

Acts of the Apostles – Purpose and Overview

New Testament Survey – Lesson 16

Does the number 525,600 mean anything to you? I will give you a hint: it is 365 times 1440. Now maybe 1440 means nothing to you, so let me tip you off that it is 60 times 24. Now do you have it? 525,600 is the number of minutes in a year (unless it is a leap year, then the number is 527,040). My life expectancy, all other things being equal, is roughly 26 more years. If that statistic proves right (something of which there is absolutely no guarantee), then I have 13,674,240 minutes left. (If my math seems off to you, remember that I am adding in the 6 leap years coming in the future – I want every day I can claim).

Why would any normal person do this math? I am not sure any *normal* person would. But I have never claimed normalcy as a personal attribute. I tend to be a time miser. I want every minute I can possibly have because I do not have time to do everything I want to do. Now thirteen million, six hundred seventy-four thousand, two hundred and forty may seem like a lot, especially when it is written out and pronounced, but it does not seem like enough time for me to get done everything I would like to get done. As a Christian believer, I take deep comfort in the faith that after this life, there is an eternity spent in the presence of my Creator, and that is certainly a far better thing than this life on earth. I already have loved ones on the other side of death's mystery, and I long for the reunion I confidently expect on the other side. Still, even with this faith that drives my life, I am not totally happy with the idea I might only have 26 more Christmases to spend with my family. On a more personal level, I do not like to think that there are a finite number of books I will get to read. It bothers me that I will likely never find the time to remember the irregular Greek verbs I worked so hard to learn yesterday (actually it was 30 years ago, but it seems like yesterday).

I am likely a bizarre person for thinking about things like this. It makes me acutely aware of how I spend my time. Now that is likely a blessing and a curse. It leads to me being a poor example as a driver because I hate the idea that I am burning precious minutes in traffic or driving slowly. I have other ways to spend those minutes! Similarly, I am not a big fan of sleeping, but now I see studies that indicate if you *do not* sleep enough, it shortens your life expectancy, so I am working on that! But on the blessing side, this does make me want to decide carefully *what* I want to do, which also requires me to consider *why* I want to do it. My priorities weigh heavily upon my choices because I want each moment to count. So I will gladly spend 720 or so minutes on this lesson both because I find it personally edifying and because I think it is one reason that God gave me my “minutes.”

People generally do things for reasons, especially if it is something that takes a significant amount of time. The reason may not be well thought out, but if you are going to a great deal of effort, you likely have a reason for doing so!

This brings me to this lesson on Acts. I find it a fascinating lens to use in two ways. First, we see in Acts the narrative of God's people making choices. These were people who were on the brink of death for their beliefs. They grew out of a fellowship of people who followed Jesus, who was taken from them by death long before his minutes were supposed to run out from a human perspective. As the last lesson worked to show, they ran out at the precise moment in God's plan. They had confidence that Jesus was resurrected; they had personal interaction with them that removed even the doubts of Thomas the skeptic. Their confidence made him gladly put their lives on the line because, unlike our confident expectation of the door that death opens, they had firsthand experience that made their "faith" much closer to simple "sight." So in a special way, I think these were people who were living with a stark recognition that they had limited days – limited minutes – to accomplish God's plans. As Peter pointed out in his Pentecost sermon, they were living in the "last days." Biblically the time between the Messiah's ascension and second coming is exactly that – the last days. We live in those ourselves. From our perspective, we see these last days amount to many generations. They did not have that foresight. They were counting minutes. They lived accordingly, and their choices can be instructive. Our "Points for Home" will be built into this examination of the narrative.

Second, I find the choice idea useful in our study because it brings up the actual writing of Luke. *Why* did Luke write his missives we call "The Gospel of Luke" and "Acts of the Apostles"? Why did he select the events he did for inclusion? Does examining his motives give us insight into understanding things about the text?

This lens of "choices" focuses how we will unpack the Acts narrative in this lesson.

CHOICES OF THE DISCIPLES IN ACTS

The Acts narrative gives us a marvelous illustration of Jesus' closest followers making choices on the minutes of their lives. We can walk through the narrative and, not only get a flow of the book, but highlight some choices that might speak to us along the way. We can break the book's narratives into 6 sections:

1. The birth of the church (1:1 – 5:42).
2. Persecution and the church's expansion (6:1 - 9:31).

3. Actions of Peter and the entrance of Gentiles (9:32 – 12:24).
4. Paul's first missionary journey and the Apostolic Decree (12:25 – 16:5).
5. The church grows around the Aegean Sea (16:6 – 19:20).
6. Paul's unexpected route to Rome (19:21 – 28:31).

The Birth of the Church (1:1-5:42)

Luke begins his narrative where he left off in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus had his ragtag band of apostles (except for self-killed Judas Iscariot) gathered about him, as he was about to ascend into heaven. They were still in the dark about the future, not yet having received the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Jesus instructed them,

Not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father ... [being] baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5).

The apostles chose to obey Jesus, and they stayed together. While they were awaiting Jesus' promises, they were not idle. They were using their best ideas to replace Judas and maintain their number at twelve. They used their reason, and picked out two men who had accompanied Jesus and the eleven during most of Jesus' public ministry. From these two, the apostles prayed for God to manifest the one that was God's choice, and they "cast lots." The lot fell upon Matthias who was chosen.

The twelve stayed together as instructed by Jesus. On Pentecost, they were together in one place when the Holy Spirit fell upon them. Their eyes were instantly enlightened; they began praising God and proclaiming Jesus with a wisdom and understanding they had never had before. This happened at the most opportune time. Devout Jews from around the world were in Jerusalem for the holiday and the numbers who heard the story of Jesus were large! Many of the people heard Peter's sermon that laid out, not the fisherman's tale of a catch, but an exposition of Old Testament Scriptures attesting to God's work in Jesus. Peter proclaimed the resurrection with power and among those present, many were cut to the heart. They asked Peter what they should do. Peter told them the right choice to make:

Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is *for* you and *for* your children and *for* all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself (Acts 2:38-39).

This sets up a consistent pattern maintained throughout the books of Acts. People convicted of their sin and the righteousness of Christ, confess their faith and

choose to be baptized. Three thousand souls were added to the group of believers that day. It changed their lives. The infant church shared what they had with each other, and began devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. Daily, they were praying in the temple and sharing bread in their homes, and the Lord kept adding to the church more people who were choosing salvation.

During this time, Peter and John were headed to the temple at a prayer time. On the way, a lame beggar asked them for some money. Even though on the way to pray, Peter chose to stop and give the man his full attention. Peter focused on the beggar and instructed the beggar to "Look at us!" (It is easy to see the beggar simply calling out for charity, with eyes cast down and hands held out. Peter and John were likely among a number walking by. Beggars typically are selective about setting up where large numbers enhance their chances of charity). Instead of money, Peter healed the man in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. The man was miraculously healed, and he went into the temple with Peter and John, "walking and leaping and praising God." Needless to say, although Luke does add it, people in the temple recognized the lame beggar and were filled with wonder and amazement. Peter's choice of compassion and charity, changed the life of a man, moving him closer to God and the ripples reverberated from this choice. The people wanted to know what had happened!

Peter chose that moment to address the people in the porch of the temple area. Peter was blunt in his sermon. He told the people this miracle was done by the very Jesus that everyone had murdered:

You denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong (Acts 3:14-15).

Peter told the people that he knew they had acted out of ignorance, but now they were informed. It was time for them to repent so "that your sins may be blotted out" and "times of refreshing" might come (Acts 3:19-20).

Quite a crowd must have gathered, for the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came up, greatly annoyed over the teaching about Jesus. This got Peter and John arrested and held over night. Notwithstanding the arrest, many of those who had been listening came to faith!

The next day an inquiry was set up before the high priest and Jewish temple leaders. They wanted to know how Peter and John had healed the man. Peter was not silent, nor did he hide his faith like he did when in the courtyard of the high priest the night of Jesus' betrayal several weeks earlier. This time, filled with the

Holy Spirit Peter chose the moment to proclaim in their midst, if he was in trouble for healing a beggar, then they *needed* to know how it was done. With that, Peter declared to the Jewish temple power structure – the very men who directly bore responsibility for the death of Jesus – that the Jesus they killed, God resurrected. He was the reason the man was healed. Peter then alluded to a Messianic Psalm (118:22), a Scripture the learned men surely picked up on, as he proclaimed,

This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else (Acts 4:11-12).

The leaders were speechless. Here were these “uneducated, common men” quoting Scripture, boldly speaking out to men they should cower before, and standing with a clearly healed cripple. With no immediate response, the power brokers huddled for consensus on what to say. They knew they could not deny the miracle. It was obvious. They opted for a decree. They ordered Peter and John to neither teach nor speak at all in the name of Jesus.

Peter saw a choice, and he made it. His minutes would not be spent following the instructions of his religious leaders of his youth. He had a different leader now – God! Peter responded,

Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard (Acts 4:20).

The leaders threatened them anyway, but were powerless in the face of the obvious miracle. Peter and John left.

While this was ongoing, the disciples were no doubt on edge. The last time one of their group was arrested for a night and challenged by the chief priest and others, he was crucified! What was to happen to Peter and John? Once they were released, the church’s anxiety turned into praise! They lifted up God in Scripture and song, praying their gratitude. They then made another choice. They went forth and spoke the word of God “with boldness” (Acts 4:31).

The church as a group determined they should sell their possessions and use them in a common pool to help those in need. One apparently well-off man from Crete (“Joseph” by name, but called “Son of Encouragement” – a/k/a “Barnabas” by the apostles) notably did so, selling a field and laying all the proceeds at the apostles’ feet. The Acts narrative will go on to recount the important role of Barnabas in the mission of the church, working with Paul and others. In contrast to Barnabas and his honest act of charity, a couple named Ananias and Sapphira pretended to do the same, but lied about it. In reality, they gave only a portion of the proceeds

from selling their piece of property. This choice was more costly than the property itself. Called out for their lies to the Spirit of truth, both fell dead.

The apostles, meanwhile, continued not only to preach and perform miracles in the name of Jesus, but even went regularly into the temple area to teach and pray. There was a real fear of the Jewish leaders, but many were still adding to the church, “multitudes of both men and women” (Acts 5:14).

This proved too much for the high priest and Jewish temple leaders. They arrested the apostles and put them into the public prison. While spending their minutes in prison, the apostles must have been surprised to have an angel of the Lord open up the prison doors and instruct them to go back out and do the very thing that got them arrested! The angel said,

“Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life” (Acts 5:20).

The apostles chose to do exactly as instructed.

Luke then shifts his scene to the morning and the high priests. The high priest called the council together to decide what to do. They then sent officers to get the prisoners. To their shock and dismay, the officers returned proclaiming the prisoners were gone! The prison was there, the doors were locked, and the prison guards were there! But the prisoners had disappeared! While hearing this report, a few might have wondered if the prisoners weren't long gone, making good on their escape and headed for the hills! Imagine the reaction when, on the heels of the officers' report, another report came in declaring that the apostles were right back at it! They were in the temple teaching about Jesus. The crowd listening was large enough to cause the officers to *ask* the apostles to come in for questioning rather than force them to come. The officers were afraid the crowd might stone them otherwise!

The apostles went voluntarily, and were quizzed on why they had disobeyed the earlier instruction to stop teaching in the name of Jesus. It is almost like the temple leaders had no real thought of how to spend their minutes with real purpose and obedience to God. They spent their minutes clinging to power, tradition, and their way of life. They were concerned with covering up their past sins, rather than confessing them and seeking to make things right. Peter explained this in stark contrast to how the apostles were spending their minutes.

We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of

sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him (Acts 5:29-32).

One wonders when the expression arose, “you can’t teach an old dog new tricks,” for it surely applies here. The reaction of the temple leaders was much the same as their earlier reactions to Jesus, “they were enraged and wanted to kill them” (Acts 5:33). In the leaders’ midst, a cooler head prevailed. Gamaliel, an honored teacher of St. Paul, noted in ancient Jewish writings as a premier first century rabbi, gave solid counsel:

Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God! (Acts 5:35-39).

The leaders took Gamaliel’s advice, and did not kill the apostles. Instead, they just beat the apostles and again ordered them to speak no more in the name of Jesus.

The apostles left the council and had two reactions. First, they chose to rejoice over the fact that they were “counted worthy” to “suffer dishonor for the name” of Jesus. Second, they chose to continue preaching not only from house to house, but even in the temple, proclaiming that the crucified and resurrected Jesus was the Messiah.

POINTS FOR HOME: Consider the choices in this first section of Acts. The apostles chose to obey Christ, and the Spirit came. Listeners chose to respond to Peter’s teaching, and they were saved. Peter chose to pay attention to the downcast. The downcast was healed, physically and spiritually, and the church grew. Peter’s life was in danger over his actions, the world power before him threatened him, but Peter chose to stand firm in faith and spend his minutes for God. Barnabas chose to follow the apostles’ lead and give what he had to the ministry. The church was blessed, Barnabas was blessed, and he got a cool nickname! Ananias and Sapphira chose to lie to God. It did not go over well. The resources they withheld were useless to them upon their death. The apostles continued to choose following God with their minutes, and when the power structure threatened to cut their minutes short, they pressed on with what God

called them to do. People were saved, their minutes were spared, and the church grew.

Of course, this raises the natural Point for Home question of how are we choosing to spend our minutes!

Persecution and the Church's Expansion (6:1 - 9:31)

The church was growing. Luke does not shy away from recording controversies in this early church. One that arose was a perceived inequality in the distribution of food among the widows. The Greek-speaking Jews ("Hellenists") believed they were being shorted in food compared to the Jews that spoke Aramaic/Hebrew. This came to the attention of the apostles, who chose not to ignore the problem, but to address it. Notably they did not address the problem by fixing it themselves. Instead, they had the church select seven men who were "full of the Spirit and of wisdom" to whom they could assign the issue for resolution (Acts 6:3). Luke names all seven, and then focuses first on Stephen¹, one of the six, and then on Philip, a second of the seven.

Interestingly, the Jewish converts during this time began to reach into the ranks of the priests (Acts 6:7). A good many of them must have been influenced by the choices Peter and others made to continue to proclaim Christ in the temple and even when on trial. Of course, plenty of the Jews were not converted and the disagreements reached a point of murderous violence. Some Jews had false witnesses deliver accusations that Stephen was blaspheming Moses and God. In their minds, this was because Stephen was speaking out against the temple and the law.

This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us (Acts 6:13-14).

On this false basis, Stephen was seized and brought before the council. The high priest challenged Stephen to answer the accusations and Stephen did so. Stephen began with God appearing to Abraham in Ur and he walked through the age of the patriarchs, the bondage in Egypt, the exodus and Moses' role, the wilderness

¹ In Acts, Luke does the same thing as in his gospel. He never hesitates to identify people by name, title, or location. It is an early type of footnote, where Luke gives the necessary connection point for anyone who might want to go for more details or even verification. In this sense he was like his mentor Paul who, in writing to the Corinthians, reminded them that there were many eyewitnesses to the resurrected Christ that they could speak to if they had any doubts about it whatsoever (1 Cor. 15:2ff).

rebellion, the conquering of the Promised Land and the time of judges, the monarchy under David, the role of prophets, and straight up to the time of Jesus.

Stephen's delivery pointedly demonstrated that from Abraham forward, God appeared to his people and performed wonders, not in the temple/law box that the priests and council supported, but where and how God chose. God appeared to Abraham "in Mesopotamia" without so much as giving him a foot's worth of inheritance in any of the Promised Land. Of course that means Abraham was without both the law and the temple, yet he was the father of them all (Acts 7:1-7). Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and 400 years of Israelites were God's without the covenant of circumcision, not the law (Acts 7:8-19). Stephen's comments about Moses were not blasphemous. He affirmed Moses had murdered an Egyptian, but that Moses was God's special tool in bringing the law to the people and the people out of bondage. Stephen pointed out that it was Moses who spoke of one who would come that would be greater:

This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, 'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers' (Acts 7:37).

The Israelites were hardly perfect in all this. They were creating and worshipping a golden calf idol during this same salvation history.

As for the temple, that did not even exist, Stephen pointed out, until after King David. God had given the Israelites a tent that moved about the Holy Land as the Israelites conquered it (Acts 7:44-46). While Solomon did build the temple, it was clear from prophetic voice that, "the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands" (Acts 7:47). Meanwhile, the power structure ignored the Holy Spirit who spoke through prophets, and even killed those who prophesied about the coming Righteous One. Those killers were the ones Stephen spoke against, and they were the ones who were listening to him now!

And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered (Acts 7:52).

Stephen drove home his final point of their hypocrisy that they would accuse Stephen of blaspheming God and the law. They blasphemed God by teaching he dwelled in the temple rather than all of heaven and earth. And they blasphemed the law by committing murder – the murder of the Messiah Jesus Christ!

The leaders were outraged and reacted with great anger. Stephen then beheld Jesus in a vision and declared,

"Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56).

At this, the leaders took Stephen by force out of the temple and out of the city, and they stoned him. While they did so, they laid their garments at the feet of “a young man named Saul.” With this reference, Luke introduces to us Paul, the man who will become the focus of most of Acts. But that part of the narrative waits a bit. First, Luke recorded the reaction of Stephen to the stoning. He faced death willingly, calling out his public deliverance of his spirit to the Lord, and begging God to forgive his murderers. He then died, and Luke adds a final note that “Saul approved of his execution” (Acts 8:1). Ultimately through the writings of Paul and the rest of Luke, it becomes clear, that Stephen’s choices and behavior, the way he spent his last day of minutes, made an everlasting impression on Paul. We will see it play a role as Paul had to grapple with his role in the murder of a holy man of God.

Luke’s narrative in today’s language might read, “At that point, the gloves came off in the war against the church.” Luke called it a “great persecution” that arose. The persecution was the choice of God’s oppressors, and it had the opposite of its intended result. It caused the church to “scatter throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria” (Acts 8:1). In other words, it caused the church to spread! Rather than contain the outbreak of Christianity, its opponents sent it forth to grow! Saul was a leader in the persecution, going house-to-house and dragging men and women off to prison.

There was a need to preach to the scattered, and we read that Philip went to Samaria to do so. It brought much joy and relief to the people when they not only saw his miracles, but heard the gospel message. Of course the Samaritans were a taboo people to the Jews, but not for the Christians! There was no clear manifestation of the Holy Spirit on the believing Jews, so the apostles went into Samaria to lay hands on the believers. This physical act of touching the untouchables broke the barriers and established a united Samaria and Judea, something that had not been accomplished politically since the split between Solomon’s son, Rehoboam and the northern king Jeroboam (1 Kings 12ff).

It was in Samaria that Philip encountered a “magician” named Simon. Simon was a self-promoter by trade who had long amazed the people with his tricks. The gospel message was powerful, however, and among the people believing it and being baptized was this so-called great magician! The magician quickly recognized that the apostles were not performing tricks. They were truly using a great miraculous power. Simon wanted some of that power!

Simon was clearly a young believer, for he did not have a clue what he was asking or what it meant. The apostle Peter rebuked Simon severely and called him to repent. We see here a difference between the Christian words “justification” and “sanctification.” Simon was saved as a believer in Jesus. But Simon was far from

Christ like in his heart and life! That would take time and choice on his part. Consider Peter's rebuke:

But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity" (Acts 8:20-22).

Simon did not react defensively. He made no excuses. He did not explain away his behavior. He did not proclaim he was a rich and powerful man who should not be spoken to that way by some out-of-town fisherman. He chose to be contrite and made a long stride on the road toward sanctification. He asked for prayer.

Leaving Samaria, Philip was instructed to go down a certain road where he happened upon an Ethiopian eunuch reading from Isaiah the prophet. Philip chose to engage the man and in doing so had the marvelous privilege of leading the man to Christ. As the man heard the good news, he was clearly receptive, for when they came to a body of water, the man asked,

"See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" (Acts 8:37).

The man stopped his chariot, they went down into the water, he was immersed, and after he came up out of the water, Philip was carried away, leaving a rejoicing believer in his wake (Acts 8:39). Philip continued to preach all the way to Caesarea.

Here in his narrative, Luke returns to his story of Paul and his persecution. Paul was "still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1). It was apparent the planned persecution had led to a new problem – the dispersal of the church and its resultant growth. So Paul chose to put on his traveling shoes to go after the church in outlying cities. Paul got papers from the high priests giving Paul authority to arrest synagogue members in other cities and headed north to Damascus, a city 135 miles northeast of Jerusalem. On the way there, a light flashing from heaven caused Paul to fall to the ground. Paul heard a voice asking him,

"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4).

When Paul asked, "Who are you?" the answer must have not only startled him, but caused great consternation,

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do” (Acts 9:5-6).

The men with Paul heard the voice, but did not see anything. This was a private visit between Jesus and Paul.

Afterwards, Paul was blinded, and his men led him in to the city. For three days, Paul was without sight (no choice) and without food and water (a choice). He was praying about things when Ananias was told by God in a vision to go find Paul, lay hands on him, and heal his blindness. After double-checking the instructions, Ananias chose to do what he was told. He found Paul and prayed over him, declaring he was doing so at the instruction of the Lord Jesus. For Paul, the choice was clear and his mind made up. He immediately chose to be baptized.

Paul did not wait. This was no slow reaction. Immediately he began teaching about Jesus and argued forcefully that Jesus was indeed Messiah, to the amazement of the church and dismay of the non-believing Jews. This brought upon Paul’s head the same persecution he had been meting out. The Jews in Damascus sought to kill Paul. The church, however, protected him, letting him down by basket and rope through an opening in the city walls. Paul then went to Jerusalem to present himself to the church. The church feared this was a trick to learn who was involved and who was not. It was the Son of Encouragement, Barnabas, who took Paul in to the apostles and told Paul’s story. Paul was not only converted, Barnabas explained, but also Paul argued against the Greek-speaking Jews in Damascus about Jesus as Messiah. Here we get an early glimpse of Paul’s ministry among those who spoke Greek. Paul’s fluent Greek would soon make a difference in the church on a major level.

POINTS FOR HOME: We see the minutes and choices of life in a marvelous and horrid way in this section of Acts. Whether they were positive choices or negative, however, the choices all fit into God’s plans and furthered his purposes. So we see the apostles choosing to put men into service to solve problems as a choice that places Stephen in a remarkable position. Stephen becomes a vocal part of a growing church. When this is brought to the authorities’ attention, Stephen does not back down. He chooses to proclaim to the authorities that Jesus was the fulfillment of Old Testament history and prophecy. Stephen chose to give his life, and clearly made an impression on Paul. It seemed to drive Paul to prove the validity of the stoning by oppressing the church into non-existence. One must wonder if Paul had ascribed to his mentor and rabbi Gamaliel’s opinion that if the movement was not of God, it would die out. Maybe Paul was trying to help it die out. His choices, however, simply caused the church to spread. We read the choices of Simon the magician, and how he sought to use his new faith for economic gain. Once taught better, he chose to repent, rather than rebel. Philip

chose to follow the Lord's instructions and saw many come to faith. Ananias chose to obey the Lord and brought the apostle Paul to sight. Barnabas chose to soldier next to Paul and brought him into fellowship with the church. This choice of Barnabas, and the choice of the apostles to trust the conversion of Paul left the church with a period of peace and growth. Next week we will continue this as we examine the choices in Acts!

THE CONTENT OF ACTS

A reasonable timetable of key New Testament events relevant to Acts:²

Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, Pentecost	April-May 30
Conversion of Saul of Tarsus	c. 33
Paul's first post-conversion visit to Jerusalem	c. 35
Death of James, son of Zebedee; imprisonment and escape of Peter; death of Herod Agrippa I	Spring 44
Famine in Judea; Paul and Barnabas sent with relief from Antioch	c. 46
First Missionary Journey (Paul and Anabas to Cyprus and Asia Minor)	47-48
Paul writes Galatians	c. 48
Apostolic Council at Jerusalem	c. 49
Second Missionary Journey (Lystra, Derbe, Troas Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth)	c. 49-50
Paul writes Thessalonian Epistles	late 50
Paul in Corinth	Fall 50-Spring 52
Galiio becomes proconsul of Achaia	July 51
Paul's hasty visit to Palestine	Spring-Summer 52
Paul at Ephesus	Fall 52-Summer 55
Paul writes First Corinthians	Spring 54
Paul's sorrowful visit to Corinth	Spring or Fall 54
Paul sends Titus to Corinth and Timothy to Macedonia	Early 55
Paul in Troas	Fall 55
Paul in Macedonia and Illyricum	Winter 55-Fall 56
Paul writes Second Corinthians	56
Paul in Corinth	Winter 56-57
Paul writes Romans	Early 57
Paul's arrival and arrest in Jerusalem	May 57
Paul detained at Caesarea	57-59
Paul sails for Rome	Sept.-Oct. 59
Paul in Malta	Winter 59-60
Paul arrives in Rome	February 60

² The timeline is derived with modification from that given by F. F. Bruce in his commentary, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (1951).

Paul writes Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians, and Philippians	c. 60-61
Death of James the Just in Jerusalem	61
End of Paul's Roman detention	late 61 or early 62
Destruction of Jerusalem	70