

The Speeches of Acts

	Text	Person	Location	Audience	Main Theme	Scripture	Response
Jerusalem	Acts 2:14 – 36	Simon Peter	Jerusalem	Jewish people on Pentecost	The gift of the Spirit is from Jesus, raised up and on David's throne	Joel 2, Psalm 16, Psalm 110	3000 Jewish people repent and are saved
	Acts 3:11 – 26	Simon Peter	Temple	Jewish people	God has raised Jesus as the final prophet to listen to	Deuteronomy 18:14 – 22, Genesis 12:1 – 8	2000 more repent, authorities imprison them
	Acts 4:8 – 12	Simon Peter	Elders	Rulers & elders of Israel	God made the creation and left you a witness by it	Psalm 118	Rulers release Peter & John
	Acts 4:24 – 30	The disciples	Jerusalem	No outside audience	God made all creation; the kings and rulers rebel against Jesus	Psalm 146, Psalm 2	
	Acts 5:29 – 32	Peter & disciples	Council in Jerusalem	Rulers & elders of Israel	God has raised Jesus to grant repentance & forgiveness to Israel		Gamaliel averts an execution
	Acts 7:2 – 53	Stephen	Council in Jerusalem	Rulers & elders of Israel	God gives 2 chances. Patriarchs obey on the second tries, but Israel disobeys on second tries	Abraham & Joseph; Israel with Moses & Shekinah (Amos 5:25 – 26, Isaiah 66:1 – 2)	They stone Stephen
Samaria	Acts 8:32 – 35	Philip	Samaria: Road from Jerusalem to Gaza	Ethiopian eunuch	Jesus is the suffering servant of Isaiah	Isaiah 53	Eunuch believes, Philip baptizes him
Ends of the Earth	Acts 13:13 – 42	Paul	Synagogue in Pisidian Antioch	Diaspora Jews	God has fulfilled His promise to David regarding a king, raising Jesus from the dead	Moses, Samuel, Psalm 2, Psalm 16,	Jews & Gentile God-fearers follow
	Acts 14:14 – 17	Paul	Lystra	Gentiles	God made the creation and left you a witness by it	Psalm 146	They still want to worship Paul & Barnabus
	Acts 17:22 – 31	Paul	Mars Hill in Athens	Gentiles	God made the creation & all peoples; He will judge the world through the one he raised from the dead	None, but quotes 2 Greek poets	Some sneered, some were curious
	Acts 20:17 – 35	Paul	Ephesus	Gentiles	Paul's spiritual leadership, his exhortation to them to be on their guard	A saying of Jesus unrecorded in the Gospels	They grieved but blessed him
Jerusalem	Acts 22:1 – 21	Paul	Jerusalem	Jerusalem citizens	Paul's conversion story and commission to the Gentiles	Jesus' words to him	The Roman guards convene the Jewish Council

	Acts 23:1 – 12	Paul	Jerusalem	Jerusalem Council	Paul claims to be defending the hope of Israel, the resurrection of the dead		Jesus himself speaks to him, says he must witness at Rome
	Acts 24:10 – 21	Paul	Jerusalem	Felix, governor of Judea	Paul claims to be defending the hope of Israel, the resurrection of the dead	“The Law and the Prophets” referenced	Felix continues to listen, then detains Paul
	Acts 26:1 – 23	Paul	Jerusalem	Festus, Roman governor of Judea, and Agrippa, King of Judea	Jesus’ resurrection , Paul’s conversion story and commission to the Gentiles	“Moses and the Prophets” referenced	Festus resists but Agrippa wavers, Agrippa declares Paul’s innocence
Ends of the Earth	Acts 28:17 – 28	Paul	Rome	Jewish community	Paul states his support for Israel and its hope, then testifies to the kingdom of God concerning Jesus	“The Law of Moses and the Prophets” referenced, and also Isaiah 6 explicitly	The Roman Jews are split over Jesus; Paul declares that the Gentiles will hear
	<i>Implied</i>	<i>Paul</i>	<i>Rome</i>	<i>Gentiles, Caesar</i>	<i>Paul declares that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah and true king of the world, has been resurrected and will judge the world</i>	<i>Paul refers to Creation and Israel out of the Law and the Prophets</i>	<i>Caesar insists he is a god, is struck dead by worms like Herod in Acts 12. Or Caesar kills Paul but the word spreads anyway. Or Caesar tries to detain Paul but God opens the jail. Or Caesar releases Paul.</i>

Observations

1. EVANGELISM: The message is unwaveringly about the 'lordship of Jesus.' Responding to Jesus on the throne is more prominent as a theme than Jesus on the cross.
 - a. The message requires an individual response, but is not at all focused around the individual in its substance. No one says, 'God has a plan for your individual life', 'God loves you individually,' etc.
 - b. *We must revive non-individual-centric proclamations of the gospel.*
2. EVANGELISM: The message is contextualized, *rhetorically* but not *ethically*, for difference audiences.
 - a. With a Jewish audience, the Old Testament is explicated and said to be fulfilled by Jesus.
 - i. Not so much in a 'proof-texting' fashion by isolating verses
 - ii. But in a 'metanarrative' fashion
 - b. With a Gentile audience, Paul uses an argument from creation
 - i. In Athens, Paul also quotes from 2 Greek philosophers/poets, perhaps because the Athenians are more educated than the Lystrans. He is clearly literate and well versed in the culture he is confronting.
 - ii. Was this easier to do back then than today? Somehow it feels hard to imagine doing this
 - c. *Is there a 'metanarrative' running throughout the Gentile world that can be engaged?*
 - i. Perhaps not in the same way: The story of God in Israel's Scriptures is not a placeholder for other Gentile metanarratives; it is unique and authoritative
 - ii. But in the manner of engagement, perhaps we could explore the following:
 1. Modernism sought a political-economic paradise, but was exploitative.
 - a. The resurrection of Jesus gives us a hope that God will bring about a truly human and humanized community.
 2. Postmodernism sought a radically pluralist paradise, but was shattered by tribalism.
 - a. The resurrection of Jesus brings about a reconciled community.
 - b. Christianity is narrow with regards to salvation but pluralistic with regards to politics and culture.
3. EVANGELISM: On the whole, the resurrection is mentioned more often than the cross
 - a. For a Jewish audience: Was the conceptual framework in place that the resurrection of Jesus was more immediately provocative?
 - b. For a Gentile audience: We know bodily resurrection (Greek: anastasis) was thought to be impossible in the pagan world, yet Paul does not play down this idea at all. The idea is too important to play down, even in the name of contextualization. The gospel is unabashedly Jewish.
 - c. *Why do we emphasize the cross more than the resurrection today? Perhaps to play up the 'God loves you a lot' message using the penal substitution atonement model.*
4. EVANGELISM: In Paul's ministry, the 'inclusion of the Gentiles' is the idea that gets the Jewish community upset, but Paul does not back down on this.
 - a. Without strong partnerships between different segments of the church, the contemporary 'church growth' strategy of having homogeneous churches legitimates ethnic, class, and other social barriers. The idea of the reconciled kingdom community is too important to play down, even in the interest of contextualization.
 - b. *We cannot continue to play down the racial and ethnic dimension of the gospel. We must also hold high the 'forgive and love your enemy' teaching of Jesus.*
5. EVANGELISM: The Scripture references form the foundation for the defense of the gospel.
 - a. They start out being Old Testament references, especially around the theme of Messianic kingship (Psalm 2, 16, 110)
 - b. Paul's first speech (Acts 13) is also centered around the theme of Messianic kingship. He also uses Psalms 2 and 16, which is a vital similarity to Peter's earlier preaching. Luke is clearly establishing continuity and equivalence between Peter and Paul, establishing Paul's authority on the same level as Peter's.
 - c. The longer messages are in all likelihood exemplary. Even when later speeches are not recorded in detail, they are probably like the others we have seen: The apostles are constantly expounding on the Old Testament.

- d. As a case in point, the 'Law and the Prophets' are referred to in the last three major speeches. This is a summary statement most likely reminding the reader that Paul, too, was constantly expounding on the Old Testament.
 - i. This recalls and affirms the fact that Jesus opened 'the Law and the Prophets' to the disciples in Luke 24. They are now authorized the 'use' the Old Testament, and are quite masterful at it. Their interpretation of the Law and the Prophets is the correct one, because, as implied by Luke, it is Jesus' own interpretation of it.
 - ii. Speeches referred to in passing are probably expositions on the Old Testament, particularly if the audience is Jewish.
 - e. The words of Jesus take on (at least) the same authorizing power in Acts 20:17 – 35 and 22:1 – 21.
 - f. Then in Paul's speech in 23:1 – 12, the resurrected Jesus responds directly to Paul, an unusual occurrence reinforcing Jesus' original commission to Paul.
 - g. We do not use the Old Testament very much today in our proclamation.
 - i. Perhaps the closest we would get is Isaiah 53 or a vague creation reference (We might say, 'In the beginning, everything was good')
 - ii. Maybe that is okay in form, but problematic in substance. Clearly the idea of Jesus as Messianic Jewish king is lost. We turn Jesus into a philosopher, healer, nice guy, etc.
 - iii. Again, it seems we have turned a this-worldly message about the 'lordship of Jesus' into an abstract, other-worldly message about 'God loves you the individual.'
6. ETHICS: The focus of Acts is not the ethical teachings of Jesus, but the Old Testament legitimacy of the Christian movement
- a. People in that period probably did not need to question whether the ethical teachings of Jesus came from Jesus. They questioned whether the whole Christian movement could be derived from the Old Testament.
 - i. This helps to partially explain the disconnect people often sense when they don't see the teachings of Jesus in the Epistles. Is it true, after all, as the skeptical scholars claim, that the teaching of Jesus was basically dropped? Did Paul and others take over the task of building the church? Most certainly not.
 - b. Luke is clearly still interested in the teaching of Jesus (thus, his Gospel!), and views the apostles' teaching as significant (2:42)
 - i. Acts continues to unpack the significance of the ethical teaching of Jesus
 - 1. By displaying the church's obedience to Jesus' teaching concerning table fellowship and money in Acts 1 – 6
 - 2. By displaying Paul's obedience to Jesus' teaching on money in Acts 19 – 20, even to the extent of mentioning a saying of Jesus that was not recorded in the Gospel.
 - 3. By the use of the phrase 'repentance for forgiveness of sins,' or variations thereof; this signifies a summary of Jesus' teaching
 - ii. The rest of the New Testament usually seems to presume an awareness of the ethical teaching of Jesus
 - 1. Paul is very aware of 'the word of the Lord' as the tradition in 1 Corinthians
 - 2. Luke 10:7 is called 'Scripture' by Paul in 1 Timothy 5:18.
 - 3. James contains multiple allusions and almost direct quotations of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt.5 – 7)
 - iii. Also, the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel (Mt.5 – 7) was the most often quoted NT Scripture by the patristic writers, showing that the teaching of Jesus was not simply ignored.
 - c. But Luke's focus quickly shifts to the use of the OT defense of Jesus and the early Christian movement. Why?
 - i. Jesus himself viewed the OT defense of his movement as critical to its success according to Luke 24. Thus, all the speeches of Acts, since they come from reliable speakers, can be said to reflect the OT hermeneutics of Jesus himself.
 - ii. The Christian movement needed to distinguish itself from ethnic Israel and still claim continuity with Israel's Scriptures
 - iii. The Christian movement probably wished to position itself politically as a sect of Judaism to (1) qualify for the protection and exemptions under Roman law, but without

the use of Mosaic markers like circumcision and (2) not categorically push the blame for rioting to ethnic Israel; thus Paul's defense of claiming Israel's hope for resurrection.

- d. Jesus' cross and resurrection seem to draw enormous controversy, to require constant explanation, to brilliantly exemplify Jesus' life and teaching, and to hold immense symbolic meaning in the overall plan of God.
 - i. For example, Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1 – 8 twice repeats the phrase “as the Scriptures foretold” – along with Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.