

## **PSPC PCGM (16/12/09): FULFILMENT OF PROPHECIES IN ACTS**

### **Introduction**

This is the first of four sessions on Acts. In each session, I will deal with a particular theme in Acts.

This evening I hope to trace the theme of prophecy-fulfilment in Acts. Here I am referring to promises or prophecies in the OT and Jesus' own predictions in Luke's gospel.

[Some of the material here is taken from D.G. Peterson, 'The motif of Fulfilment and the Purpose of Luke-Acts', in Winter & Clarke (eds.) *The Book of Acts in Its First-Century Setting, Vol. 1: Ancient Literary Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 83-104.]

I will also use this theme of prophecy-fulfilment to trace the advance of the gospel of Jesus Christ from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

Before I do that, let me say something about the **author**:

- Luke the physician (Col 4:14 – "*our dear friend, Luke the doctor*") is the author of Luke's gospel and Acts. Acts 1:1 tells us that he is writing to Theophilus, and refers to his former book. This former book refers to Luke's gospel. Luke 1:1 – 4 tells us that the gospel was written to Theophilus, which name means 'lover of God'. We do not know who this man was; he could have been a patron who provided Luke with the resources for his writing. Although Luke-Acts was written to Theophilus, the two volumes would have been circulated among the churches, reaching many people in the Greek-speaking world.
- Luke was one of the team members on Paul's missionary trips – see the 'we' passages in Acts 16:10 - 17; 20:5 - 15; 21:1 - 18; 27:1 - 28:16.

Luke brings out the theme of fulfilment right at the very beginning of his gospel. In Luke 1:1, he speaks of drawing up '*an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us.*' In the infancy narrative that follows, Luke points to God's promise to Abraham and David.

In Luke 4:16-22, Jesus claims that he has come to fulfil the prophecy in Isa. 61:1-2: *The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the*

*year of the Lord's favour*. This is part of the prophecy for the restoration of Israel.

Luke ends his gospel with the same theme of prophecy-fulfilment (24:26-27, 44-45). In Luke 24:26-27, Jesus tells the two disciples on their way to Emmaus, "***Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?***" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself (24:26-27). Later Jesus tells his disciples that "***everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms***" (24:44). So Jesus sees himself as the fulfilment of OT prophecy and promises.

Peterson: In the light of these two passages in Luke, we need to take "a global view of the Old Testament and its promises" in our understanding of the plan and purpose of God. In 24:48, Jesus' commission to his disciples will also find fulfilment in scripture. Thus Acts must be read "against the background of OT expectations and Jesus' own predictions."<sup>1</sup>

"The concluding references to the fulfilment of Scripture in the Third Gospel continue to highlight the necessity of Jesus' suffering and prepare for the teaching of Acts. Both volumes are concerned to show that Jesus' rejection and suffering was not an accident of history but part of the plan of God, as revealed in specific passages as Isaiah 53 (cf. Lk. 22:27; Acts 8:26-35), and in the OT more generally (cf. Acts 2:23; 3:18; 17:3; 26:22-23)."<sup>2</sup>

So it is important that when we read Acts, we must read it in the light of OT and Luke's gospel.

### **A Brief overview of Acts**

Most of us are very familiar with Acts 1:8: ***But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*** We must read this verse in its context. This is Jesus' reply to his disciples' question in verse 6: ***Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?***

This question shows that the disciples have not fully understood Jesus' mission. They are still thinking in terms of Jesus restoring the physical kingdom of Israel. In his reply, Jesus directs their attention to their role as his witnesses. The

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<sup>1</sup> Peterson, 9 "The Motif of Fulfilment and the Purpose of Luke-Acts," in B.W. Winter & A.D. Clarke (eds.), *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting Vol. 1: Ancient Literary Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 93-94.

<sup>2</sup> D. Peterson, "The Motif of Fulfilment and the Purpose of Luke-Acts," 93.

kingdom of God is not confined to a particular locality. The kingdom of God will include all who accept the words of Jesus' witnesses wherever they go – in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

I don't know how many of you have read the book of Acts recently. If you haven't, I would suggest that you do so in the next couple of weeks.

Let us recall the main events in Acts. I find the synopsis in Stott useful.

### **A Synopsis of Acts (from Stott, 9)**

Luke begins his story with the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and the honeymoon period of the Spirit-filled community, which was abruptly terminated by the opposition of the Jewish authorities. He goes on to describe the transition stage in which the foundations were laid for the Gentile mission by Stephen's martyrdom and Philip's evangelism, the conversions of Saul and Cornelius, and the founding of the first Greek church in Antioch. From this international city and church the world-wide Christian mission was launched. Paul and Barnabas evangelized Cyprus and Galatia; the Council of Jerusalem acknowledged the legitimacy of Gentile conversion; Europe was reached during the second missionary journey (including Athens and Corinth) and Ephesus on the third. Then Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, and this was followed by a series of court trials, his appeal to Caesar, and the long sea voyage to Rome, the city of his dreams. There Luke leaves him, restricted to his own rented house, but unrestricted in his preaching of the gospel.

### **ACTS AS FULFILMENT OF 1:8<sup>3</sup>**

In Acts, Luke traces the advance of the gospel of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, as predicted by Jesus in 1:8. We see this clearly in the structure of Acts in Stott's commentary:

#### **Introduction**

1. Introduction to Luke (Luke 1:1-4)
  2. Introduction to the Acts (Acts 1:1-5)
- A. In Jerusalem (1:6 – 6:7)**

1. Waiting for Pentecost (1:6 - 26)

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<sup>3</sup> The main headings and sub-headings of this outline is taken from David Wenham & Steve Walton, *Exploring the New Testament Vol. 1: Introducing the Gospels and Acts* (London: SPCK, 2000) 271.

2. The Day of Pentecost (2:1 - 47)
3. The outbreak of persecution (3:1- 4:31)
4. Satanic counter-attack (4:32 - 6:7)

### **B. Foundations for world mission (6:8 – 12:24)**

5. Stephen the martyr (6:8 - 7:60)
6. Philip the evangelist (8:1-40)
7. The conversion of Saul (9:1-31)
8. The conversion of Cornelius (9:32 - 11:18)
9. Expansion and opposition (11:19 -12:24)

### **C. The apostle to the Gentiles (12:25 – 21:17)**

10. The first missionary journey (12:25 – 14:28)
11. The Council of Jerusalem (15:1 - 16:5)
12. Mission in Macedonia (16:6 - 17:15)
13. Paul in Athens (17:16-34)
14. Corinth and Ephesus (18:1- 19:41)
15. More about Ephesus (20:1 -21:17)

### **D. On the way to Rome (21:18 – 28:31)**

16. Paul's arrest and self-defence (21:18 – 23:35)
17. Paul on trial (24:1 – 26:32)
18. Rome at last (27:1 – 28:31)

And my structure of Acts, which shows the contribution of women in the expansion of the early church:

#### **1:1 – 5:42            Witnesses in Jerusalem**

- 1:1-2:37        The beginning of the church
  - 1:13-15 - Women praying with the other disciples in the upper room in Jerusalem; would have experienced the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and would have continued to preach the gospel.
- 3:1-5:42        The church in Jerusalem
  - 5:14 – more and more men and women believed in the Lord

#### **6:1 – 11:18            Witnesses to Judea and Samaria**

- 6:1-9:31        The church begins to expand:
  - 6:1 - Christian widows needing care

- 8:3; 9:2 – Christian women were subject to Saul’s persecution
  - 9:32-11:18 The beginning of the Gentile mission
    - 9:36-42 - In Joppa a disciple named Tabitha or Dorcas made robes and other clothing for widows.
    - 10:24 – Cornelius’ household believed in Jesus; these would have included some women.
- 11:19 – 28:31      Witnesses to the ends of the earth**
- 11:19-14:28 The mission from Antioch to Asia Minor
    - 12:12 – the church prayed in Mary’s house.
  - 15:1-35 The discussion concerning the Gentiles in the church
  - 15:36-18:17 Paul’s mission to Macedonia & Achaia
    - 16:11-15 – Lydia in Philippi
    - 17:4 – not a few prominent women in Thessalonica
    - 17:12 – a number of prominent Greek women in Berea
    - 17:34 – Damaris in Athens
    - 18:1-3 – Priscilla in Corinth
    - 18:24-26 – Priscilla in Ephesus
  - 21:1-28:31 Paul’s arrest and imprisonment: Paul’s journey to Rome and his witness before the authorities
    - 21:8 – Philip’s four unmarried daughters who prophesied

In this last part of Acts, Luke concentrates on Paul and his journey to Rome to put his defence before Caesar. There are only a few references to women in this part of Acts. We learn that Paul had a sister, whose son overheard the plot to kill Paul (23:16). Presumably, she was a Christian. Two other women are mentioned: Drusilla the wife of Felix the governor (24:24), and Bernice the wife of King Agrippa (25:13). Both women heard Paul preach the gospel and his account of his encounter with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. Whether these women later became Christians, we do not know.

So we can trace the progress of the Gospel through women witnesses from Jerusalem (1:14; 12:12-17), to Joppa (9:36-42), to Philippi (16:11-15), to Thessalonica (17:4), to Berea (17:12), to Athens (17:34), Corinth (18:1-3), to Ephesus (18:24-6). In his narrative, Luke places these women at significant points in the advance of the gospel in the Roman Empire.

Let us now turn to our theme for this evening – prophecy-fulfilment in Acts.

## ACTS AS FULFILMENT OF 1:8

### 1) Acts 1:1 – 5:42 – Witnesses in Jerusalem

#### a) 1:1 - 8

##### Context:

Luke refers to the former book he has written about *all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen* (1:2). After the resurrection, Jesus shows himself to his disciples through many convincing proofs. He appears to them over a period of 40 days, and he teaches them about the kingdom of God. He also promises them the Holy Spirit.

Their question in verse 6 shows that the disciples have not fully understood the meaning of the kingdom of God. To their question, “*Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?*” Jesus replies that it is not for them to know the times or dates which are set by his Father. His commission in 1:8 shows that the kingdom of God is to come about by the preaching of Jesus by his disciples in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. The phrase “to ends of the earth” is a reference to Isa. 49:6 – “*he says, ‘It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.’*”

Jesus’ coming has redefined the meaning of the kingdom of God. It is not confined to a particular locality or nation or a particular group of people. The kingdom of God is open to Jews and Gentiles, as Luke shows us very clearly in his gospel. It is God’s rule over God’s people. Entry into the kingdom of God is not by natural descent but by faith in Jesus Christ.

In Acts, the disciples continue the work of Christ through the Holy Spirit working in and through them. Peterson: “Acts 1:8 is a prediction of the way the divine plan will be fulfilled through the witness of the apostles.” The rest of Acts shows how this happen.

**1:16** – the first time fulfilment language is used; here it is used by Peter, and the issue relates to the appointment of another apostle. Peter cites Ps. 69:25 & 109:8. In Ps. 69, the psalmist David describes the way his enemies treat him, and prays that God will judge his enemies. In verse 25, he prays: *May their place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in their tents*. Peter changes the plural to singular to apply this verse to the judgement of God upon Judas.

Similarly in Ps. 109, the psalmist speaks about the hatred and slander from wicked men, and prays for God's judgement on them. Verse 8 refers to the shortening of the days of the wicked man – someone else would be appointed to take his place of leadership. Peter applies this to Judas.

### **b) 2:1-36 – Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost**

**Context** – On the day of Pentecost when the disciples are all together in one place, they are filled with the Holy Spirit and begin to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit enables them. They are most probably praying at the time when this happen (1:14-15). The Jews there are amazed as they hear their own languages spoken by these people, who are Parthians, Medes and Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene, visitors from Rome, Cretans and Arabs.

#### **Content of speech -**

- Referring to the strange behaviour of the disciples who have been filled with the Holy Spirit and are speaking in different languages, Peter explains that they are not drunk. It is too early in the morning! Rather it is the fulfilment of Joel 2:28-32.
- Peter then addresses the Jews. He speaks of Jesus of Nazareth, a man accredited (approved) by God through miracles, wonders and signs. Then he speaks of Jesus' death, which he attributes both to their wicked deed and the foreknowledge and purpose of God.
- God had raised this Jesus from the dead. Peter appeals to Ps. 16:18-11, seeing in this prophecy through David about the resurrection of the Christ. They are also eye-witnesses of the resurrection.
- God has exalted Jesus to his right hand. Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit as promised, and this is what they are seeing and hearing.
- Peter refers to David in Ps. 110:1.
- Peter's conclusion (v. 36): ***Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.***

## Comments on prophecy/fulfilment theme -

Peter stands up and addresses the crowd. He sees the coming of the Holy Spirit on the disciples as the fulfilment of Joel 2:28-32, and also the fulfilment of the promise given by Jesus (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5). According to Peterson, verse 1 is literally 'when the day of Pentecost was being fulfilled.' Peter begins his sermon with "***this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel***". Peter links the prophecy of Joel to the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Joel's prophecy comes in the context of a plague of locusts upon Israel. This was God's judgement on them. When the people repented, the Lord heard them and promised them plentiful harvests.

Then comes the passage from which Peter quotes - Joel 2:28-32, which speaks of what will happen 'afterward', on that great day of the Lord when God will pour out his Spirit on all flesh. Peter changes 'afterward' in Joel's prophecy to 'in the last days'. He understands that the prophecy is fulfilled that day when God pours out his Spirit on his people and they speak in different languages.

He cites Ps. 16:8-11- these words could not have applied to David because they know that David did go to the grave; his body did decay. They even know where the tomb is. ***David was seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body decay (v. 31)***. So the resurrection of Jesus is foretold in the OT.

The coming of the Holy Spirit is also prophesied, not only by Joel but also by Jesus. Peter cites Ps. 110:1. Again his argument is the same – this passage cannot refer to David because David did not ascend to heaven. The Lord here refers to Jesus Christ, who is now at God's right hand.

God has vindicated Jesus: all that he had said and done are true. God has made this Jesus both Lord and Christ. He is the Lord in Joel's prophecy, the Lord on whom anyone can call and be saved.

Jesus' ministry and death was according to the foreknowledge and plan of God, although the Jews had a part to play in this too.

As to the forgiveness of sins, see Jer. 31:34; Ezek. 36:25-27.

As a result of his sermon, 3000 are baptised. They continue to meet together: they devote themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. They also share their possessions with each other. Daily more and more are added to their number.

### c) 3:11-36 – The Healing of the crippled beggar at the temple gate

**Context** – the healing of the crippled beggar at the temple gate. Peter seizes the opportunity to preach to the people.

#### **Content of speech** –

- Peter declares that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has glorified Jesus. Though the Jews are the ones who ‘killed the author of life but God has raised him from the dead’ (3:15).
- The crippled man is healed in the name of Jesus and the faith that comes through him.
- Peter refers to the prophecy about Jesus’ suffering (v. 18). And also about his coming to restore everything as he promised long ago through his holy prophet (v. 21).

#### **Comments on prophecy/fulfilment theme -**

Peter points to the fulfilment of scripture in Jesus’ suffering: *But this was how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that the Christ would suffer* (3:18). Peter also refers to what Moses said in Deut. 18:15-16 – that God would raise up a prophet like him from among the people, and they must listen to him.

In vv. 24-26, Peter refers to what the prophets (from Samuel on) have foretold about those days. They are the heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with their forefathers. Peter points them to Gen. 22:18 (which reaffirms the promise in 12:1-3) – *“Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.”*

Say more about God’s promise to Abraham and how this promise reverses the effects of the Fall: Gen. 12:1-3; 18:18-19; 22:15-18; Ex. 19:3-6; Deut. 4:5-9.

Peterson (98): “The sermon in Acts 3:11-26 also introduces a factor that is important in later speeches to Jewish audiences. Peter presents a theological overview of Israel’s history, beginning with the declaration of God’s saving purpose to Abraham (3:25, citing Gen. 12:3; 22:18; cf. Luke 1:55). The testimony of the prophets from Moses onward was that God’s ultimate plan for Israel and the nations would be fulfilled in the raising up of a particular individual, here identified as a prophet like Moses (3:22-24, citing Deut. 18:15-16).”

According to Peterson, the healing of the crippled man points forward to “the renewal of the whole created order which is the ultimate hope of the prophetic Scriptures (e.g. Isa. 35:1-10; 65:17-25; Ezek. 47:1-12). Peter’s sermon thus sets the work of Christ within a framework bounded by the covenant with Abraham and promises of a new or renewed creation” (D.G. Peterson, “Acts,” in D.A. Alexander & B. S. Rosner (eds.), *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Leicester: IVP, 2000) 289).

#### **d) 4:8 – 12 – Peter brought before the Sanhedrin**

##### **Context**

- The religious leaders are disturbed by Peter’s preaching, in particular about the resurrection of Jesus. Peter & John are arrested and thrown into jail.
- They are then brought before the Sanhedrin the following day. The rulers, elders and teachers of the law are there – Caiaphas, John, Alexander and other men of the high priest’s family.

##### **Comments on prophecy/fulfilment theme -**

The opposition and arrest of Peter and John fulfil what Jesus had told them when he was with them. In Luke 12:11-12, Jesus warns them, “***When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.***” The Holy Spirit gives boldness to Peter and he is able to answer the question posed by the religious leaders, “By what power or what name did you do this?”

Peter reminds his hearers that they are the ones who crucified Jesus (v. 10). Peter then cites Ps. 118:22 – Jesus was the stone which the builders rejected, implying that the builders here refer to the audience. But this same stone has become the capstone, the corner stone, the foundation stone, by which all other stones are aligned.

Peter proclaims that it is by the name of Jesus that the crippled man is healed. In verse 12, ***salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.***

The disciples continue preaching about Jesus. Many are healed. The apostles are persecuted. Many more became Christians. There is some trouble between Greek-speaking Jews and Hebraic Jews because their widows are being overlooked in the daily distribution of food (6:1-6). The apostles appoint

deacons to look after this matter. Stephen is one of the deacons, a man full of God's grace and power, who performs great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.

## 2) 6:1 – 11:18 - Witnesses to Judea and Samaria

### a) 7:1 – 53 – Stephen's speech before the Sanhedrin

#### Context

- Stephen performs many wonders and miracles. This causes some Jews to bring false accusation against him: they accuse him of blasphemy (v.11)
- They bring Stephen to the Sanhedrin, and produce false witnesses against him.
- Stephen defends himself by reciting the history of Israel from Abraham to Solomon

#### Comments on prophecy/fulfilment theme

Stephen recounts the history of Israel from God's promise to Abraham to Solomon who built the temple for God. But God does not dwell in houses made by men. It seems that Stephen uses the retelling of Israel's history to stress the rejection of the Jews against the leaders God appointed. Moses was rejected (v. 35) when he tried to settle a dispute between two Israelites. Later in the wilderness the people also rejected Moses and wanted to return to Egypt. They made a golden calf and worshipped it. More attention is focused on Moses.

Stephen then accuses his hearers: ***You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: you always resist the Holy Spirit. Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him – you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it.***

Peterson (99): "In short, Scripture is used in a polemical way, against Jewish opponents of the gospel, as well as in a positive way, to expound the significance of Jesus and his saving work." The promise to Abraham finds its fulfilment in Jesus Christ, and not in the Law or the temple.

Persecution breaks out against the church in Jerusalem. Philip goes down to Samaria, where he proclaims Christ and heals many who are sick.

## b) 8:26 – 35 – Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch

### Context

- Philip is brought to an Ethiopian eunuch who has been to Jerusalem to worship. He is reading from Isa. 53:7-8.

### Comment on prophecy/fulfilment theme

Philip explains to the eunuch that the prophet was speaking about Jesus Christ. Isaiah 53 speaks of the suffering servant who is humiliated, deprived of justice and finally killed. All this while, the servant is silent. Jesus applies Isa. 53 to himself – see Luke 22:37 citing Isa. 53:12 (*It is written: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors, and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfilment.’*)

In Acts 9, Luke records the dramatic conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus. The great persecutor of the church has become one of them, and *‘the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.’* (9:31).

Luke also records Peter going to Lydda and Joppa, where miracles also take place. You will recall that in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha or Dorcas.

## c) 10:1 – 48 – Peter preaches at Cornelius’ house

### Context

- Cornelius and all his family are devout and God-fearing.
- He has a vision and is told to send men to Joppa for Simon. Cornelius obeys.
- Meantime in Joppa, Peter also has a vision in which he sees a large sheet containing unclean animals. Peter refuses to eat them.
- When Peter is wondering the reason for the vision, the men sent by Cornelius arrive.
- Peter goes to Cornelius’ house – he finally understands the meaning of the vision.

## Content of speech

- Peter speaks about Jesus Christ and his ministry, his death and resurrection.

## Comment on prophecy/fulfilment theme

God has abolished the distinction between clean and unclean, between Jews and Gentiles. Salvation is for all who believe in Jesus Christ. Peter speaks about Jesus and his ministry, his death and resurrection. In verse 43, Peter tells them that **“all the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”** While Peter does not cite specific verses, he would have had some of these verses in mind: Isa. 33:24; 55:6-7; Jer. 31:34; Ezek. 36:25 (Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* 339).

Peter realises that the gospel is for all people, and not just for the Jews. God does not show favouritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right (v. 34). After Peter recounts his story to the apostles and the brothers throughout Judea, they have no further objections, and praise God, saying, “So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.” (11:18).

The Holy Spirit comes upon Cornelius and his household even while Peter is still speaking. They receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and speak in tongues like the Jews at Pentecost.

## 11:19 – 28:31 - Witnesses to the ends of the earth

### a) 13:16 – 41- Peter’s sermon at Pisidian Antioch

#### Context

After Paul’s conversion, he spent a year with Barnabas in Antioch. In Acts 13:1-3, Barnabas and Saul were set apart for the work to which God had called them. They travelled to various places, and then to Pisidian Antioch. They went to the synagogue on the Sabbath and read from the Law and the Prophets. They were then invited to speak. The audience comprised Jews and god-fearing Gentiles.

## Content

Paul recounts the story of Israel from God's choice of Abraham to David, and it was through David that God has brought to Israel the Saviour Jesus, as he promised (13:23). All this is by God's initiative and grace.

### Comment on prophecy/fulfilment theme

More attention here is focused on David. Paul teaches that Jesus is the Saviour from the line of David, and he is the fulfilment of OT prophecy. The religious leaders of Jerusalem do not recognise who Jesus is and they condemn him to death. Paul asserts that this rejection is also a fulfilment of prophecy (v. 27 – “... **yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath**”). Jesus was put to death but God raised him from the dead, and he had appeared to his disciples who were his witnesses.

Verses 32 – 41 – Paul cites scripture to show that “**what God promised our fathers, he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus**” (v. 32). Paul cites Ps. 2:7 – “**You are my Son; today I have become your Father.**” He also cites Isa. 55:3 and Ps. 16:10 to show that what was spoken is not for David but for Jesus who died but did not decay. Instead God has raised him from the dead.

Paul ends his message by citing Hab. 1:5, and warns them that what the prophet said would not happen to them, if they turn to Jesus for forgiveness of their sins.

So what is prophesied and fulfilled in Jesus? It is his suffering and death, and his resurrection.

Peterson (99) notes the three synonymous fulfilment terms in Paul's sermon:

- those in Jerusalem & their rulers did not “**recognise Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath**” (v. 27);
- “**when they had carried out all that was written about him**” – this relates to his suffering and death (v. 29);
- “**What God promised our fathers, he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus**” (v. 33).

The next Sabbath, when Paul and Barnabas go back to the synagogue, ‘the whole city’ gathers to hear the word of the Lord (v. 44). Some Jews are jealous and objects to Paul's message. The response from Paul & Barnabas: “**We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles**” (v. 46). He cites

Isa. 49:6 as a justification for going to the Jews first, and then to the Gentiles: ***“I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”*** (Recall the phrase ‘ends of the earth’ in Acts 1:8).

Peterson (99): “In Acts 13, therefore, we see the fulfilment of prophecy motif used to highlight two key issues in Luke’s presentation: God’s age old intentions concerning the death and resurrection of the Messiah, and his plan to bring salvation to the Gentiles.”

## **b) 15:1 – 21 – the Jerusalem Council**

### **Context**

Some men have come from Judea to Antioch and teach that unless a person is circumcised according to the custom taught by Moses, he cannot be saved (v.1). Paul & Barnabas are sent to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about resolving this issue. Some of the believers who belong to the party of the Pharisees say, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.” The apostles and elders convene a meeting to discuss the matter.

### **Content**

Paul speaks of what God has done among the Gentiles, that God has accepted them and given them the Holy Spirit, just as he has done to the Jews. God makes no distinction between Jews and Gentiles. So they too should accept the Gentiles just as God had accepted them, without them having to obey the Law of Moses. They tell the audience of all the miraculous signs and wonders they have witnessed among the Gentiles.

### **Comment on prophecy/fulfilment theme**

In Gen. 17, God made a covenant with Abraham, and circumcision was the sign of the covenant. Any uncircumcised male would not be considered part of God’s people. So these believers from the party of the Pharisees want Gentile believers to be circumcised before they could be saved. In other words, they have to be Jews first, and could not go direct to God for salvation. They think that God would incorporate the Gentiles into the nation of Israel, and to be part of God’s covenant people, they have to be circumcised and obey the Law of Moses.

Paul’s argument: ***“Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are***

*saved, just as they are.*” Israel became God’s covenant people by God’s grace, and circumcision is a sign of the covenant. (Note Paul’s comment that they could not bear the whole weight of the law).

James (leader of the Jerusalem church) cites Amos 9:11, 12 to show that the incoming of the Gentiles into the church is prophesied in the OT: *“The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: ‘After this, I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things that have been known for ages’”* (15:15-18).

Amos 9:11-15 speaks of God’s promise to restore Israel after judgement. God promised that he would rebuild David’s fallen tent. He would restore Israel with the purpose that the rest of humankind would seek God. What is envisaged here is a people of God made up of both Jews and Gentiles. James sees the fulfilment of the promise in Amos 9:11ff in the coming in of the Gentiles into the church. This is a fulfilment of Gen.12:1-3.

James then deals with a practical issue: How do Jewish and Gentile Christians sit at table fellowship together? James recommends that Gentile Christians should abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood (v. 20). This exhortation has to be given in order to help Jewish and Gentile Christians to come together for table fellowship. This is not imposing some of the laws of Moses upon Gentile Christians. Gentile cities were rather immoral places, and so it makes sense that Gentile Christians have to abstain from sexual immorality. Furthermore, the Gentiles are used to eating food offered to idols. To the Jews, this would have been unacceptable. It is the same with eating the meat of strangled animals and blood. Actually this prohibition is given in Gen. 9:4 – “You must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it.”

These restrictions are not conditions for their salvation. They have been saved by grace. It is to facilitate table fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

### **Give a brief overview of the rest of Acts.**

12. Mission in Macedonia – Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea (16:6 - 17:15)
13. Paul in Athens (17:16-34)
14. Corinth and Ephesus (18:1- 19:41)
15. More about Ephesus (20:1 -21:17)

### On the way to Rome (21:18 – 28:31)

16. Paul's arrest and self-defence (21:18 – 23:35)
17. Paul on trial (24:1 – 26:32)
18. Rome at last (27:1 – 28:31)

c) Texts relating to **Paul's trial speeches** in which he speaks of the fulfilment theme:

- **24:14-15** – Paul's defence before Felix, governor of Caesarea – *“However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked”.*
- **26:22-23** – Paul's defence before King Agrippa – Paul recounts his earnest and determined persecution of Christians, and his encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus, and the commission that he receives from the Lord for him to preach the gospel to the Jews & Gentiles. Paul has been obedient to this command, and has spoken to Jews and Gentiles about the gospel. Verses 22-23 – *“I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen – that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles.”*
- **28:23-38** – Paul arrives at Rome, and he speaks to the leaders of the Jews. He *“explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.”*

**Peterson's comments on Luke's purpose in highlighting the fulfilment theme:**

- Peterson observes that Luke highlights the prophecy/fulfilment theme in the early chapters of Acts, and in encounters with the Jews (sometimes with god-fearers). But the message that Christ had come to fulfil OT prophecies is also a dominant theme in Paul's trial speeches (23:6; 24:14-15; 26:22-23)
- Peterson concludes that Luke's purpose is to show how Jesus fulfilled OT prophecies regarding his birth, ministry, death and resurrection. He further adds that Luke's use of prophecy/fulfilment theme also

legitimizes the mission to the Gentiles. This was not something new but it was promised many years ago – Gen. 12:1-3; Isa. 49:6b.

- Peterson concedes that there could also be an apologetic reason for Luke's prophecy/fulfilment theme. He analyses Hellenistic histories, which have a particular feature in the idea of history's fulfilling oracles. The fulfilment would have legitimated "the religious authority of the person to whom the prophecy referred or of the god who gave it" (Peterson, 102). Also during the first century it was common for a people to trace their roots as far back as they could go. So one of Luke's reasons for highlighting the fulfilment theme may be to help Greek-speaking Christians to appeal to an argument from antiquity: it offered the Christians "a confident basis from which to address their contemporaries" (Peterson, 103).
- Peterson (104): "Although the primary audience for which Luke writes is the Christian community, his apologetic method offered Christians an 'apologetic tool', to assist them in evangelism." Christianity was not a new religion; Christians could claim their origins from antiquity.
- Peterson's conclusion: Luke was writing primarily a work of edification for Christians, to show that Jesus came to fulfil OT prophecy and promises. It also legitimizes the mission to Gentiles, which had been in God's purposes from way back when God made the promise to Abraham in Gen. 12:1-3. The apologetic approach would have helped Christians when they engaged with non-Christians in sharing the gospel to them.
- EP – the fulfilment theme is for encouraging both Jewish and Gentile Christians. To Jewish Christians, the coming of Jesus and the birth of the church in Luke-Acts show that there is continuity with the OT: what God had promised to their forefathers, God has now fulfilled through Christ and will continue to fulfil through the church. It also helps them to acknowledge that God intended the gospel to go to the Gentiles. Their attitude towards the Gentiles must change, as we see in Peter going to Cornelius' household after the vision he had (Acts 10). To Gentile Christians, they would be encouraged to know that they were part of God's purpose right from the beginning. They have as much a right to the gospel as the Jews. It also provides 'an apologetic' for Gentile Christians when they engaged in sharing the gospel to fellow Gentiles.