



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Class Notes

## The Speeches in Acts

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### *Introduction*

1. Before examining Peter's Pentecost sermon, we should pause to introduce and overview the discourses in Acts, comprised of sermons and defense speeches. Here are three of the reasons to do so.
  - a. The number of speeches and the amount of Acts devoted to them: depending on how we identify a speech and determine its content, the speeches make up 25–30 percent of the book.<sup>1</sup>
  - b. What they show about the church's audiences and how they adapted their approach.
    - 1) Audiences included Jews, in the temple, Sanhedrin, synagogues, places of prayer, and Paul's house (Acts 28.17–28); Gentile god-fearers; pagan Gentiles; Athenian philosophers; and Roman and Jewish rulers.
    - 2) Approaches, specific themes, and styles varied and were adapted, depending on the audiences.<sup>2</sup>
  - c. More importantly, what they show about the content of the early church's preaching.
2. The speeches have been the subject of much discussion and debate, especially among critical scholars, regarding their historicity, original content (verbatim reports or summaries?), and origin of composition; we'll leave those matters for others.<sup>3</sup>

### *The kērygma broadly considered*

3. Differences in style and specific themes have been noted, but scholars have identified a common core content in the things preached (κήρυγμα, *kērygma*).<sup>4</sup> In broad terms, we see the following ideas.
  - a. The promises God made in the OT have been fulfilled; the Messiah has come and his reign has begun.
  - b. He is Jesus of Nazareth who:
    - 1) Went about doing good and executing mighty works by the power of God.
    - 2) Was crucified according to the purpose of God.
    - 3) Was raised by God from the dead.

<sup>1</sup> Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles (2009, 342), for example, say speeches make up “about 25 to 30 percent of the book.” Smith (1993, 100) lists “Ten Major Sermons in Acts.” By comparison, my list on page 3 includes thirteen passages with speeches or defense statements (including two in Acts 17; one is a summary) where Smith lists only one.

<sup>2</sup> For example, compare the styles of Peter and Paul in addressing Jews (Acts 2; 13) with Paul in Athens (Acts 17); or compare his speech to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20; some see similarities with his epistles) with his preaching to the the Corinthians or his defense speeches before the Jews and Roman rulers (Acts 18; 22; 26).

<sup>3</sup> See Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles 2009, 342–345; Carson and Moo 2005, 320–321.

<sup>4</sup> Among the nine NT uses of *kērygma* are the following in Paul: Rom 16.25; 1 Cor 1.21; 2.4; 15.14; 2 Tim 4.17; Tit 1.3. From the sixty-one uses of the verb κηρύσσω (*kērussō*), see Luke 24.37; Acts 8.5; 9.20; 10.37, 42; 15.21; 19.13; 20.25; 28.31.

- 4) Has been exalted by God and given the name “Lord.”
- 5) Will come again to judge humanity.

### *Comparing Acts speeches with Paul’s summary of apostolic preaching*

4. Acts is not all the historical evidence we have of the church’s initial preaching; Paul summarizes it in 1 Corinthians 15.1–11.
  - a. That evidence is especially useful for historical purposes (Habermas 2006, 127–133).
    - 1) First Corinthians was written before Acts, just two decades after the crucifixion.
    - 2) Paul indicates that the teaching is even older (cf. Gal 1.18–19).
    - 3) In fact, even many critical scholars agree that the tradition cited in 1 Corinthians 15.3–8 goes back to the earliest preaching.
  - b. Notice in broad terms what Paul says about the early church’s preaching.
    - 1) It was the gospel he had preached, they had received, and on which they stood (1 Cor 15.1).
    - 2) It was the message of the original preachers.
      - a) The language of passed-on tradition takes us back to Christianity’s origins (vv. 1, 3).
      - b) The other apostles had preached the same message (vv. 9–11).
5. Now, notice the specific points he emphasized as primary in the preaching (vv. 3–8).
  - a. Paul identifies the things he will say in verses 3–8 as “most important” (CSB) or “of first importance” (ESV, NIV), translating the one Greek word, *πρῶτος* (*prōtos*).
    - 1) In fact, the word is plural here (*πρῶτοις*, *prōtois*), meaning that Paul is listing the first-importance ideas.
    - 2) He uses the conjunction *ὅτι* (*hoti*) to delineate those ideas; notice that *hoti* is used four times.
      - a) “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (v. 3).
      - b) “that he was buried” (v. 4).
      - c) “that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (v. 4).
      - d) “that He was seen by [*ὤφθη*, *ōphthē*; passive voice] Cephas, ... the twelve ... over five hundred brethren at once ... James ... all the apostles ... me [Paul] also” (vv. 5–8 NKJV).
    - 3) The appearances are the evidence that Jesus was really raised and were as vital to the preaching as the death, burial, and resurrection; in fact, based on space used, Paul stresses the evidence more than the events.
6. A few years ago, it occurred to me to examine the speeches in Acts to see whether and how they correspond to Paul’s summary of the early church’s preaching (which, remember, he traces back to the beginning in vv. 9–11). The chart below shows what I found, presenting a thematic emphasis we should keep in mind whenever we encounter a speech in Acts.

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| <b>1 Corinthians 15 Themes in the Sermons and Defense Speeches in Acts</b> |                              |                           |                               |                             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Text                                                                       | Death                        | Burial                    | Raised                        | Witnesses                   |
| 2                                                                          | Crucified/killed (23)        | Not in Hades ... (27–31)  | God raised him (24–36)        | We are witnesses (32)       |
| 3                                                                          | Killed Author of life (15)   |                           | God raised from the dead (15) | We are witnesses (15)       |
| 4                                                                          | Jesus ... crucified (10)     |                           | God raised from the dead (10) |                             |
| 5                                                                          | ... killed on a tree (30)    |                           | God raised from the dead (30) | We are witnesses (32)       |
| 10                                                                         | Killed ... on a tree (39)    |                           | God raised 3rd day (40)       | Appear to witnesses (41–42) |
| 13                                                                         | Ask Pilate to execute (28)   | Laid in a tomb (29)       | God raised (30, 32–37)        | Galileans—witnesses (31)    |
| 17 [2]                                                                     | Christ had to suffer (3)     |                           | Preached (3, 18, 31)          |                             |
| 22                                                                         | Implied in report (6–10)     |                           | Implied in report (6–10)      | “I am Jesus ...” (8, 10)    |
| 23                                                                         |                              |                           | Paul tried b/c res. (6)       |                             |
| 24                                                                         |                              |                           | Paul tried b/c res. (21)      |                             |
| 25                                                                         | Festus alludes to death (19) |                           | Festus: Paul asserts res (19) |                             |
| 26                                                                         | Christ must suffer (23)      |                           | God can raised & did (8, 23)  |                             |
|                                                                            | 9 stated/implied             | 2 stated—Jewish audiences | 12 stated/implied; 1 ref.     | Stated 5 / implied 1        |

## Works Cited

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