would it be?
  
- If you could have Jesus literally by your side... or you could choose “something else,” what would you choose?
  
- Let’s ask & answer those Q’s again at the end...

## **See Colossians 1:9b-14**

"We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: **bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might** so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (**Colossians 1:9b-14**). *Amen.*

## **Peter's Pentecostal Preaching**

September 18th, 2011 | by [Brian Anderson](#) | Scripture: [Acts 2:14-40](#) |

In this message we examine Peter's first recorded sermon on the day of Pentecost. What things was Peter anxious to communicate to these unbelieving Jews? How was his preaching different from our preaching today?

Teaching Notes:

## ***Peter's Pentecostal Preaching***

**Acts 2:14-40**

**Intro:** Jesus had told the apostles that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them and they would be His witnesses. Well, that's exactly what we read taking place in Acts chapter 2. The Spirit came with power! There was a noise from heaven like a violent rushing wind. There were visible tongues as of fire that rested on each one of them. Further, these men began to speak in other languages they had never learned, voicing the mighty deeds of God. These supernatural phenomenon drew a great crowd together to see what was going on. The response? Bewilderment, Amzement, astonishment, perplexity. But others just mocked, saying they were drunk. It is at this time, that Peter steps forward, raises His voice, and begins to proclaim God's truth to the assembled throng. Peter does some explaining to this crowd. He explains what happened, how it happened, and then why it happened.

## **1. Peter Explained What Happened: The Spirit Had Come (Acts 2:14-21)**

· **The Unusual Speech Was Not Because of Drunkenness:** 2:14-15. Evidently, some in the crowd did not understand their speech. To them it sounded similar to a drunk who slurs his speech and becomes unintelligible. However, it was only 9:00 a.m., not the time of day people usually carouse and party!

· **The Unusual Speech Was a Result of the Holy Spirit Being Poured Out:** 2:17-18. Peter quotes Joel 2:28-32. *All mankind, sons and daughters, young men, old men, bond slaves, men and women.* Surely these words are intended to arrest our attention to something new. In the OT, the Spirit was given to a favored few. Now the prophecy says he would be given to all

God's people. *Prophecy, visions, dreams*: Peter explains that these supernatural languages were a fulfillment of God granting prophecy through the Spirit. So, in a sense, tongues is prophecy. Remember our working definition of prophecy? "The communication of a divine revelation." Well, that works here. What was the divine revelation? The mighty deeds of God (2:11). They were supernaturally communicating those divine revelations.

- **The Prophecy Was Fulfilled in the Last Days:** What did Peter mean by that phrase? Most people today use the phrase to refer to the time at the very end of human history. However, the Bible never uses the phrase in that sense. It is always describing the time in which the apostles lived. Heb.1:1-2; 1Pet.1:20; 1Jn.2:18; 1Cor.10:11.

- **What is 2:19-21 Referring To?** There are various options: 1) signs that will take place right before Jesus returns. However, why would Peter continue to quote those verses if they had no significance to the time in which He was living? 2) The signs surrounding Christ's death (sun turned into darkness, blood). But how do we explain "fire, vapor of smoke, moon into blood"? 3) The signs that would precede the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. That would make the prophecy more relevant to the audience at hand – it would take place in that very generation. Is there a Biblical basis for this suggestion?

A) Last Days could refer to the last days before the end of the Jewish age. God would soon bring to an end the Old Covenant. In Heb.8:13 it says that the Old Covenant was becoming obsolete, and growing old, and ready to disappear. If God did not destroy Jerusalem and the temple in judgment, there would forever be 2 rival religions, each claiming it was established by God. But after 70 A.D. all the ceremonial trappings of the Old Covenant were obliterated – there was no longer any priesthood, temple, or

sacrifices.

B) Acts 2:20 – “the great and glorious day of the Lord”. The “day of the Lord” in the OT does not refer to the 2nd coming of Christ, but to a particular time in which God would bring judgment upon His enemies (such as the Babylonians, Edomites, Moabites, Egyptians). There is another OT passage with a reference to the “great and terrible day of the Lord” in Mal.4:5. There we are told that God would send Elijah before that day. Who is this Elijah? Jesus said it was John the Baptist (Mt.17:10-13; Mt.11:13-14. Luke quotes Mal.4:5 and applies it to John the Baptist in Luke 1:17. Well, what was this “great and terrible day of the Lord?” Whatever it was, it seemed quite soon. “Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” “The axe is already laid at the root of the trees.” The only “great and terrible day of the Lord” that occurred within a generation of John the Baptist was the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D.

C) What about the signs predicted by Joel and quoted by Peter?

**Wonders in the sky above:** Josephus, a Jewish historian who wrote about the destruction of Jerusalem, wrote that directly before 70 A.D. people could see a star in the shape of a sword that hung over Jerusalem and a comet that lasted for about a year. Also, people could look up and see soldiers in an army running in the clouds

**Signs on the earth below:** Josephus also wrote that there was a light behind the altar that shone brighter than the daytime in the middle of the night. A large gate that 20 men had difficulty opening, opened of its own accord. Also, believe it or not, a cow gave birth to a lamb.

**Blood:** Josephus writes of rivers of blood running through the streets

**Fire and vapors of smoke:** The Romans set the city on fire, and there were pillars of smoke.

**The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood:** this took place because of the smoke of the fire.

## **2. Peter Explained How It Happened: Jesus Died, Rose, and Ascended (Acts 2:22-36)**

· **Jesus Died:** 2:22-23. His death was predestined: 2:23; 4:28. Notice here that foreknowledge and predetermined plan belong together. God's foreknowledge is explained by His predetermined plan. God knows beforehand, because He has planned beforehand. When this foreknowledge is of people, the word carries the idea of "loved beforehand" or "known beforehand" or "chosen beforehand. Well, if Christ's death was planned by God, does that mean that God will not hold responsible the men who put Him to death? No, far from it! They are called "godless" men. Here are 2 truths that you must believe, but may never be able to harmonize. Truth #1: God is absolutely sovereign over all things. Truth #2: Man is absolutely responsible for his actions.

· **Jesus Rose:** 2:24-32.

*In order to prove the resurrection Peter quotes OT Scripture.* He begins with Ps.16:8-11, in which David predicts that God will not abandon Him to Hades or allow His holy one to undergo decay. Peter is quick to point out that David did undergo decay, and he did go into Hades. But because David was a prophet, he was communicating a divine revelation. He was speaking, not of himself, but of Jesus. So, if Jesus never suffered decay, he must have risen from the dead.

*A further proof of Christs' resurrection is the witness of the apostles.* Remember that the primary purpose of the apostles was to be a witness of Jesus' resurrection (1:22). These apostles saw Jesus risen with their own eyes!

- **Jesus Ascended:** 2:33-36. He was exalted to the right hand of God. He received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit. Then He poured out the Holy Spirit. The supernatural signs of noise like wind, tongues of fire, and supernatural languages all should enable these Jewish men to "know for certain" that God had made Jesus Lord and Christ. You see, God made Jesus Lord by raising Him and exalting Him to His right hand. Then, Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit is proof positive that Jesus is Lord! And you are in big trouble, because you murdered Him! The truth is not that sinners have Jesus in their hands to do with Him whatever they wish. No, the truth is that Jesus has the sinner in His hand to do with him whatever He wishes!

### **3. Peter Explained Why It Happened: To Save Sinners (Acts 2:37-40)**

- **Peter's Sermon is Interrupted:** notice that there was no altar call. In fact, there are no altar calls anywhere in the NT. Peter didn't get to His application, because they interrupted him first. Why did they interrupt him? Because their hearts were pierced. The Holy Spirit was convicting them of sin, specifically the sin of killing their Messiah who was now Lord of the Universe. Now that they know that Jesus is Lord, the only question is "what shall we do?" In other words, how can we escape His wrath?

- **Peter's Answer To What They Must Do?** There are 2 things they must do, and there is something God must do, and there are 2 things that they will receive if they obey Peter's

instructions.

### **What they must do:**

- **Repent:** they are guilty of going against God's will, killing His Son. They must change their mind and their heart, and go in a brand new direction.
- **Be baptized:** this is the way they were to express their faith in Christ. They must turn away from their sin of rejecting God's Son, and now must publicly embrace and own Him as their Lord and King.

**What God must do:** 2:39. He must call them to Himself. This answers the question, "how does a person come to repent and believe?" He does so in response to God's call. The effectual call changes the man's heart, grants him a new nature, and makes him a new creation. The very first thing he does as a new creation is repent and believe.

### **What they will receive:**

- Forgiveness of sins:
- The gift of the Holy Spirit:

**Is Baptism Essential To Salvation?** This verse has been used by the United Pentecostal Church and the Church of Christ to "prove" that you can not be forgiven of your sins until you are baptized. On the surface, that's what this verse sounds like it is saying. However, in all of Peter's preaching, he never says that a person must be baptized in order to be saved (Acts 3:19; 10:43; 15:9. Paul says the same thing (Acts 13:38-39; 16:31). There are 2 possible solutions to this problem:

**1) The word "for" (eis):** This Greek word, just like the English word "for" can be used in 2 different senses. The prisoner was

executed for murder. There “for” means “because of.” However, we could also say, “she went shopping for groceries.” There “for” means “in order to obtain.” Sometimes *eis* in the NT means “because of” as in Mt.3:11; 12:41. Thus, this passage might mean, “Repent, and then be baptized because of the forgiveness of sins you have received.”

**2) The Greek grammar:** In Greek verbs, the word contains the person and number. Repent is 2nd person plural. Your sins is 2nd person plural. You will receive is 2nd person plural. The only verb that is different is “be baptized.” That is 3rd person singular. In other words all the other verbs belong together, while “be baptized” belongs by itself. Understood in this way, there would be a parenthesis at “and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ”. The verse would be read like this: “Repent for the forgiveness of your sins, and then each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

### **Life Application:**

**1. We should always be able to explain what is taking place**

**Scripturally:** 2:16. One famous charismatic once said, “You have to realize that more can be cooked up in the kitchen than appears on the menu. God is bigger than the Bible.” Not so! When you can no longer say “This is that” you are in trouble. You have just opened pandora’s box, and now anything is permissible. Sound doctrine and good church practice is to always be able to say, “This is that”

**2. We should emphasize the Resurrection of Christ in gospel preaching:** notice how much space Peter gives to the resurrection of Christ in this sermon! He passes over the death of Christ in one verse, and doesn’t even explain how the cross atoned for sins. Yet he spends 8 verses on establishing Christ’s

resurrection. Let's not make the mistake of only speaking of the cross. Sinners need to hear that Jesus rose, is alive, and can give them new life!

**3. We need to emphasize the Lordship of Christ in gospel preaching:** 2:36. Too often in contemporary gospel presentations, Jesus is only presented as Savior. But that is a truncated gospel. This Savior is also the Lord, and Master of your eternal destiny. Unless and until a sinner surrenders himself to Jesus as Lord, he is still lost! Rom.10:9-10.

**4. We need to aim at the conviction of sinners in gospel preaching:** 2:37. They were pierced to the heart. We should employ those doctrines and truths of Scripture which are calculated to prick hearts: the Law, sin, judgment, hell. One preacher said, "We are to afflict the comfortable, and comfort the afflicted." After the sore has been lanced, then we pour in the medicine of the gospel.

# **Atheists in the Pulpit — The Sad Charade of the Clergy Project**

WEDNESDAY • *August 29, 2012*

"It is hard to think of any other profession which it is so near to impossible to leave." That is the judgment of Richard Dawkins, perhaps the world's most famous living atheist, as he welcomes unbelieving pastors to join the Clergy Project, a group designed to help unbelieving pastors make their way out of the ministry. Apparently, some are not moving out very fast.

Dawkins explains that the Clergy Project “exists to provide a safe haven, a forum where clergy who have lost their faith can meet each other, exchange views, swap problems, counsel each other — for, whatever they may have lost, clergy know how to counsel and comfort.” Dawkins, who once held one of the world’s most coveted academic posts, has now reduced himself to addressing small gatherings of atheists and celebrating a motley crew of pastors who have abandoned the faith — even if some have not abandoned their pulpits.

The Clergy Project’s own statement is even more blunt, describing itself as “a confidential online community for active and former clergy who do not hold supernatural beliefs.” Most people, believers and unbelievers alike, are no doubt in the habit of thinking that the Christian ministry requires supernatural beliefs. That assumption is what Richard Dawkins and the Clergy Project want to subvert. More precisely, they want to use the existence of unbelieving pastors to embarrass the church and weaken theism.

This past Sunday, *The New York Times Magazine* told the story of Jerry DeWitt, once a pastor in DeRidder, Louisiana and later the first “graduate” of the Clergy Project. He is now the executive director of a group known as Recovering from Religion, based in Kansas. DeWitt told the magazine of his struggle as an unbelieving pastor. “I remember thinking,” he said, “Who on this planet has any idea what I am going through?”

As the story unfolds, DeWitt tells of being the pastor of a Pentecostal church. What readers will also discover, however, is that even by the time he assumed the pastorate, DeWitt “espoused a more liberal Christianity.” Though he never earned a college degree, he educated himself by reading authors such as Carl Sagan, an atheist astronomer, and Joseph Campbell, a proponent of the mythological. Later, he read Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins, key figures in the New Atheism. By the time he had read Dawkins and Hitchens, “even weak-tea Christianity was becoming hard to follow.”

When he found that he could no longer pray for his own parishioners or preach a coherent message, DeWitt resigned, preaching his last sermon in Cut and Shoot, Texas in April 2011. Now he travels the country organizing Recovering from Religion local chapters and working with the Clergy Project.

The magazine also told of Teresa MacBain, once a Methodist preacher in Tallahassee, Florida and now another trophy of the Clergy Project. The magazine simply states that MacBain “resigned from her pastor’s position in Tallahassee and went public as an atheist.” That is a very strategic example of under-reporting the story. As National Public Radio reported, MacBain first told just about everyone but her church of her atheism.

“I am currently an active pastor and I’m also an atheist,” she said. “I live a double life. I feel pretty good on Monday, but by Thursday — when Sunday’s right around the corner — I start having stomachaches, headaches, just knowing that I got to stand up and say things that I no longer believe in and portray myself in a way that’s totally false.” Of course, she didn’t have to say such things at all. She could have resigned and spared herself and her church the hypocrisy. MacBain told NPR of her experience with mounting doubts, and then of her “eureka moment” when she realized, “I’m an atheist. ... I don’t believe.”

On March 26, 2012, she stood before the American Atheists convention in Bethesda, Maryland and told the 1,500 attendees, “My name is Teresa. I’m a pastor currently serving a Methodist church — at least up to this point — and I am an atheist.” As NPR reported, the crowd hooted and clapped for more than a minute.

NPR and *The New York Times Magazine* attempt to portray MacBain and DeWitt as victims. MacBain presents herself as unnerved by the fact that her church fired her and did not appreciate her declaration of atheism behind their backs at a convention hundreds of miles away.

The Clergy Project and similar efforts are rooted in a 2010 study undertaken by Daniel C. Dennett and Linda LaScola of Tufts University. Dennett is one of the major figures in the New Atheism. He argues that belief in God once served an important evolutionary purpose, but does so no longer. Religious belief, he argues, is a vestigial remnant of our evolutionary past that modern humanity must overcome. He is hardly a neutral and dispassionate observer.

Nevertheless, Dennett and LaScola conducted and published a study known as “Preachers Who Are Unbelievers.” In that study, a small sampling of atheist or unbelieving pastors was considered, along with five representative profiles. These pastors clearly are not believers, at least in any orthodox or recognizably Christian sense. They spoke openly and in considerable detail about their unbelief, with the ministers explaining how they had abandoned any confidence in biblical Christianity.

Why didn't they just resign? Most shockingly, some openly spoke of losing their salaries as the main concern. So much for intellectual honesty.

**Dennett and LaScola made a very interesting and important observation in their research report. They acknowledged that defining an unbelieving pastor is actually quite difficult. Given the fact that so many liberal churches and denominations already believe so little, how is atheism really different? In the name of tolerance, the liberal denominations have embraced so much unbelief that atheism is a practical challenge.**

**In the words of Dennett and LaScola: “This counsel of tolerance creates a gentle fog that shrouds the question of belief in God in so much indeterminacy that if asked**

**whether they believe in God, many people could sincerely say that they don't know what they are being asked."**

**The Clergy Project gets to the point more concisely, defining its membership as "active and former clergy who do not hold supernatural beliefs." Nevertheless, this definition suffers from the same problem. Many liberal ministers hold to no supernatural beliefs, but they also tenaciously hold to their pulpits without admitting atheism.**

The Clergy Project is a parable of our times, but it is also a pathetic portrait of the desperation of many atheist and secularist groups. They are thrilled to parade a few trophies of unbelief, but do they really believe that these examples are serving their cause? They celebrate a former Pentecostal preacher with no education, who was already a theological liberal when called to his church, and who then educated himself by reading Sagan, Dawkins, and Hitchens. Seriously?

The Clergy Project is a magnet for charlatans and cowards who, by their own admission, openly lie to their congregations, hide behind beliefs they do not hold, make common cause with atheists, and still retain their positions and salaries. Is this how atheists and secularists groups intend to further their cause? They are getting publicity from the media to be sure, but do they think it will win them friends?

Ministers struggling honestly with doubts and struggles are in a different category altogether. Doubt will lead to one of two inevitable consequences. Faithful doubt leads to a deeper embrace of the truth, with doubt serving to point us into a deeper knowledge, trust, and understanding of the truth. Pernicious doubt leads to unfaithfulness, unbelief, skepticism, cynicism, and despair. Christians — ministers or otherwise — who are struggling with doubt, need to seek help from the faithful, not the faithless.

Christianity has little to fear from the Clergy Project. Its website reveals it to be a toothless tiger that will attract media attention, and that is about all. The greater danger to the church is a reduction in doctrine that leaves atheism hard to distinguish from belief. And the real forces to fear are those who would counsel such a reduction.

I am always glad to hear from readers. Write me at [mail@albertmohler.com](mailto:mail@albertmohler.com). Follow regular updates on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/](http://www.twitter.com/)

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## **“So Peter Opened His Mouth” The Preacher’s Calling Reduced to Five Powerful Words**

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The Bible presents an astonishingly simple method of preaching. In Nehemiah 8:8 we read that Ezra and his fellow preachers “read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.”

There is no calling as majestic as the Christian ministry, and yet the central task of ministry is breathtakingly uncomplicated. We read the Bible aloud, we read it clearly, and then we explain what we have read, so that hearers understand the meaning. Of course, no one said it was easy. This is an arduous calling, but it is incredibly simple in design. The most amazing thing about preaching is the fact that God chose to use human mouths for his message. It is astounding that God has willed that the earth shall hear his voice by means of the human voice.

### Martin Luther put it this way:

“Thus when you hear a sermon by St. Paul or by me, you hear God the Father Himself. And yet you do not become my pupil but the Father’s, for it is not I who is speaking; it is the Father. Nor am I your schoolmaster; but we both, you and I, have one Schoolmaster and Teacher, the Father, who instructs us. We both, pastor and listener, are only pupils; there is only this difference, that God is speaking to you through me. That is the glorious power of the divine Word, through which God Himself deals with us and speaks to us, and in which we hear God Himself.”

In this light, perhaps the most clarifying way to understand the preacher's task is to consider its most quintessential act — the opening of the mouth.

Look with me to the Book of Acts, 10:30-43:

*And Cornelius said, "Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.' So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord." So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" [Acts 10:34-43].*

The context is one of the most significant turning-points in the Book of Acts. This text explains not only how Cornelius came to be saved, but how we — the Gentiles — can be saved. This came after Peter had

received his vision and heard the voice from heaven declare: “What God has made clean, do not call common” [Acts 10:15].

Peter was commanded to follow three men, who took him to the house of a Roman centurion, Cornelius: “And they said, ‘Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say’” [Acts 10:22]. Notice carefully that Peter is told that Cornelius was directed by an angel to hear what Peter has to say. When Peter arrives, Cornelius declares to his entire household: “Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord” [Acts 10:33].

This is one of the most powerful teachings in Scripture about the proper disposition of a congregation. This congregation may have been relatively small, but it was ready to hear a word from the Lord, delivered through God’s preacher.

Just imagine if every congregation awaited every sermon with such an announcement: “Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.”

Imagine the expectation that statement reflects; the faithful eagerness that statement projects. They were gathered to hear and to receive and to believe all that God would command his preacher to say.

So Peter opened his mouth. That is *the very next verse* — “So Peter opened his mouth and said: ‘Truly I understand that God shows no partiality’” [Acts 10:34]. So Peter opened his mouth. That is the essential act of preaching reduced to five earth-shaking words. *So Peter opened his mouth.*

In his commentary on Ephesians 6:19-20, Peter O’Brien notes: “The expression ‘to open the mouth’ appears in contexts of solemnity where a

grave or important utterance from God is about to be made.”

We can imagine no more important utterance than this — salvation is for the Gentiles, too.

This phrase is used in the Old Testament as well, with reference to prophetic utterance. In Ezekiel 3:2, the prophet says, “So I opened my mouth, and he gave me this scroll to eat.” He was to eat the Word, then preach the Word. In Ezekiel 33:22, Ezekiel explains that he was ready to preach when God opened his mouth, and “so my mouth was opened.” So Peter opened his mouth. He obeyed the call. He fulfilled his calling. He did not remain silent or hide, he opened his mouth and declared all that God had commanded him to say. Paul once asked the Ephesian Christians to pray “that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly” [Ephesians 6:19].

And what did God command him to speak?

That everyone who believes in him receives the forgiveness of sins through his name. Everyone. Jews who believe in him receive the forgiveness of sins through his name. Gentiles who believe in him receive the forgiveness of sins through his name.

Peter had declared the story of Jesus, who went about doing good and healing, but was put to death by hanging him on a tree. God raised him up on the third day, and after appearing to many witnesses he commanded the apostles to preach the gospel to all people, to all nations. The Christian ministry requires courage, and we can see even more courage required in the near future. There may well be a higher price exacted for opening our mouths. But God has called us to open our mouths so that others can hear his voice, believe, and be saved — so that his church will be fed and taught, and be matured. Can you imagine any higher calling than that?

So, dear preacher, go ye into all the world, and open your mouth.

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# THE SPEECHES IN ACTS

by

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About half of the Book of Acts consists of speeches, discourses, and letters. Counting both the short and the long addresses, we number at least 26 speeches that are made by either apostles and Christian leaders or by non-Christians (Jews and Gentiles). Classifying these speeches, we have eight addresses delivered by Peter,<sup>1</sup> a lengthy sermon of Stephen before the Sanhedrin (7:2-53), a brief explanation by Cornelius (10:30-33), a short address by James at the Jerusalem Council (15:13-21), the advice to Paul by James and the elders in Jerusalem (21:20-25), and nine sermons and speeches by Paul.<sup>2</sup> The rest of the discourses were given by Gamaliel the Pharisee (5:35-39), Demetrius the silver-smith (19:25-27), the city clerk in Ephesus (19:35-40), Tertullus the lawyer (24:2-8), and

Festus the governor (25:24-27).<sup>3</sup> In addition, Luke relays the text of two letters: one from the Jerusalem Council to the Gentile churches (15:23-29), and the other written by Claudius Lysias addressed to Governor Felix (23:27-30).

I. *Sources* The speeches in Acts make the book interesting, because when

people talk we learn something about their personalities. Luke gives

\* A few paragraphs in this article have been taken from my commentary *An Exposition of Acts* (New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990).

<sup>1</sup> See Acts 1:16-22; 2:14-36, 38-39; 3:12-26; 4:8-12, 19-20; 5:29-32; 10:34-43; 11:5-17; 15:7-11.

<sup>2</sup> See Acts 13:16-41; 14:15-17; 17:22-31; 20:18-35; 22:1-21; 24:10-21; 26:2-~ , 25-27; 27:21-26; 28:17-20.

<sup>3</sup> H. J. Cadbury, "The Speeches in Acts," *The Beginnings of Christianity: The Acts of the Apostles* (repr. ed.; 5 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) 5.403. See also J. Navonne, "Speeches in Acts," *The Bible Today* 65 (1973) 1114-17.

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the reader an opportunity to listen to the speakers and by listening to come to know their personalities. Luke was personally present when Paul addressed the Ephesian elders, spoke in Jerusalem, defended himself before Felix, and delivered speeches before Festus and Agrippa. We presume that Luke received from Paul the wording of Paul's sermon in Pisidian Antioch and his Areopagus address.

Perhaps Paul and other witnesses provided information on Stephen's speech before the Sanhedrin. From Peter, Luke gathered material on the addresses of Peter in the upper room, at Pentecost, near

Solomon's Colonnade, before the Sanhedrin, and at the Jerusalem Council. And from James he received the details concerning the Jerusalem Council.

If Luke collected his information from eyewitnesses, does he faithfully reproduce the speeches which they and others made? As can be expected, the context reveals that Luke presents the addresses in summary form. But are these summaries true to fact or have they been placed in the mouths of speakers? Some scholars are of the opinion that the speeches are the creation of the writer of Acts. By comparison, they point to the Greek historian Thucydides and claim that Luke adopted the methodology of Thucydides. This historian declared that in composing his speeches he "adhered as closely as possible to the general sense of what was actually said."<sup>4</sup> The apparent intention of this ancient writer was to state that the speeches he wrote were historically accurate and not based on his own imagination.<sup>5</sup> Even though the words of Thucydides have been a topic of much debate, the inclination to take his saying at face value prevails. The task which the ancient historian assumed was to give an account of the events just as they happened. He reported facts not fiction.

If we listen to Luke's own words in the preface to his Gospel, we learn that he gives an account of the things that have happened and which people have accepted as true (Luke 1:1; cf. Acts 1:1). Thus at the beginning of his writings, Luke informs the reader that his reporting as a historian is true to fact.

## II. *History*

The question that concerns the student of Acts is whether Luke is giving a truthful presentation in this historical account. Does he accurately report the speeches he himself did not hear?

<sup>4</sup>Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1.22.1.

<sup>5</sup>M. Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* (London: SCM, 1956) 141, expresses doubt; but W. W. Gasque accepts the statement as true, in "The Speeches of Acts: Dibelius Reconsidered," *New Dimensions in New Testament Study* (ed. by R. N. Longenecker and M. C. Tenney; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974) 243-44. Compare T. F. Glasson, "Speeches in Acts and Thucydides," *Exp Tim* 76 (1964-65) 165.

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Before we examine some of the speeches in Acts, let us first note that Luke's reporting reflects linguistic peculiarities that show the area and setting in which a dialogue took place. In many sections of his Gospel and Acts, Luke expresses himself in excellent Greek. This is evident, for instance, from the Greek in the introduction to his Gospel (Luke 1:1-4). But throughout the birth narratives (Luke 1 and 2), his diction and word choice bear a distinct Aramaic stamp. It is as if Mary herself relates to Luke the accounts of Jesus' conception and birth in Aramaic Greek. Indeed, so Luke reports, Mary kept all these things in her heart (2:19, 51).

Also in Acts, Luke varies the choice of words with reference to the locale. He reflects the diction, vocabulary, and culture of the area he describes. In the chapters that depict Palestine (1-15), Luke's Greek has an Aramaic coloring. The second half of the book (16-28) reflects a Gentile setting and is written in fluent Greek that, at times, rivals classical Greek. To illustrate, of the 67 times that the optative mood occurs in the NT, 17 of these are in Acts. These 17 instances appear mostly in the second half of the book and often come from speakers who know Greek well.<sup>6</sup> Another aspect of a Jewish

backdrop that Luke portrays in Acts is the use of Semitisms. For instance, Jesus addresses Paul on the way to Damascus with the Hebrew name Saoul instead of the Grecized form Saul (9:4; 22:7; 26:14; and see 9:17; 22:13). By contrast, when Governor Festus alludes to Emperor Nero as o[ Sebastoj and o[ ku<rioj (25:25,26), he exposes a typical Roman setting.

Is Luke composing speeches that he places on the lips of the speakers, or does he present more or less the exact words the speakers uttered in summarized form? If we say that Luke is the source for these speeches, he proves to be an exceptionally skilled artist who writes a masterful book with all the possible nuances of speech and word choice.<sup>7</sup> His work, then, is closer to fiction than history. But if we contend that Luke's source material comes directly from the speakers or the community that heard them, he mirrors people as they are with their own peculiarities and characteristics. "The question of the historicity of the speeches is not beside the point in the study of a work which claims to be a historical narrative."<sup>8</sup> Luke, then, is both a writer and a historian.

<sup>6</sup>These include the Greek philosophers in Athens (17:18), Paul at the Areopagus (17:27 [twice]), Governor Festus (25:16 [twice], 20), and Paul addressing King Agrippa (26:29). The other instances are: 5:24; 8:20, 31; 10:17; 17:11; 20:16; 21:33; 24:19; 27:12, 39.

<sup>7</sup>Concludes J. T. Townsend, "There is therefore, no reason to suppose that the speeches in Acts which are found in the mouths of Christians reflect any other mind than the mind of the man who wrote them, the author of Luke-Acts." "The Speeches in Acts," *ATR* 42 (1960) 159.

<sup>8</sup>F. F. Bruce. "The Speeches in Acts-Thirty Years After," in *Reconciliation and Hope* (ed. by R. Banks; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 57.

Space does not permit examination of all the discourses in Acts. We must be selective and refer to only a few, namely, those of Stephen, Peter, and Paul, with a passing reference to the ones of Tertullus and Festus. In the last part of Acts (20-28), Luke discloses that he himself was present and, therefore, he speaks as an eyewitness.

III. *Stephen* The most extensive speech in Acts is the one Stephen delivered

before the members of the Sanhedrin (7:2-53). Stephen traces the history of the people of Israel from the time of Abraham to that of Solomon's temple. But the speech is much more than a chronicle of historical events. Stephen imparts that he is an expert theologian who is thoroughly acquainted with the Scriptures. He is knowledgeable in drawing implicit conclusions and displays the same theological acumen as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews unveils.

Stephen directly quotes no less than 15 OT passages, of which 13 are from the Pentateuch and two from the Prophets. Of the 40 OT quotations cited in Acts, 15 are in Stephen's speech.<sup>9</sup> The repeated appeal to the OT is not a characteristic of Luke's style but rather points to a theologian of Stephen's stature (6:9-10). Moreover, Stephen has selected considerable detail from the primary events of Israel's early history. "The major events and details which are included are carefully chosen and presented to indicate convincingly the accuracy of Stephen's interpretation of Israel's past history."<sup>10</sup>

In his speech, Stephen shows that God is not bound to an earthly temple built by human hands: God revealed himself to Abraham in Mesopotamia, to Joseph in Egypt, and to Moses in the flames of the burning bush. Stephen proves that the Jews are unable to confine God's dwelling place to the temple in Jerusalem. He develops the theological themes of God, worship, the Law, the covenant, and the

person and message of the Messiah. Through the work of the Messiah, the house of Israel is able to worship God in truth and justice. Stephen avoids mentioning the name of Jesus but teaches that God has raised up a Savior for the house of Israel.

<sup>9</sup> Gen 12:1 = v 3; Gen 48:4 = v 5; Gen 15:13-15 = vv 6-7; Exod 3:12 = v 7; Exod 1:8 = v 18; Exod 2:14 = vv 27-28; Exod 3:2 = v 30; Exod 3:6 = v 32; Exod 3:5 = v 33; Exod 3:7, 8, 10 = v 34; Exod 2:14 = v 35; Deut 18:15 = v 37; Exod 32:1, 23 = v 40; Amos 5: 25-27 (LXX) = vv 42-43; Isa 66:1-2 = vv 49-50.

<sup>10</sup> J. J. Scott, Jr., "Stephen's Speech: A Possible Model for Luke's Historical Method?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 17 (1974) 93. Consult A. F. J. Klijn, "Stephen's Speech-Acts VII. 2-53," *NTS* 4 (1957) 25-31. C. H. H. Scobie thinks that Luke used a Christian tract as source material in "The Use of Source Material in the Speeches of Acts III and VII," *NTS* 25 (1979) 399-421.

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We are unable to ascertain from whom Luke received the substance of Stephen's speech. We surmise that Luke gained access to the speech that Stephen delivered before the Sanhedrin from Paul and those members of the Sanhedrin who later became Christians. The speech came to Luke's attention through a fixed tradition either in oral or written form. With reference to Acts 7--a study of word choice, references to the temple and to Moses, and the absence of typical Lucan constructions--all these facts indicate that Stephen's speech did not originate in the mind of Luke.

Thus, the words *promise* and *affliction* have their own significance in the context of Acts 7 and do not correspond to their usages in the rest of Acts. Next, Stephen's manner of speaking about Moses and the temple is confined to this particular discourse. Luke writes

nowhere else in Acts in a similar manner. And last, in Stephen's speech are at least 23 words that do not occur again either in Acts or in any other book of the NT; also, numerous literary forms, peculiar to both the Gospel of Luke and Acts, are absent from Stephen's speech.<sup>11</sup> We cannot assume that Luke has presented a verbatim account of Stephen's speech, but we confidently assert that he allows the original speaker to be heard in words and concepts that belong to Stephen, the first Christian martyr.

We infer that as a faithful historian Luke has incorporated the discourse of Stephen at this juncture of Acts to prepare the reader for the persecution subsequent to Stephen's death and for extending the church beyond the confines of Jerusalem. It was Stephen, and not Luke, who provided the impetus to further the church's development. Luke, therefore, is reporting factual information based on historical events.<sup>12</sup> He is a historian who, in the manner of Thucydides, reports speeches as closely as possible to the general sense of what the speakers actually said.

#### IV. *Peter*

Peter's Pentecost sermon is the first of the three major addresses Peter delivered (2:14-36; 3:12-26; 10:34-43). Some scholars are of the opinion that Peter's Pentecost sermon is much more a theological

<sup>11</sup> M. H. Scharlemann, "Stephen's Speech: A Lucan Creation?" *Concordia Journal* 4 (1978) 57. See also L. W. Barnard, "Saint Stephen and Early Alexandrian Christianity," *NTS* 7 (1960-61) 31.

<sup>12</sup> Compare M. H. Scharlemann, *Stephen: A Singular Saint* (Analecta Biblica 34; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1968) 52-56; J. Kilgallen, *The Stephen Speech: A Literary and Redactional Study of Acts 7, 2-53* (Analecta Biblica 67; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1976) 113.

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discourse written by Luke than a historical report of the apostle's speech.<sup>13</sup> We know that Luke himself was not present in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, but that he received his information from "eye-witnesses and servants of the word" (Luke 1:2). We presume that Peter served as Luke's informant who gave him the pattern and wording of the sermon. In fact, "Both the pattern and the basic theology are older than Luke and probably reach back into the early days of the church."<sup>14</sup> Luke presents a summary of Peter's sermon, which is also the case in the other discourses. Luke indicates that much more was said, for Peter warned the people with many other words (2:40).

In his speeches, Peter employs concepts that have an echo in his epistles. He even exhibits similarities in his word choice. Comparing these similarities in both his speeches and letters, we find some instances that are striking not only in Greek but even in translation.

Acts by the set purpose and foreknowledge of God (2:23)

silver or gold I do not have (3:6)

the faith that comes through him (3:16)

as judge of the living and the dead (10:42)

1 Peter according to the foreknowledge of God (1:2)

such as silver or gold that you were redeemed (1:18)

you believe in God through him (1:21)

to judge the living and the dead (4:5)

When Peter addresses the household of Cornelius, he tells the Gentile audience that "God shows no favoritism" (10:34). Next, he

repeats this thought in slightly different wording when he speaks at the Jerusalem Council in favor of admitting the Gentiles to membership in the church. He says that God "made no distinction between us and them" (15:9). Third, in 1 Peter he writes that God "impartially judges each man's work" (1:17). And last, when Peter proclaims the good news to the crowd at Solomon's Colonnade, he instructs the people to repent in order to hasten the coming of Christ (3:19-21). He expresses the same sentiment in a brief sentence in 2 Peter. He writes, "You ought

<sup>13</sup> Among others, R. F. Zehnle, *Peter's Pentecost Discourse: Tradition and Lukan Reinterpretation in Peter's Speeches in Acts 2 and 3* (SBLMS 15; ed. by R. A. Kraft; Nashville, New York: Abingdon, 1971) 136-38.

<sup>14</sup> I. H. Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries; ed. by R. V. G. Tasker; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 72. Compare C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1936) 72-74.

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to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming" (3:11b-12a, NIV).

We admit that all these resemblances are no more than proverbial straws in the wind. Nevertheless, these similarities point in the same direction and lend verbal support to the historicity of Peter's discourses.<sup>15</sup> In these speeches, Peter clearly teaches both the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ (e.g., 2:22, 33-36). Also throughout his writings, Peter refers to Jesus as God and man (e.g., 1 Pet 1:2, 3; 2:21, 24; 3:15; 2 Pet 1:1). In brief, Peter presents Jesus Christ as God and man in both his addresses and epistles.

*V. Paul*

Luke has recorded three of Paul's missionary discourses: the synagogue sermon in Pisidian Antioch (13:16-41), the Areopagus speech in Athens (17:22-31), and the farewell address to the Ephesian elders (20:18-35). Of these three, Luke personally heard the third one; he appears to have received information for the first two discourses from Paul and his travel companions.

The Pisidian Antioch sermon is a type that Paul delivered throughout Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece (cf. 14:15-17; 17:22-31). Paul's sermon basically consists of three parts: (1) a survey of Israel's history; (2) the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; and (3) the application of the gospel message.<sup>16</sup> Many aspects of this sermon resemble features in the sermons delivered by Peter in Jerusalem (2:14-36; 3:12-26) and the one Stephen preached before the Sanhedrin (7:2-53).

Paul's sermon in Pisidian Antioch discloses aspects of his epistolary teaching. When Paul preached in the synagogue at Antioch, he ended his sermon by mentioning the doctrine of justification. He said, "Every- one who believes in [Jesus] is justified from all things from which you could not be justified through the law of Moses" (13:39). There is a discernible link between his sermon and his epistles, for Paul expresses the doctrine of justification in his Epistles to the Romans, the Galatians, and the Ephesians.<sup>17</sup> This fundamental tenet he taught both in sermons and letters.

<sup>15</sup> Cadbury is skeptical of these similarities and parallels, for he points to comparable word choices in other NT writers. "The Speeches in Acts," *Beginnings*, 5.413.

<sup>16</sup> Refer to J. W. Bowker, "Speeches in Acts: A Study in Proem and *Yelammedenu* Form," *NTS* 14 (1967-68) 101-2.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Rom 3:20,21,28; Gal 3:16; and Eph 2:9. Rejecting that Luke wrote Acts, J. Roloff says that in general the speeches which the writer places on

the lips of Paul have nothing in common with the Pauline theology and characteristics known from his epistles. *Die Apostelgeschichte* (NTD 5; Gottingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1981) 3.

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Strictly speaking, Paul's Areopagus address in Athens is not a defense of the Christian faith. Rather, his speech is both a challenge to the pagan religion and a proclamation of the gospel. When Paul stood before members of the Areopagus Council, he faced an audience that was different from that of the synagogue worship services. In the presence of the Athenian philosophers, he could not assume that they had any knowledge of the Scripture or of Jesus who fulfilled Scripture's prophecies. Paul had to begin his speech by teaching his audience the doctrines of God and creation. He continued his teaching with the doctrine of man, for man is God's offspring. And he concluded his oration with the doctrines of judgment and the resurrection.

We affirm the historicity of Paul's visit to the Council of the Areopagus. In that meeting, Paul the apostle to the Gentiles introduced a pagan audience to the teachings of the Christian faith. He commented that God created man, appointed a day for judgment, and overlooked man's sins of the past. Paul's speech and writing reveal similarity. In his letter to the Romans, Paul mentions that God has made himself known in creation, that God judges men's secrets through Jesus Christ, and that God has shown his forbearance by leaving sins unpunished (Rom 1:19-21; 2:16; 3:21-26). Comparing these comments with his Areopagus address, we assert that Paul himself addressed the council members of the Areopagus.<sup>18</sup> We assume that at a later time he gave Luke the wording of this speech.

Even though Paul alludes to an altar inscription (“to an unknown

God”) and quotes some lines from pagan sources, he nowhere indicates that the gospel occupies common ground with pagan religion and philosophy.”<sup>19</sup> Paul uses these pagan aspects as points of contact with his audience but refuses to accommodate and compromise the gospel message. In this respect he is true to his God, who gives man the law not to have any gods before him. When Paul refers to pagan gods, he skillfully employs the neuter gender: “What [o!], therefore, you worship in ignorance, this [tou?to] I am proclaiming to you” (17:23); and “We ought not to think that the divine being [to> qei?on] is like an image” (17:29). He refrains from calling an idol “God,” but classifies it with impersonal objects. Conclusively, Luke indicates that Paul carefully chose his words when he addressed the Athenian philosophers.

<sup>18</sup> F. F. Bruce, "Paul and the Athenians," *Exp Tim* 88 (1976) 11. H. Conzelmann calls Paul's speech "not an extract from a missionary address, but a purely literary creation." See his "The Address of Paul on the Areopagus," *Studies in Luke-Acts* (ed. by L. E. Keck and J. L. Martyn; Nashville/New York: Abingdon, 1966) 218. Consult C. J. Hemer, "The Speeches of Acts: II. The Areopagus Address," *Tyndale Bulletin* 40/2 (1989) 239-59.

<sup>19</sup> T. L. Wilkinson, "Acts 17: The Gospel Related to Paganism," *Vox Reformata* 35 (1980) 12.

### Simon J. Kistemaker: THE SPEECHES IN ACTS 39

Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders on the beach of Miletus has a number of phrases that occur also in his epistles. These are a few illustrations:

serving the Lord with all humility (20:19)

that I may finish the race (20:24)

complete the task I received from the Lord (20:24)

serving the Lord (Rom 12:11) with all humility (Eph 4:2)

I have finished the race (2 Tim 4:7)

complete the task you received in the Lord (Col 4:17)

Examining the diction of Paul's farewell speech, R. H. Charles concludes:

There is every ground for accepting this speech as a trustworthy record of Paul's speech. Some of the phrases are exclusively Pauline as *plhn> o!ti, kai> nu?n i]dou<, desma> kai> qli<yeij, nouqetei?n*; others are characteristically Pauline and non-Lucan as *mh> fei<desqai, tapeinofronsu<nhj, u[poste<llesqai, nu<kta kai> h[me<ran, to> sumfe<ron*.<sup>20</sup>

In view of Luke's presence, we confidently affirm the historicity of Paul's speech recorded by his friend Luke. C. K. Barrett pointedly asks why Luke would write fiction and attach the story to Miletus instead of "the great city and Pauline centre Ephesus."<sup>21</sup> If Luke records a his- torical event, then the address is an eyewitness report that reflects the words Paul spoke.

The speeches which Paul the prisoner delivered before the Jews in Jerusalem (22:1-21) and before King Agrippa (26:2-29) exhibit remark- able differences even though both contain the account of Paul's con- version experience. For one thing, the audiences are different. In his Jerusalem address, Paul never mentions the name Jesus with the excep- tion of Jesus' self-identification (22:8). Paul purposely circumscribes the name to avoid giving offense to his Jewish audience. But when he

<sup>20</sup> P. Gardner, "The Speeches of St. Paul in Acts," *Essays on Some Biblical*

*Questions of the Day* (ed. by H. B. Sweet; London: Macmillan, 1909) 418. In an addendum he includes the investigations of R. H. Charles.

<sup>21</sup> C. K. Barrett, "Paul's Address to the Ephesian Elders," *God's Christ and His People: Studies in Honour of N. A. Dahl* (ed. by J. Jervell and W. A. Meeks; Oslo/Bergen/Tromsø: Universitetsforlaget, 1977) 109. Consult G. A. Kennedy, "The Speeches in Acts," *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill/London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984) 139. Consult C. J. Hemer, "The Speeches of Acts: I. The Ephesian Elders at Miletus," *Tyndale Bulletin* 40 (1989) 77-85.

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addresses King Agrippa and tries to persuade him to believe in Jesus, he explicitly mentions Jesus' name (26:9).

Further, addressing the Jews in Jerusalem, Paul features Ananias as a devout man according to the law and respected by all the Jews living in Damascus (22:12). In his speech before Agrippa, Paul overlooks the entire encounter with Ananias because it detracts from his purpose to acquaint the king with the gospel. He delivers his Jerusalem address in Hebrew or Aramaic (21:40) but his discourse before Agrippa and Festus in excellent Greek. In the presence of these government officials, military commanders, and prominent citizens of Caesarea, Paul's diction compares with that of classical Greek. To illustrate, he employs an Attic verb form  $\iota\sigma\alpha\iota$  instead of the third person plural  $\sigma\iota\gamma\alpha\sigma\iota\sigma\iota$  (26:4); he ingeniously quotes the words "Nothing was done secretly in a corner" (26:26), which philosophers pejoratively used for uneducated teachers;<sup>22</sup> and he uses the optative mood in his closing remark to Agrippa:  $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\alpha\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\sigma\theta\iota$  (26:29).

What are the characteristics that support the historicity of Paul's speech before King Agrippa? In summary, here are the highlights:

First, no speech either of Paul or any other speaker in Acts is as personal in tone as Paul's address before Agrippa (see especially v 27). This speech sparkles in the beauty of its direct gospel appeal. Paul speaks engagingly to King Agrippa throughout his discourse by addressing him by title, name, and personal pronoun *you*.<sup>23</sup>

Next, Paul fits his choice of words to the class of his audience. That is, his diction and syntax are approaching classical Greek and equal that of his Areopagus address (17:22-31). At the same time, we hear in his Agrippa speech the same tone and tenor of Paul's other discourses.

Third, in his speech before Agrippa, Paul repeats his conversion experience (cf. 22:1-21; and see 9:1-19). Although the three conversion accounts reveal differences, Paul freely selects from his own recollection those elements that suit his present purposes. And because Paul is the speaker, he is free to choose his own wording to describe the event.

Last, Paul addresses Agrippa, who is of Jewish descent and, as curator of the Jerusalem temple, as "an expert in all the customs and disputes of the Jews" (26:3). Yet Paul's speech is not a one-sided gospel appeal directed only to Agrippa (see, for instance v 8); he presents the doctrine of Christ's resurrection as a light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles (v 23).<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Consult A. J. Malherbe, "'Not in a Corner': Early Christian Apologetic in Acts 26:26," *The Second Century* 5 (1985-86) 193-210.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. vv 2, 3, 7, 13, 19, 27.

<sup>24</sup> Compare K. Haacker, "Das Bekenntnis des Paulus zur Hoffnung Israels nach der Apostelgeschichte des Lukas," *NTS* 31 (1985) 437-51; J. J. Kilgallen, "Paul Before Agrippa (Acts 26,2-23): Some Considerations," *Bib* 69 (1988) 170-95.

## VI. *Conclusion*

The speeches in Acts accurately portray the speakers and reflect their individual traits. The syntax in some of Peter's speeches is awkward and in some verses disjointed. For example, before Cornelius and his household Peter literally said: "The word which he sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ, this one is Lord of all, you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed" (10:36-37). Tertullus the lawyer attempts to influence Governor Felix with flattery. Luke, who was present at the hearing, records Tertullus's grammatical errors with journalistic accuracy. The orator utters a participle ("finding this man to be a troublemaker" [24:2]) instead of a main verb, and thus he disrupts the flow of the sentence. The letter from the hand of commander Claudius Lysias is written in military style (23:26-30), while the diction and syntax of Governor Festus characterize him as an educated Roman official who is able to speak excellent Greek (25:24-27).

Although Luke is the writer of the speeches in Acts, he is not their composer. That is, he does not create discourses which he places in the mouths of speakers. He himself asserts, "I myself have accurately investigated everything from the beginning" (Luke 1:3; see also Acts 1:1). Hence, we are assured that Luke's presentations are based on factual and faithful research. Luke presented the people as they were, precisely because he was personally acquainted with most of them. As a travel companion of Paul, he recorded the historical events relating to Paul's words and deeds.

A close examination of Paul's speeches to the Jews shows that

"there is much in the content that is not essentially Lukan."<sup>25</sup> As he addressed Jewish audiences, Paul regularly appealed to the OT Scriptures. But this characteristic does not fit Luke's style. Also, much of the content and the vocabulary of Stephen's speech is not repeated in the rest of Acts; this feature indicates that Luke is reporting and not composing Stephen's address. We conclude, then, that the speeches in Acts do not appear to be Lucan creations.

<sup>25</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (3d rev. and enlarged ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 62.

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## **Acts 2:14-36**

### **Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost**

#### **Verse 14**

¶ "But Peter, standing among the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them, 'Men of Judea, and all you who dwell in Jerusalem, be this known to you and heed my words...' " (Acts 2:14).

- **Peter is a changed man.** At the arrest of Jesus, Peter denied his Lord (Matthew 26:33-75), but now he is standing strong and speaking with boldness

and authority.

## Verse 15

¶ " 'You suppose these men are drunk, but they are not! Be reasonable. It's only the third hour of the day.' " (Acts 2:15).

- **Third hour of the day.** The third hour in Jewish time is 9.00am by our reckoning. It was insulting to say that these devout men were drunk at all, let alone at such an early hour. Yet some were mocking and calling out, "**These men are full of new wine**" (Acts 2:13).

## Verses 16-18

¶ " 'But this is what God spoke about through the prophet Joel: *In the last days, says God, I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy; your young men will see visions; your old men will dream dreams. And yes, in those days I will pour out my Spirit on my servants and on my handmaids, and they shall prophesy*' " (Acts 2:16-18).

- **Fulfilling Prophecy.** Peter quotes Joel 2:28-32 which predicts the giving of the Holy Spirit. This was such a powerful gift that many wonders and signs and miracles occurred, one of which was the xenoglossia being witnessed by all who heard the apostles preaching in many foreign languages (Acts 2:4-11).

- Jesus had predicted this giving of the Holy Spirit a few days before it happened (Acts 1:8, Mark 16:15-16). **Baptism and pouring.** Some note that "I will pour out my Spirit" (Acts v2:17) is equivalent to "You shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). From this they make an argument that a *pouring* is sufficient without an *immersion*. But that isn't what we see here in Acts. The Holy Spirit was poured out in order to immerse the apostles. If this were a parallel to water baptism, then it would demand sufficient water be poured out so as to immerse. However there is no parallel, because we also read "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4), and nobody suggests that we fill people with water to baptize them.

## Verse 19-20

¶ " 'I will show wonders in the sky above, and signs on the earth beneath: blood and fire, and palls of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and glorious day of the Lord comes.' " (Acts 2:19-20).

- **Fulfilling Prophecy (cont).** This part of Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:30-31) is usually regarded as figurative; nevertheless Christ's crucifixion and resurrection were attended by signs and wonders not unlike those that Joel describes (Matthew 27:45,50-54).
- **Day of the Lord.** The awesome "day of the Lord" here refers to the day of Pentecost when power came upon the apostles (Acts 1:7-8).

## Verse 21

¶ "'And so it will be that whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.'" (Acts 2:21).

- **Calling and being called** Here at the beginning of Peter's sermon, we have the idea of people calling on God. At the end of Peter's sermon we have the reverse: God calling people (Acts 2:39). Likewise, Paul quotes the same passage about people calling on the name of the Lord to be saved (Romans 10:12-14). And he also teaches the reverse when he calls the saved "**those who are called**" (Romans 8:28). Being saved involves being called by God and calling upon God. Through Peter's preaching, God called people so that they might call on God.

**Name of the Lord.** The "**name of the Lord**" here means the power and authority of God in Christ our Lord, who alone is able to save.

## Verses 22-24

¶ "'Men of Israel, hear these words! Jesus of Nazareth is a man recommended to you by God. In your very midst, God wrought mighty works and wonders and signs by him. You yourselves know this. He was then delivered up by the ordaining counsel and foreknowledge of God. You took him, and you crucified and killed him by the hand of men who don't obey God's law. But God released him

from the agony of death, and raised him up, because it was impossible for death to keep him captive.' " (Acts 2:22-24).

- **Peter's main message** This is the heart of Peter's message. The rest of the message is supporting argument. Peter makes three statements about Jesus:
- **His credentials** were clear to everybody, supported by the very public miracles he had done.
- **His crucifixion** was a wicked act, a seeming defeat, yet God had long ago planned to turn it into high victory (1Peter 1:18-20).
- **His conquering of death** was witnessed by many. Men had killed him; God raised him up to life again.

## Verses 25-28

¶ " 'For David has this to say about Christ: *I saw the Lord always facing me, for he is at my right hand that I should not be moved. Therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced. And more than this, my flesh as well will dwell in hope; because you will not leave my soul in Hades, neither will you let your Holy One see decay. You made known to me the ways of life. You will make me full of joy with your presence.*' " (Acts 2:25-28).

**Christ's resurrection.** Although David writes this, he is not speaking of himself. Rather, it is Christ speaking through him, foretelling his death and resurrection. His soul will not be abandoned to the world of the dead, nor

will his body remain in the grave to rot. He will live again and rejoice.

## Verses 29-31

¶ " 'Brothers, I can say without contradiction that the patriarch David is dead and buried. His tomb is with us to this day. So David was speaking as a prophet. He knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that, of the fruit of David's fleshly body, God would raise up the Christ to sit on David's throne. Foreseeing this, David spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that Christ's soul was not abandoned in Hades, nor did his flesh see decay.' " (Acts 2:29-31).

- **God makes an oath.** The "throne promise" that God made to David is recorded in (2Samuel 7:12), and is made an oath in (Psa 89:3-4) and (Psa 132:11).
- **God fulfills the oath.** God has now fulfilled this oath. Jesus is now King of Kings and Lord of Lords (1Timothy 6:14-15). He said himself, "**I have sat down with my Father in his throne**" (Revelation 3:21). We have been ushered into his kingdom (Colossians 1:13).
- **David's throne equals God's throne.** Note that David's throne is the Lord's throne, a fact made obvious by these parallel passages: "**Solomon sat on the throne of David**" (1Kg 2:12), "**Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord**" (1Ch 29:23). The physical throne in Jerusalem was a "type" or symbol of the heavenly throne, just as David's earthly kingdom was a "type"

or symbol of the heavenly kingdom.

- **God made another oath.** David knew of another associated oath, that Christ would be "a priest on his throne after the order of Melchizedek (Zec 6:12-13, Psa 110:4). This oath has been fulfilled (Hebrews 6:17-20). Therefore the throne oath has also been fulfilled.

**Not postponed till second coming.** Peter says that David looked ahead and spoke of the *resurrection* of Christ. The promise and oath about Christ sitting on David's throne was fulfilled when Jesus rose from the dead and then ascended into heaven to reign. Popular teaching says that the fulfillment was postponed by God until Christ's *second coming*. This teaching contradicts Peter in his Pentecostal sermon.

## Verses 32-33

¶ "'Jesus is this one whom God raised up. To that fact we all bear witness. Jesus has therefore been exalted to the right hand of God. He has received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit. He has poured out this which you now see and hear.'" (Acts 2:32-33).

- **Jesus was pouring out the Spirit** Jesus poured out the power of the Holy Spirit to produce what was being seen and heard —the manifestation of the sound like a rushing mighty wind and the flames of fiery light that descended upon the apostles; also the ability of the apostles to speak fluently in many foreign languages

(a miracle known as *xenoglossia*, zen-o-gloss-ee-yuh)  
(Acts 2:2-4).

- **The message was confirmed by miracles.** The miraculous signs were evidence that the message being spoken was from God and his Christ. Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, was behind both the message and the miracles that confirmed the message.
- **Jesus is exalted.** Christ was exalted to the right hand of God. There is no higher exaltation than that. Paul expresses it this way: "Therefore God also highly exalted him, bestowing on him the name that is above every name..." (Php 2:9). The name above every name is, of course, God's name.
- LOOKUP ▶ "Name"

## Verses 34-36

¶ " 'David didn't ascend into the heavens, but David himself says, *The Lord said to my Lord, Sit by my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.* Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain, that God has made him both Lord and Christ —this Jesus whom you crucified." (Acts 2:34-36).

**One more prophecy from David.** Peter reiterates that David's prophecies were not about himself, but about the Christ. The prophecy that Peter quotes here is Psalm 110:1. Jesus used that same text to confound the religious teachers of his day (Matthew 22:41-46).

- Greek References for Christ: *χριστος* *Christos* Christ 5547 (Strong) cf 5548 [Hebrew Messiah 4899 cf

4886], χριστιανος *Christianos* Christian 5546.

- **Meaning of House of Israel.** The term "house of Israel" simply means the *family* or descendants of Jacob. Jacob was the father of twelve sons who in turn were the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. An angel of God changed Jacob's name to Israel (Gen 32:28). Luke calls these descendants of Jacob "**Jews**" (Acts 2:5). That name means *Judeans* —the the remnant of Jacob's descendants living in Judea and its capital Jerusalem. This was the only surviving part of the large kingdom of Israel over which David and Solomon had ruled. However the term *Jews* came to include all of Jacob's descendants who migrated to various parts of the world, as well as their progeny. The Jews had synagogues all over the world, but the devout one journeyed to Jerusalem for special festivals such as Pentecost.
- **Peter concludes his message.** Peter concludes his message with the statement, "**Let all the house of Israel know for certain, that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ**" (Acts 2:36). This is the main point of Peter's message.
- **Who crucified Christ?** In some quarters, there is discomfort, even anger, about "blaming the Jews for Christ's crucifixion." Three things should be clear:
- **(1) Not all Jews were to blame.** However the Jewish religious leaders, and a big crowd that they collected, shouted, "**Crucify him! Crucify him!**"

- **(2) Others besides the Jews were to blame.** For example it was the Romans who carried out the crucifixion.
- **(3) We are really all to blame.** Everyone born into the world is guilty of Christ's death. "**All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God** (Romans 3:23-25). Without his crucifixion, none of us could be saved, therefore we are all equally *responsible* for his crucifixion because we caused the need of it.

## Definition of **KERYGMA**

### **Kerygma**

Transliteration of the Greek word that ***means proclamation or preaching***. Depending on the context, it may refer to either the content proclaimed or the act of proclaiming. The word is used once in Matthew ( [12:41](#) ), once in Luke ( [11:32](#) ), and six times in Paul's letters ( [Rom 16:25](#) ; [1 Col 1:21](#) ; [2:4](#) ; [15:14](#) ; [2 Tim 4:17](#) ; [Titus 1:3](#) ). All of these New Testament occurrences appear to refer to what is being proclaimed.

Both Matthew and Luke apparently refer to Jonah's message as the content proclaimed. The parallel statement in Matthew 12:42 speaking of the wisdom of Solomon also points toward content as the intended meaning of kerygma. Thus the statement in both Matthew and Luke would mean that the men of Nineveh repented

at the message of Jonah.

There are two occurrences ( [1:21](#) ; [2:4](#) ) of the term "kerygma" in the first major unit of 1 Corinthians (1:18-2:5). In this large passage Paul is explaining his gospel in contrast to the influence of the Jews who are concerned about signs and of the Greeks who are concerned about wisdom. This Greek influence seems to have come from the Sophists (the wisdom teachers). The believers in Corinth seem to view the gospel through Sophist eyes as "wisdom" and the evangelists as "wisdom teachers." Paul is correcting this kind of misunderstanding of the gospel. His opening reference to "the message of the cross" ( [1:18](#) ) clearly indicates that he has a definite content in mind. His reference to "the wisdom of the world" ( [1:20](#) ) shows what the kerygma has rendered untenable. Then comes the crucial assertion in 1:21 that God is saving those who believe through the kerygma—the message about Jesus' death and resurrection, which from the viewpoint of the world is foolishness. Verse 23 combines the cognate verb (*kerysso* [[khruvssw](#)]) with the primary content of the kerygma by saying, "We preach Christ crucified." Paul goes on to declare that this message is the power and wisdom of God that, in fact, the Jews and Greeks are seeking; yet they fail to perceive these qualities in the gospel and reject it as an offense or foolishness. God's purpose in allowing this failure and rejection is explained in verses 26-31. The twofold purpose is stated negatively as preventing people from boasting and positively as allowing them to boast only in the Lord. For Paul kerygma is the gospel or the proclamation of the death of Christ to bring about the salvation of all those who believe. **Verses 1-5 of chapter 2 explain that belief in the message comes about not by human wisdom or eloquence, but by means of the demonstration and power of the Spirit. Verse 4 refers to Paul's word or proclamation (*kerygma* [[khvrugma](#)]), and verse 5 asserts that faith in this proclamation results in trust in the power of God. That is, the believer in this message is brought into a**

## relationship with God: salvation or redemption.

At the end of 1 Corinthians, in the last major unit on the resurrection ( [15:1-58](#) ), **Paul returns to the theme of kerygma. Interestingly, at the beginning of this section Paul uses the word "gospel" (*euangelion*) and spells out the four crucial elements of the gospel: Christ's death, burial, resurrection, and appearances (vv. 1-8). Then, in the process of asserting the absolute necessity of the resurrection, Paul refers to "our preaching [kerygma]" (v. 14). Clearly, Paul understands "our preaching" as the gospel he has just defined in the opening verses of the chapter. The interchangeability of kerygma and gospel in this passage brings out unmistakably that the kerygma is the gospel message about Christ's death and resurrection.**

**These two large units ( [1 Col1:18-2:5](#); [15:1-58](#) ) are the definitive passages in the New Testament on kerygma.**

There are three other references to kerygma in Paul's letters. In the closing doxology of Romans, Paul parallels gospel (*euangelion*) and proclamation (*kerygma* [*khvrugma*]) ( [16:25](#) ). Probably the conjunction "and" (*kai* [*kaiv*]) would be better translated "that is," which would show that by proclamation Paul means the gospel or message about Christ. As it is here paralleled with gospel, kerygma is certainly intended to mean the content or message Paul proclaims. **Because the entire Letter to the Romans is an elaborate and systematic development of the gospel, it might be suggested that Romans is at the same time the most extensive statement of Paul's kerygma.**

Thus, even though the word "kerygma" occurs only in the closing doxology, Romans in fact is Paul's own masterful development of

his earlier definition of *kerygma* in 1 Corinthians, which was written about two years before Romans.

Paul includes in the opening salutation of his Letter to Titus a reference to the proclamation. The context might possibly be understood with either meaning here. The immediately preceding reference to "his Word" (*ton logon autou*) could be viewed as the message Paul declares in proclaiming (*en kerygmati*). But it seems more natural to understand "his word" to refer back to God's promise (v. 2) which is then embodied in "the proclamation" that has been entrusted to Paul. Thus, throughout the salutation "truth, " "knowledge, " "promise," "word, " and "preaching" (*kerygmati* [*khvrugma*]) all refer to the message or the gospel Paul proclaims. Thus it may be said that the context indicates that he is referring to the content of the gospel he proclaims, which is the message that has been entrusted to him from God.

**In the closing instructions of his final letter ( [2 Tim 4:17](#) ) Paul makes his last reference to the *kerygma*. The context indicates that he means the gospel or the message he has proclaimed throughout his ministry.**

His statement is that "through me the *kerygma* might be fully proclaimed." The use of "words" (*logois*) at the end of verse 15 further strengthens the understanding that *kerygma* in verse 17 does refer to the gospel or message about Jesus' death and resurrection.

The meaning of *kerygma* all six times that Paul uses this term is consistently the message about Jesus, the content of the gospel Paul so courageously proclaimed throughout his ministry.

- Hobert K. Farrell

See *also* [Paul the Apostle; Preach, Proclaim](#)

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: the ***apostolic proclamation*** of salvation  
through Jesus Christ — **ker·yg·mat·ic** *adjective*  
- *Webster's Dictionary*

κήρυγμα, (Kerygma) is a Greek word meaning "proclamation". The Greek word κηρύσσω, (*kerusso*) means "to be a herald (kerux)," or to be one who proclaims. And thus the *Kerygma* is what is proclaimed. As the Apostles began the work of preaching and proclaiming Christ, they proclaimed a message that was rather basic and simple.

The basic content of the *kerygma* emphasizes that Jesus is the chosen Messiah of God, the one who was promised. And though he was crucified, He rose gloriously from the dead, appearing to his disciples, and having been exulted

at the right hand of the Father through his ascension, now summons all to him, through the ministry of the Church. This proclamation (*kerygma*) requires a response from us, that we should repent of our sins, accept baptism, and live in the new life which Christ is offering. This alone will prepare us for the coming judgment that is to come upon all humanity. There is an urgent need to conform ourselves to Christ and be prepared by him for the coming judgment.

John MacArthur's Commentary:

*But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea, and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give heed to my words. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: 'And it shall be in the last days,' God says, 'That I will pour forth of My Spirit and they shall prophesy. And I will grant wonders in the sky above, and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come. And it shall be, that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'" [\(2:14-21\)](#)*

In an effort to appeal to people's interest, the church today emphasizes a great many different programs, methods, and approaches. Small group activities, sharing, and "culturally relevant" worship services,

emphasizing music and drama have become increasingly popular. Secular psychology, management techniques, and advertising strategies have all made significant inroads into the life of the church. Seminars on everything from how to have a good marriage to how to handle money abound.

Not all of those things may be harmful. Some, in their proper place, may even be helpful. But **what has too often been sacrificed in the flurry of activities and programs is the priority of preaching. While some moderns may bid it good riddance, such has not been the attitude of the church through history, starting with the early church. The first event of church history, following the coming of the Spirit, was Peter's sermon.** It led to 3,000 conversions and launched the church.

**The book of Acts is largely the record of apostolic preaching. Preaching has always remained central to the church's mission.**

[Acts 4:2](#) records the displeasure of the Jewish officials that the apostles "were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead." Undaunted, "every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" ([Acts 5:42](#)). After the first great persecution of the church broke out, "those who had been scattered went about preaching the word" ([Acts 8:4](#)). [Acts 8](#) also records the preaching of Philip ([vv. 5, 12](#)), and Peter and John ([v. 25](#)) to the Samaritans, and Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch ([v. 35](#)). It also describes the further preaching ministry of Philip ([v. 40](#)).

**After his conversion, Paul immediately "began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God'" ([Acts 9:20](#)). [Acts 11:20](#) describes the ministry of the "men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the**

Lord Jesus." All the way to the very last verse, Acts records how the early church "continued to preach the gospel" (Acts 14:7; cf. 10:42; 13:5, 32; 14:15, 21; 15:35; 16:10; 17:3, 13; 20:25; 28:31).

The early church's emphasis on preaching reflected that of our Lord. At the very outset of His ministry, "Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (Matt. 4:17).

Mark records that "after John [the Baptist] had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God" (Mark 1:14).

In Luke 4:43 Jesus said, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose."

Throughout His ministry, Jesus continued to preach and teach (cf. Matt. 11:1; Mark 1:38-39; Luke 8:1; 20:1).

Luke 4:16-21:insight into the Lord's view of His ministry:

*"And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book, and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit*

*of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord." And He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed upon Him. And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*

**Preaching or proclaiming is mentioned three times in the passage from Isaiah that Jesus read. That clearly shows the importance of preaching in His ministry. Jesus instructed His disciples, "As you go, preach" (Matt. 10:7), and at the end said, "Go into all the world and preach" (Mark 16:15).**

**This call to preach is best summed up  
in the words of Paul in [1 Corinthians 1:17-25](#):**

*“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, that the cross of Christ should not be made void. For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside." Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the*

*foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

**Preaching has rightly held that central place in the life of the true church throughout the ages.**

**The Reformation, which recovered the faith, was initiated and spread largely through the revival of preaching by men like Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and Knox. At the very core of the great strength of seventeenth-century Puritanism was its emphasis on sound biblical preaching. The Great Awakening of the eighteenth century was led through preaching by men such as George Whitefield, John Wesley, and Jonathan Edwards. The nineteenth century saw great evangelists, such as D. L. Moody, and great preachers, such as Charles Spurgeon, Joseph Parker, and Alexander Maclaren.**

A godly man, gifted by the Spirit to preach the Word, has no equal in the presentation of God's truth. It is the God-ordained method for evangelism and edification. The weakness of the contemporary church is largely due to the decline in powerful biblical preaching. Paul set the standard in bold relief when he said,

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I

determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. ([1 Cor. 2:1-5](#))

The apostle was inspired by God to ask the question, "How shall they hear without a preacher?" Then he affirmed the nobility of the preacher when he quoted from [Isaiah 52:7](#): "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!" ([Rom. 10:14-15](#)).

The content of biblical preaching can be summed up in two Greek words: *kērugma* and *didachē*. *Kērugma* derives from the verb *kērussō*, which means "to proclaim," or "to announce a proclamation." The noun *kērugma* refers to the content of a proclamation. At least five elements made up the New Testament *kērugma*. First, it presented Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Second, it described Him as God in human flesh. Third, it focused on His life and work, especially His death and resurrection. Fourth, it spoke of His second coming. Finally, it declared that salvation was only through faith in Him, and that those who rejected Him as Lord and Savior would be eternally damned.

In addition to *kērugma*, or proclamation, true biblical preaching must also contain *didachē*, or teaching. *Didachē*, from which the English word "didactic" derives, refers to the doctrinal content within the preaching of the *kērugma*. The epistles are largely composed of this theology of salvation that provides the depth and breadth and height of preaching. True preaching is proclaiming the great truths and undergirding them with the richness of the supernatural and profound wisdom revealed throughout Scripture, particularly the New Testament. There is no such thing as genuine biblical preaching that is devoid of doctrinal content.

The book of Acts frequently records that men were persuaded to believe and be redeemed by apostolic preaching. After Paul and Silas preached

in the synagogue in Thessalonica, "some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas" ([Acts 17:4](#)). In Corinth, Paul "was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks" ([Acts 18:4](#)). After arriving in Ephesus, Paul "entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God" ([Acts 19:8](#)). Even while imprisoned at Rome, Paul kept up his ministry of preaching and persuading men:

And when they had set a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God, and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening. And some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe. ([Acts 28:23-24](#))

The use of the term "persuaded" suggests the apostolic preaching had both a logical flow and doctrinal content. And Paul affirmed that saving faith comes by hearing a message about Christ ([Rom. 10:17](#)).

Before launching into the main body of his sermon, Peter discusses what is immediately on the people's minds—the phenomena of Pentecost. He begins by giving a refutation of the scurrilous charge of drunkenness. Then he offers an explanation of Pentecost based on Old Testament prophecy.

## **The First Christian Sermon--part 2**

**([Acts 2:22-36](#))**

*Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. For David says of Him, "I was always beholding the Lord in my presence; for He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue exulted; moreover my flesh also will abide in hope; because Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, nor allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; Thou wilt make me full of gladness with Thy presence." Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. And so, because he was a prophet, and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants upon his throne, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay. This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: "The Lord said to my Lord, sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet." Therefore let all the house of Israel know for*

*certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified. ([2:22-36](#))*

Ever since God's covenant with Abraham, in which He promised to bless all nations through Abraham's seed ([Gen. 12:1ff.](#); cf. [Gal. 3:16](#)), the Jewish people have longed for messianic times. They believe that when Messiah comes all wrongs will be made right, and He will lead them to victory over their enemies and usher in the blessings of His promised kingdom.

Viewed in that context of intense Jewish expectation, Peter's announcement that the last days, a name for messianic times, had already begun ([2:16-21](#)) was shocking. That startling claim, made by the apostle in the introduction to his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, directed his hearers logically into his sermon's theme. For if the messianic times had indeed begun, then Messiah must have come. That is precisely the thesis Peter develops in the main body of his sermon. He presents the truth that Israel's long-awaited Messiah has come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

It is difficult for twentieth-century readers to appreciate how profoundly disturbing that claim was to the Jews. Messiah was the central figure in Jewish thought. Of Him God had revealed, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples" ([Gen. 49:10](#)). Of Him the psalmist warned, "Do homage to the Son, lest He become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled" ([Ps. 2:12](#)). He was the great descendant of David, of whom God said, "I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" ([2 Sam. 7:13](#); cf. [Luke 1:31-33](#)).

In light of that, for Peter to boldly proclaim Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah had to both shock and outrage his listeners. After all, less than two months earlier they had executed Jesus for claiming to be the Messiah. Now his upstart followers were making that same claim on His

behalf. To the Jewish mind, there could be no greater expression of blasphemy.

That same antipathy toward Jesus Christ persists in our own day. I'll never forget the time when, as a young man, I visited the office of a local rabbi. We had a pleasant discussion until I asked him what he thought of Jesus Christ. He brought his fist crashing down on his desk and glared at me. Pointing his finger at me he said vehemently, "Don't ever mention that name in my presence again!"

For Peter to proclaim Jesus as Israel's Messiah was to raise the most dynamic, powerful and forceful issue possible. By so doing, Peter showed a boldness and courage that he had previously lacked. That is once again evidence of the transforming power of Pentecost in his life.

Knowing that his hearers would demand compelling evidence before accepting such an audacious claim, Peter proceeds to provide it. Having explained the miracle of Pentecost in his introduction, he now launches into his theme, namely that Jesus of Nazareth is the divine Messiah. Peter establishes Jesus's credentials by demonstrating how His life, death, resurrection, and exaltation prove Him to be the Messiah. As his sermon unfolds, Peter flows through those four elements in chronological order. In keeping with apostolic custom, however, he focuses primarily on the resurrection of Christ (cf. [Acts 3:15](#); [5:30](#); [10:40](#); [13:30](#), [33](#), [34](#), [37](#)).

## **The Life of Christ**

*Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—([2:22](#))*

As he did at the beginning of his sermon (cf. [2:14](#)), Peter boldly challenged the **men of Israel** present to **listen to his words**. His

boldness was predicated on two undeniable truths: God had worked miracles through Jesus, and they had seen them. That salvation was being offered to Israel despite their unbelief and rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ is a testimony to the magnanimity of God's grace.

**Jesus the Nazarene** was the name by which our Lord was commonly known during His earthly ministry ([Matt. 21:11](#); [Mark 10:47](#); [14:67](#); [16:6](#); [Luke 24:19](#); [John 18:5, 7](#)). It identified Him with His hometown of Nazareth; in fact, the phrase is sometimes translated "Jesus of Nazareth." It was the name on the inscription on His cross ([John 19:19](#)). Peter used it several other times in Acts ([3:6](#); [4:10](#); [10:38](#)), as did Paul ([26:9](#)). It was even used in derision by some (cf. [John 1:46](#)), thus Peter's use of it constitutes a mild rebuke. This name for our Lord reflects His wonderful condescension in leaving the glory of heaven to live in a humble Galilean village.

Peter further describes Jesus as **a man attested** to them **by God** (cf. [John 5:32-37](#); [8:18](#)). *Apodeiknumi* (**attested**) has various shades of meaning. It is used in [1 Corinthians 4:9](#) to speak of exhibiting something. In [Acts 25:7](#) it conveys the idea of proof. [Second Thessalonians 2:4](#) uses it in the sense of proclamation to high office. All those shades of meaning are applicable to Jesus. He was exhibited as God in human flesh, and that was confirmed by "many convincing proofs" ([Acts 1:3](#)). Finally, God "highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name" ([Phil. 2:9](#)). There is no higher office than that of Messiah, God's anointed King.

Peter describes the means by which God **attested** Jesus as **miracles and wonders and signs**. The many miracles performed by our Lord provide overwhelming evidence that He is who He claimed to be. From His miraculous birth to His miraculous resurrection, to all the miracles He performed during His earthly ministry, the miraculous element was central in our Lord's life. Nicodemus no doubt spoke for many when he exclaimed, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher;

for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him" ([John 3:2](#)).

It should come as no surprise if the God Who supernaturally created the universe should choose at times to supernaturally intervene in it. Yet it is the claim of miracles that many in our culture find most objectionable in biblical Christianity. The many attempts by rationalistic critics to invent the "historical" (that is, nonmiraculous) Jesus have inevitably ended in frustration. If the miracles are removed from His life, there is very little left.

Many would agree with the eighteenth-century British philosopher David Hume, who rejected the possibility of miracles. Hume argued that since the laws of nature are uniform, and a miracle is by definition a violation of the laws of nature, miracles are impossible. There is a fatal flaw in Hume's argument, however. C. S. Lewis writes,

Now of course we must agree with Hume that if there is absolutely "uniform experience" against miracles, if in other words they have never happened, why then they never have. Unfortunately we know the experience against them to be uniform only if we know that all the reports of them are false. And we can know all the reports to be false only if we know already that miracles have never occurred. In fact, we are arguing in a circle. (C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* [New York: Macmillan, 1972], 105; for a defense of the possibility of miracles, see also Norman L. Geisler, *Miracles and Modern Thought* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982]).

**Miracles, wonders, and signs** all describe God's miraculous works. **Miracles** is from *dunamis*, a term that describes the powerful, supernatural character of the works. **Wonders** is the plural form of *teras*. It describes the marveling that takes place in the mind of the one who witnesses a miracle. **Signs** derives from *sēmeion* and gives the intent of God's miraculous works: to point to spiritual truth. It should be noted that "throughout Acts the term 'wonders' only occurs in conjunction with 'signs,' a testimony to the fact that mere marvels have no value in

themselves except as they point beyond themselves to the divine power behind them and so lead to faith" (John B. Polhill, *The New American Commentary: Acts* [Nashville: Broadman, 1992], 112).

The miracles of our Lord were thus mighty manifestations of God's power designed to get people's attention and point them to spiritual truth. For example in [John 6](#) Jesus followed the miracle of the feeding of the multitude by offering Himself as the bread of life. Similarly, He used the miracle of Lazarus's resurrection to illustrate the spiritual truth that He is the resurrection and the life ([John 11:25](#)).

Jesus did not do His miracles on His own; **God performed** them **through Him** ([John 5:17-20](#), [30](#), [36](#); [8:28](#); [14:10](#)). They showed both His deity and the Father's approval of Him ([Matt. 11:1-6](#); [Luke 7:20-23](#); [John 3:2](#); [6:14](#)). Peter repeatedly emphasizes God's involvement in Christ's life, death, and resurrection ([vv. 23, 24, 32, 33, 36](#)). He drives home the point that ample evidence reveals that Jesus Christ was no impostor but was indeed God's chosen Messiah.

The miracles God performed through Jesus Christ, Peter reminds them, were done **in your midst, just as you yourselves know**. They could not claim ignorance. Their rejection of Jesus was not based on lack of information but on hatred and love of sin.

That hatred appears in many passages. In [John 10:37-38](#), Jesus said, "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father." What was the response? "Therefore they were seeking again to seize Him, and He eluded their grasp" ([v. 39](#)). Note that, although they rejected His claims, they did not deny the works He did.

After Jesus' resurrection of Lazarus, "some of the [crowd who had witnessed the raising of Lazarus] went away to the Pharisees, and told them the things which Jesus had done. Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, 'What are we doing?

For this man is performing many signs" ([John 11:46-47](#)). Even His most bitter enemies did not deny His miracles. Their response, however, was to plot His death ([vv. 48-53](#)).

At the triumphal entry, "the multitude who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of the tomb, and raised him from the dead, were bearing Him witness. For this cause also the multitude went and met Him, because they heard that He had performed this sign" ([John 12:17-18](#)). A few days later, this same multitude cried out before Pilate, "Let Him be crucified" ([Matt. 27:22-23](#)).

Perhaps the clearest statement of this truth comes from our Lord's words in [John 15:24-25](#): "If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well. But they have done this in order that the word may be fulfilled that is written in their Law, 'They hated Me without a cause.'"

The evidence from Jesus' life and works that He was the Messiah of God was conclusive and undeniable. But because "men loved darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil" ([John 3:19](#)), they committed the greatest sin that can be committed—they rejected Jesus Christ.

## **The Death of Christ**

*this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. ([2:23](#))*

Peter's emphatic use of the phrase **this Man** brings out the stark contrast between his hearers' evaluation of Jesus and God's. The very One whom God had honored as Messiah, they had rejected and crucified.

In this verse Peter answers an objection that would arise in the minds of his listeners. If Jesus was the Messiah, why was He a victim? Why did He not use His power to avoid the cross? Peter's reply to this unspoken

objection is that Jesus was no victim ([John 10:17-18](#); [19:10-11](#)); rather, He was **delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God.**

*Ekdotos* (**delivered up**) appears only here in the New Testament. It describes those surrendered to their enemies, or betrayed. God gave His Son to be the Savior of the world, which entailed delivering Him to His enemies. By the design of God, Jesus was betrayed by Judas into the hands of the Jewish leaders, who handed Him over to the Romans for execution.

**Predetermined** is from *horizō*, from which we get our English word "horizon." It means "to mark out with a boundary," or "to determine." **Plan** is from *boulomai* and refers to God's will, design, or purpose. Taken together they indicate that Jesus Christ was delivered to death because God planned and ordained it ([Acts 4:27-28](#); [13:27-29](#)) from all eternity ([2 Tim. 1:9](#); [Rev. 13:8](#)).

**Foreknowledge** translates *prognōsis*, an important and often misunderstood New Testament word. It means far more than knowing beforehand what will happen. Significantly, the word appears here in the instrumental dative case. That shows that it was the means by which Christ's deliverance to His enemies took place. Yet, mere knowledge cannot perform such an act. Foreordination can act, however, and that is the New Testament meaning of *prognōsis*:

*Proginoskein* and *prognōsis* in the New Testament... do not denote simple intellectual foresight or prescience, the mere taking knowledge of something beforehand, but rather a selective knowledge which regards one with favor and makes one an object of love, and thus approaches the idea of foreordination, [Acts 2:23](#) (comp. [4:28](#)); [Rom. 8:29](#); [11:2](#); [1 Peter 1:2](#). These passages simply lose their meaning, if the words be taken in the sense of simply taking knowledge of one in advance, for God foreknows all men in that sense. Even Arminians feel constrained to give the words a more determinative meaning, namely, to foreknow one with absolute assurance in a certain state or condition. This includes the

absolute certainty of that future state, and for that very reason comes very close to the idea of predestination. (L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976], 112)

The idea that God saw in advance that Israel would reject and crucify Christ and worked that into His eternal plan is a implicit denial both of His sovereignty and omniscience (cf. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 68).

Peter strongly emphasizes the point that Jesus was delivered to death by God's eternal plan. That being the case, His death in no way contradicted His messianic claims.

That Jesus Christ was delivered to death by God's predetermined plan, however, does not absolve those who put Him to death of their guilt. Peter goes on to indict them because they nailed Jesus **to a cross... and put Him to death**. They were the instigators of Jesus' execution, which **by the hands of godless** (literally, "lawless") Romans was carried out.

God used evil men to accomplish His purpose, yet never violated their will or removed their culpability by doing so. Peter thus presents the total sovereignty of God alongside the complete responsibility of man. That apparently paradoxical truth is affirmed throughout Scripture and is illustrated in [Luke 22:22](#). Speaking of His betrayer there, our Lord said, "The Son of Man is going as it has been determined; but woe to that man through whom He is betrayed!" Men are responsible not for God's plans but for their own sins.

The heinous sin of rejecting Jesus Christ was the blackest moment in Israel's history. Far from casting doubt on His messianic credentials, however, that betrayal was part of God's eternal plan. And though Peter does not develop the thought here, the Old Testament clearly teaches that Messiah had to die (cf. [Ps. 22](#); [Isa. 53](#)). The death of Jesus Christ, no less than His life, confirmed that He was the Messiah.

## **The Resurrection of Christ**

*And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. For David says of Him, "I was always beholding the Lord in my presence; for He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue exulted; moreover my flesh also will abide in hope; because Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, nor allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; Thou wilt make me full of gladness with Thy presence." Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. And so, because he was a prophet, and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants upon his throne, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay. This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. ([2:24-32](#))*

As already noted, the resurrection of Jesus Christ was not only the central theme of apostolic preaching but also is without question the climax of redemptive history. It proves beyond doubt the deity of Jesus Christ and establishes His messianic credentials. It is also the guarantee of our own resurrection ([John 14:19](#); [Rom. 6:4-5](#); [1 Cor. 6:14](#); [15:16-23](#)). The resurrection is the crowning proof that God accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (cf. [Rom. 4:25](#)). Without it, His death becomes the heroic death of a noble martyr, the pathetic death of a madman, or the execution of a fraud.

The greatest proof that Jesus is the Messiah, then, is not His teaching, His miracles, or even His death. It is His resurrection. That becomes the main theme of Peter's sermon. After spending one verse each on Christ's life and death, he spends nine verses on His resurrection.

[Verses 23](#) and [24](#) form one connected thought. Israel rejected and crucified her Messiah, but **God raised Him up again**. Peter forcefully drives home the point that they were guilty of opposing God—despite their boasts to the contrary ([Rom. 2:17-20](#)). That tactic was frequently employed in Acts (cf. [3:14-15](#); [10:39-40](#); [13:27-30](#)).

By raising Jesus, God put **an end to the agony of death** for Him. **Agony** translates *ōdinas*, which literally means "birth pangs." Like the pain of a woman in labor, the pain of death for Jesus was temporary and resulted in something glorious—the resurrection.

God delivered Jesus from death **since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power**. Death was powerless to hold Him for several reasons. First, death could not hold Him because of divine power. Jesus was "the resurrection and the life" ([John 11:25](#)), who died "that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil" ([Heb. 2:14](#)). Second, death could not hold Him because of divine promise. [John 2:18-22](#) records the following dialogue:

The Jews therefore answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, seeing that You do these things?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews therefore said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking of the temple of His body. When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had spoken.

"Thus it is written," our Lord told the disciples, "that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day" ([Luke 24:46](#)). Finally, death could not hold Him because of divine purpose. God has designed that His people be with Him for all eternity. In order to do that, they need to go through death and out the other side. Jesus had to go first to make the way (cf. [1 Cor. 15:16-26](#)). Because He lives, His people will live forever ([John 14:19](#)).

To further confirm that the resurrection was God's plan for the Messiah, Peter quotes a prophetic passage from [Psalm 16:8-11](#). Although written by **David**, the passage is prophetically Messiah speaking in the first person (cf. [Ps. 22](#)). It describes Messiah's confident trust in God as He looked to the cross. His declaration **I was always beholding the Lord in my presence** is the key to that trust. Jesus kept His focus on God no matter what trials came His way. He knew that because God was at His **right hand**, He would **not be shaken**. The **right hand** symbolizes protection. In a wedding ceremony, the bridegroom stands to the right of the bride. In the ancient world, a bodyguard stood on the right side of the one he was protecting. In that position he could cover him with his shield and still have his right arm free to fight.

Because of His confidence in God's protection, Messiah could say **my heart was glad and my tongue exulted**. Even the prospect of the cross could not dampen Christ's joy. As the writer of Hebrews puts it, "Jesus... for the joy set before Him endured the cross" ([Heb. 12:2](#)). **Moreover**, another reason for Messiah's joy was His confidence that His **flesh also would abide in hope**. **Flesh** here refers to the physical body. *Kataskēnoō* (**abide**) literally means "to pitch a tent." It expresses Messiah's certainty that He could commit His body to the grave with the confident **hope** that it would be raised to life again.

The next statement from [Psalm 16](#) gives the reason for Messiah's confidence: **because Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades**. **Hades** is the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament term "Sheol." Although it can refer specifically to hell ([Matt. 11:23](#)), Peter uses it here in its more general sense of the abode of the dead. The phrase expresses Christ's confidence that He would not remain a captive in the realm of death. Nor would God **allow His Holy One** (a messianic title; cf. [Mark 1:24](#); [Luke 4:34](#); [John 6:69](#)) **to undergo decay**. During its three days in the tomb, our Lord's body experienced no corruption. The significance of this verse will be seen shortly.

Peter's quote of [verse 11](#) of [Psalm 16](#) has puzzled some commentators, since it doesn't appear to advance his argument. The phrase **the ways of life** (the Hebrew text of [Psalm 16:11](#) uses the singular "path of life"), however, can be interpreted as a reference to the resurrection. It would thus have the sense of "the path to resurrection life." The context strongly implies such an interpretation. As a result of the resurrection, Messiah would be **full of gladness** as He experienced God's **presence**.

Peter now comes to the crux of his argument. Addressing them once again as **brethren**, he **confidently** reminds them that **the patriarch David both died and was buried**. In fact, his **tomb** provided visible evidence that he had not fulfilled the prophecy of [Psalm 16](#). David spoke as a **prophet**, however, not of himself. He **knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants upon his throne**. That promise is recorded in [2 Samuel 7:11-16](#):

The Lord also declares to you that the Lord will make a house for you. When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.

David, then, **looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ**, who, in contrast to David, **was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay**.

Peter's argument from [Psalm 16](#) can be summarized as follows: The psalm speaks of a resurrection. Since David, however, was not resurrected, it cannot speak of him. Thus, David speaks in the psalm of the Messiah. Hence, Messiah will rise from the dead. Peter now delivers his powerful conclusion: **This Jesus God raised up again, to which we**

**are all witnesses.** The argument is conclusive: Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah.

## **The Exaltation of Christ**

*Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: "The Lord said to my Lord, sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet." Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified. ([2:33-36](#))*

Not only did Jesus rise from the dead, but he also was **exalted** to the place of honor, glory, and power (cf. [Phil. 2:9-11](#)) at the **right hand of God** (cf. [Mark 16:19](#); [Luke 22:69](#); [Acts 5:31](#); [7:55-56](#); [Rom. 8:34](#); [Col. 3:1](#); [Heb. 10:12](#); [12:2](#); [1 Peter 3:22](#)). From that exalted position, Peter says, Jesus, **having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, has poured forth this which you both see and hear.** Peter now brings his listeners full circle back to the phenomena of Pentecost. He tells them that what they had just seen resulted from God's promise to send the Spirit to inaugurate the messianic age ([Joel 2:28-29](#)). Now that Christ was risen and glorified, God fulfilled that promise (cf. [John 7:39](#)).

Peter then quotes from another Davidic psalm, [Psalm 110](#), to prove from His ascension and exaltation that Jesus Christ is the Messiah. Once again, the psalm could not be referring to David, since **it was not David who ascended into heaven.** In fact, David **himself says** in that psalm, **"The Lord said to my Lord, sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet."** Placing one's enemies under one's feet was a figure of speech denoting their abject submission (cf. [Josh. 10:24-25](#)). David was not exalted to God's right hand, but Jesus was

([Acts 1:9-11](#)). The proof of that was the outpouring of the Spirit that the crowd had just witnessed.

Peter has provided overwhelming evidence from Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and exaltation that He is indeed Israel's long-awaited Messiah. He now draws his sermon to a powerful conclusion with these ringing words: **Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.** *Asphalōs* (**for certain**) speaks of that which is known beyond a doubt. The same Jesus whom God attested as Messiah through His life, death, resurrection, and exaltation was the same **Jesus whom they had crucified.** The verdict was in, and they were on the wrong side, guilty of opposing God and rejecting their Messiah. As Peter was later to put it, "He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the very corner stone" ([Acts 4:11](#)).

## The First Christian Sermon--part 3

### ([Acts 2:37-41](#))

*Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself." And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and*

*there were added that day about three thousand souls. ([2:37-41](#))*

The most momentous question anyone can ask is the question, "What must I do to be saved?" A wrong answer to that question, no matter how correct a person's beliefs may be in other areas, is the path to eternal tragedy.

Knowing how vitally important a correct answer is to this question, Satan has made his greatest efforts to confuse the issue. The result has been a plethora of wrong answers. Although ostensibly based on the Bible, each is in fact a perversion of biblical truth.

The legalist, for example, argues that salvation comes through a works-righteousness system. He may cite [James 2:21](#) as a proof text: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?" Such a misuse of that verse ignores the context in which it appears ([James 2:14-26](#)). It also is directly contradicted by the apostle Paul's words in [Romans 4:2-3](#): "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness'" (cf. [Gal. 3:6-9](#)). And Paul emphatically rejects any idea of salvation through keeping the law in [Romans 3:20](#), "By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight."

The moralist takes a slightly different tack. He believes that as long as his good deeds outweigh his bad ones in God's scales he will be all right for eternity. As proof, he may cite [John 5:28-29](#), "An hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment." That verse, however, merely states that a redeemed life will be characterized by good works, an unredeemed one by their absence. Further, the moralist will carefully avoid any discussion of such passages as [Ephesians 2:8-9](#) ("For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one

should boast"), [Romans 3:12](#) ("There is none righteous, not even one"), and [Romans 3:23](#) ("All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God").

Some of Peter's Jewish listeners would have argued for salvation based on racial heritage. To such people, John the Baptist gave the following warning: "Do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" ([Matt. 3:9-10](#)). The truth is that "they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel" ([Rom. 9:6](#)).

The universalist rests his false hopes on a misinterpretation of passages such as [Romans 5:18](#), "So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men." He ignores our Lord's solemn warning to "enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it" ([Matt. 7:13](#)).

The ritualist also appeals to Scripture to validate his notion that salvation comes through observing rituals. [Verse 38](#) of the present passage is often cited in support of the ritualist viewpoint: "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." Ritualists ignore the biblical truth that salvation comes not through rituals but through faith in Jesus Christ. They fail to understand that "with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" ([Rom. 10:10](#)).

Sadly, all of those aberrant views have legions of followers in our day. That shows that any position can be proven from the Bible by misinterpreting or taking passages out of context and failing to compare Scripture with Scripture.

Unlike the purveyors of false teaching, Peter gives the correct answer to the question of how to be saved. He wraps up his sermon with an appeal

to his listeners. The passage then concludes by giving the results of Peter's sermon.

## **The Appeal**

*Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself." And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" ([2:37-40](#))*

Peter's conclusion to the main body of his sermon was devastating. He charged his listeners with rejecting and executing their Messiah—the very One whom God had made both Lord and Christ ([v. 36](#)). **When they heard this**—Peter's statement in [verse 36](#)—**they were pierced to the heart.** *Katanussō* (**pierced**) appears only here in the New Testament. It means "to pierce," or "to stab," and thus depicts something sudden and unexpected. Stunned by their inability to evade the indictment that they were guilty of heinous behavior before God, they were overcome by grief and remorse.

There were several reasons for their anguish. First, as already noted, was the realization that they had executed their Messiah. The One for whom they had longed for centuries, the One who was the hope of all their personal and national promises, had finally come. Instead of welcoming Him, however, they rejected Him and handed Him over to their bitter and hated enemies, the Romans, for execution.

Second, they themselves had done it. It would have been bad enough to learn that Messiah had been killed. Far worse was the knowledge of their

own complicity in the crime. That no doubt produced in them a deep sense of guilt. They could not imagine a greater sin than killing their Messiah.

A third cause for their anguish was fear of Messiah's wrath. Peter had announced to them in no uncertain terms that the same Jesus they had crucified was now alive ([vv. 24, 31, 32](#)). Worse still, he had quoted to them a passage from [Psalm 110](#) that spoke of the vanquishing of Messiah's enemies. What greater enemies of God existed than those who killed His Messiah?

Finally, they were devastated by the understanding that what they had done could not be undone.

Overwhelmed with anguish, despair, remorse, and guilt, they **said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"** They sought desperately for a way to make right what they had done, and avoid Messiah's wrath. They were at the same point Paul was when he cried out on the Damascus road, "What shall I do, Lord?" ([Acts 22:10](#)). Their words are reminiscent of those of the Philippian jailer, who asked Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ([Acts 16:30](#)). Their state of mind illustrates perfectly that of the convicted sinner. They had a deep sense of their own guilt, and a panicky fear of God's wrath. They had a strong desire to be saved from that wrath, and a willingness to submit to God's will. Such conviction of sin is a part of every genuine conversion.

The book of Zechariah illustrates that truth. [Zechariah 12:10](#) describes the first step in the restoration of Israel—conviction of sin: "And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born." Only after that conviction does the cleansing of sin described in [Zechariah 13:1](#) take place: "In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for

sin and for impurity." Conviction is the key used by the Holy Spirit to open the heart to salvation.

An indictment for sin is an essential part of any gospel presentation. People need to be convicted of sin before they will see the need for a savior. No matter how morally upright they may be, all unbelievers are guilty of the vile sins of rebellion against God (cf. [Acts 17:30](#)) and rejection of Jesus Christ ([John 16:8-9](#)). Genuine conviction is produced by the Spirit of God, in conjunction with the Word of God, which is "living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" ([Heb. 4:12](#)).

The Holy Spirit, through Peter's powerful preaching, had brought them to the point of desperation. Peter now answers their question with the only correct answer: **repent**. *Metanoēō* (**repent**) is a rich New Testament term. It speaks of a change of purpose, of turning from sin to God ([1 Thess. 1:9](#)). It is an essential component of a genuine conversion. Both John the Baptist ([Matt. 3:2](#)) and the Lord Jesus Christ ([Matt. 4:17](#)) called for repentance. It is an oft-repeated theme in Acts ([3:19](#); [5:31](#); [8:22](#); [11:18](#); [17:30](#); [20:21](#); [26:20](#)).

Although Peter's hearers feared God's judgment, true repentance involves more than fear of consequences. Commentator Albert Barnes rightly notes that "false repentance dreads the *consequences* of sin; true repentance dreads *sin itself*" (*Barnes' Notes on the New Testament: Acts-Romans* [1884-85; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, n.d.], 52. Emphasis in original). True repentance hates sin for what it is—an affront to God. Knowing that sin is evil and that God hates it motivates the truly repentant person to forsake it. Genuine repentance thus forsakes sin and turns in total commitment to Jesus Christ. (For a discussion of repentance, see my books *The Gospel According to Jesus*, rev. ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], and *Faith Works* [Dallas: Word, 1993].)

It is difficult for modern readers to grasp the magnitude of the change facing Peter's Jewish hearers. They were part of a unique community, with a rich cultural and religious history. Despite long years of subjugation to Rome, they were fiercely nationalistic. The nation had rejected Jesus as a blasphemer and executed Him. Now Peter calls on them to turn their back on all that and embrace Jesus as their Messiah.

By calling on **each** of them to **be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ** Peter does not allow for any "secret disciples" (cf. [Matt. 10:32-33](#)). Baptism would mark a public break with Judaism and identification with Jesus Christ. Such a drastic public act would help weed out any conversions which were not genuine. In sharp contrast to many modern gospel presentations, Peter made accepting Christ difficult, not easy. By so doing, he followed the example of our Lord Himself ([Luke 14:26-33](#); [18:18-27](#)). Baptism was always **in the name of Jesus Christ**. That was the crucial identification, and the cost was high for such a confession.

The meaning of Peter's statement that baptism is **for the forgiveness of sins** has been much disputed. Those who teach baptismal regeneration—the false teaching that baptism is necessary for salvation—see this verse as a primary proof text for their view.

That view ignores the immediate context of the passage. As already noted, baptism would be a dramatic step for Peter's hearers. By publicly identifying themselves as followers of Jesus of Nazareth, they risked becoming outcasts in their society (cf. [John 9:22](#)). Peter calls upon them to prove the genuineness of their repentance by submitting to public baptism. In much the same way, our Lord called upon the rich young ruler to prove the genuineness of his repentance by parting with his wealth ([Luke 18:18-27](#)). Surely, however, no one would argue from the latter passage that giving away one's possessions is necessary for salvation. Salvation is not a matter of either water or economics. True repentance, however, will inevitably manifest itself in total submission to the Lord's will.

Second, such teaching violates the important hermeneutical principle known as *analogia Scriptura* (the analogy of Scripture). That principle states that no passage, when correctly interpreted, will teach something contradictory to the rest of Scripture. And the rest of Scripture unmistakably teaches that salvation is solely by faith (cf. [John 1:12](#); [3:16](#); [Acts 16:31](#); [Rom. 3:21-30](#); [4:5](#); [10:9-10](#); [Phil. 3:9](#); [Gal. 2:16](#)).

Third, after condemning the ritualistic religion of the scribes and Pharisees, our Lord would hardly have instituted one of His own. F. F. Bruce remarks, "It is against the whole genius of Biblical religion to suppose that the outward rite [of baptism] had any value except in so far as it was accompanied by true repentance within" (*The Book of the Acts* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971], 77).

Fourth, this interpretation is not true to the facts of Scripture. Throughout the book of Acts, forgiveness is linked to repentance, not baptism (cf. [3:19](#); [5:31](#); [26:20](#)). In addition, the Bible records that some who were baptized were not saved ([Acts 8:13](#); [21-23](#)), while some were saved with no mention of their being baptized ([Luke 7:37-50](#); [Matt. 9:2](#); [Luke 18:13-14](#)). The story of the conversion of Cornelius and his friends very clearly shows the relationship of baptism to salvation. It was only after they were saved, as shown by their receiving the Holy Spirit ([Acts 10:44-46](#)), that they were baptized ([vv. 47-48](#)). Indeed, it was because they had received the Spirit (and hence were saved) that Peter ordered them to be baptized ([v. 47](#)). That passage clearly shows that baptism follows salvation; it does not cause it.

In [1 Corinthians 15:1-4](#), the apostle Paul summarizes the gospel he preached and by which the Corinthians had been saved. There is no mention of baptism. Further, in [1 Corinthians 1:14-16](#), Paul rejoiced that he had baptized none of the Corinthians except Crispus, Gaius, and the household of Stephanas. That statement is inexplicable if baptism is necessary for salvation. Paul would then in effect be saying he was thankful that only those few were saved under his ministry. The apostle clearly distinguishes baptism from the gospel in [1 Corinthians 1:17](#),

where he says that "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel." How could Paul have made such a statement if baptism was necessary for salvation?

While the preposition *eis* (**for**) can mean "for the purpose of," it can also mean "because of," or "on the occasion of" (A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Baker, reprint of the 1930 edition], 3:35-36; H. E. Dana and J. R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* [Toronto: Macmillan, 1957], 104). The latter is clearly its meaning in [Matthew 12:41](#), which says that the people of Nineveh repented because of the preaching of Jonah.

The order is clear. Repentance is for forgiveness. Baptism follows that forgiveness; it does not cause it (cf. [8:12](#), [34-39](#); [10:34-48](#); [16:31-33](#)). It is the public sign or symbol of what has taken place on the inside. It is an important step of obedience for all believers, and should closely follow conversion. In fact, in the early church it was inseparable from salvation, so that Paul referred to salvation as being related to "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" ([Eph. 4:5](#)).

Complete **forgiveness of sins** is the blessed joy and privilege of every believer. That glorious truth fills the pages of the New Testament. In [Matthew 26:28](#), our Lord said, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins." In [Luke 24:47](#), He reminded the disciples that "repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem." Therefore, "in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace" ([Eph. 1:7](#)). Paul wrote to the Colossians that "when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions" ([Col. 2:13](#)). The apostle John says simply, "Little children, your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake" ([1 John 2:12](#). See also [Acts 5:31](#); [10:43](#); [13:38](#); [26:18](#); [Rom. 4:7](#); [Eph. 4:32](#); [Col. 1:14](#); [1 John 1:9](#).)

Salvation would not only bring them forgiveness, but they would also **receive the gift of the Holy Spirit**. For this they had been waiting; the gift of the Spirit, according to [Joel 2:28-29](#), would mark the beginning of messianic times.

*Dōrea* (**gift**) refers to that which is free and unmerited. Contrary to much contemporary teaching, Peter attached no condition to receiving the Spirit except repentance. Nor did he promise that any supernatural phenomena would accompany their reception of the Spirit. It should be noted as well that the gift of the Spirit does not come through water baptism ([Acts 10:47](#)).

The marvelous gift of the Holy Spirit was not merely for those in Peter's audience that day. **The promise** of the Holy Spirit, Peter informs them, **is for you and your children, and for all who are far off**. They and their children, the nation of Israel, would receive the Spirit, as the Old Testament promised ([Isa. 44:3](#); [Ezek. 36:27](#); [37:14](#); [Joel 2:28-29](#)). They would share that blessing, however, with those **who are far off**—the Gentiles (cf. [Eph. 2:11-13](#)).

Peter's description of those who would receive the Spirit as those whom **the Lord our God shall call to Himself** describes God's sovereignty at work in salvation. It presents the necessary balance to his statement in [verse 21](#) that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." A biblical view of salvation does not exclude either human responsibility or divine sovereignty, but allows them to remain in tension. We must resist the attempt to harmonize what Scripture does not, content in the knowledge that there is no ultimate contradiction in God's mind.

Luke adds that **with many other words Peter solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!"** Luke has given us only a synopsis of Peter's sermon, which obviously lasted far longer than the few minutes it takes to read this passage. It is likely as well that Peter engaged in a dialogue with the crowd following his sermon, as the statement **kept on exhorting**

indicates. The gist of his exhortation was that they should **be saved from this perverse generation** through repentance and faith in Christ. **Perverse** translates *skolios*, which means "bent," or "crooked," and hence evil and unrighteous.

Peter's condemnation echoed that of our Lord. In [Matthew 12:39](#) and [16:4](#), He described them as an "evil and adulterous generation." In [Matthew 12:45](#) He referred to them as "this evil generation," while in [Luke 11:29](#) He commented that "this generation is a wicked generation." In [Mark 9:19](#) He condemned them as an "unbelieving generation," while [Matthew 17:17](#) and [Luke 9:41](#) add the word "perverted" to "unbelieving." Finally, in [Mark 8:38](#), Jesus denounced them as an "adulterous and sinful generation."

Many thousands from that generation were to perish during the Jewish revolt, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Peter's appeal for immediate response was timely.

## **The Results**

*So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls. ([2:41](#))*

As already noted, much present day evangelism seeks to make coming to Christ as easy as possible. Many today would be appalled that Peter made the cost of coming to Christ so high. How could he expect them to turn their backs publicly on their culture? How could he ask them to risk becoming outcasts among their families and society? How could he demand that they accept as Messiah the very One their leaders had rejected and executed? They would no doubt predict that the results of Peter's sermon would be minimal.

Such was not the case, however. **Those who had received his word** accepted the conditions and **were baptized**. Further, they amounted to more than an insignificant handful; **there were added** to the church **that**

**day about three thousand souls.** That a precise number was recorded suggests that they kept track of those who were saved and baptized.

- MacArthur New Testament Commentary,