

resurrection of the dead, bring Peter and John before the Jewish high court, where Peter preaches the Gospel fearlessly. The court, which is called the Sanhedrin, recognizes that public opinion is in favor of the apostles and releases them with only a warning.

The high priest imprisons the apostles, but they are miraculously freed by an angel, and they continue their preaching. Brought again before the court, Peter leads the apostles in their defense, saying, “We must obey God rather than any human authority” (5:29). Influenced by the great and wise teacher Gamaliel, who warns, “[Y]ou will not be able to overthrow them—in that case you may even be found fighting against God,” the court declines to execute the apostles, who continue preaching throughout Jerusalem (5:39).

The church divides into two groups. One group is the Hellenists, Christians who were born Jewish but who have a Greek cultural background. The other group is the Hebrews, the Christians who, like the apostles, were born into Jewish cultural backgrounds. The Hellenists feel discriminated against, so in response, the community of disciples elects seven leaders to account for the needs of the Hellenists. Foremost among these Christian Hellenist leaders is Stephen. A controversy ensues between Stephen and some Jews, who accuse him of heresy before the Sanhedrin. Stephen’s accusers testify that “[t]his man never stops saying things against the holy place and the law” (7:13). In front of the Sanhedrin, Stephen delivers a long speech detailing the history of Jewish leadership in the Bible, concluding with a damning accusation: “Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made with human hands. . . . You stiff-necked people . . . you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do” (7:48–51).

Stephen is immediately stoned to death, with the approval of a young man named Saul of Damascus, a vigorous persecutor of the Christians. Stephen is the first Christian martyr, a person who is killed as a result of defending the church. Saul is a Jewish leader who has been trying to wipe out the new community of Christians because he believes that they are trying to dismantle Jewish law. While traveling to persecute Christians, Saul is blinded by a light and hears the voice of Jesus asking, “Saul, Saul why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:4). With the help of a Spirit-directed man named Ananias, Saul is baptized and healed. Saul then sets out to become the most relentless, brilliant, and bold missionary of Christianity that the church has ever known. He travels to the coast, performs miracles, preaches the Gospel, and converts Gentiles.

In a brief interlude, Acts recounts the miracles and speeches of Peter. Traveling to the coast, Peter cures a paralytic at Lydda and revives a woman at Joppa. In Caesarea, he says that he has received a message from God through a trance-like vision, telling him that he “should not call anyone profane or unclean” (10:28). He deduces that he may associate with Gentiles, as “God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (10:34). He therefore dines with the family of a Roman centurion named Cornelius, and they become the first Gentiles baptized by Peter. The church continues to shift its emphasis toward welcoming the Gentiles. Some of those who fled persecutions in Jerusalem arrive at the Syrian city of Antioch, where they begin to preach to the Greeks. Saul and Barnabas are among these people.

SUMMARY ACTS CHAPTERS 1-10

Summary of Acts - Chapters 1-10 Material taken from Sparknotes study guides.

Introduction

The Acts of the Apostles, the second part of the work that begins with the Gospel According to Luke, is the story of the early church after Jesus' martyrdom. Like Luke, Acts is addressed to the unknown reader Theophilus, and in the introduction to Acts, it is made clear that it is a continuation of Luke: “In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day he was taken up to heaven” (1:1–2).

Second-century Christian tradition identifies the author of Luke and Acts as Luke, a traveling companion of the missionary Paul of Tarsus. Modern scholars agree that Acts and Luke should be credited to the same author, but have been more reluctant to identify him: the author most likely wrote between the years 80 and 90, and may indeed have been Paul's companion.

One of the perplexing problems surrounding the authorship of Acts is the narrator's changing voice and person. He generally speaks as an uninvolved third party, but sometimes lapses into the plural. Acts is certainly intended as a history of the early church, and it is the most complete and valuable history we have of the Christians in the first century. However, it is not necessarily historically reliable, either in terms of its depiction of the first-century development of Christian theology and religion, or in its description of the political history of the church. For instance, the author seems relatively shaky in his knowledge of Paul's theology. Whether or not it was intended to be a historically accurate text, Acts can be read as a devotional and instructional history, whose religious purpose remains unaffected by its inaccuracies. It depicts the story of the spread of Christianity, the growing distance between Christianity and Judaism, the move toward earthly concerns rather than apocalyptic expectations, and the triumph of the Christian message despite persecutions.

Summary

Acts begins with Jesus's charge to the Twelve Apostles to spread the Gospel throughout the world. Peter serves as the leader of the apostles and the small congregation of the faithful in Jerusalem. Their first order of business is to elect Matthias as the twelfth apostle, replacing the traitor Judas Iscariot. During the year of Jesus's death and resurrection, the disciples are gathered for Pentecost, a religious holiday celebrating the grain harvest. The Holy Spirit descends upon them. As a result of the Holy Spirit's presence, they begin speaking other languages.

Peter delivers a sermon explaining the miracle. He says that the gift of tongues is given to prophets. Peter summarizes the life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus. He gives scriptural proof that Jesus is the Messiah, the savior whom God promises in the Old Testament to send to save Jews from their adversity. Responding to Peter's sermon, 3,000 people are baptized into the Christian community—an idealized, thriving community characterized by prayer, brotherhood, common ownership, and sharing. A man named Barnabas is particularly praised for his generosity, and a couple (Ananias and Saphira) that defrauds the church is stricken dead. Going to the temple to pray, Peter and John cure a crippled beggar. Peter tells a crowd the story of Jesus's persecution and his eventual resurrection, concluding with a reminder that the Jews are favored by God and a call to repentance. The Sadducee high priests of the temple, who do not believe in the