

Evangelistic Sermons in Acts

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What is the gospel, the church's message of good news for the unconverted? There are four books called "Gospels." Is the gospel presented clearly in them? In all of them or only in John? In Romans? Or where? Wherever else we find it, the gospel must surely be clear in the Book of Acts, God's authoritative account of the church's amazing beginning. Fully as inspired as the Gospels and the epistles, Acts accurately reports the apostolic words as well as deeds. The church, "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Eph. 2:20), must continue to preach their message. This study considers the gospel they preached, according to Acts.

Acts does not lack for summaries of evangelistic sermons (messages attempting to convert the hearers). As already suggested, these summaries are accurate; they report what was said without adding or subtracting anything essential. Furthermore, their content is different from our modern Western evangelistic preaching. The purpose of this study is to analyze those sermons and discover their pattern. Please study the Comments and each sermon for yourself before you evaluate my Conclusions.

Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible with one change: Instead of the title *Christ* I use the equivalent, *Messiah*. In this way I attempt to retain the original reference to the promised King. KJV means King James Version.

Note below that there are three main sections in this study: I. Comments, II. Contents, and III. Conclusions. The Contents section has subsections.

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I. Comments on Key Terms in Acts

These comments are in the order of the first use of the terms in Acts. Many of the same terms are marked with an asterisk (*) in Section II.

Acts 1:3, 6; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31. *The kingdom.* Also see the comments on 3:12-26 and 3:19-21. During His forty days of post-resurrection ministry, Jesus taught His disciples “about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). No one doubts that the disciples had material and political views of the kingdom God had promised, views derived from many prophecies in Scripture. Did they understand the prophecies? At least after the forty days they should, for Jesus “opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45). Did this new understanding change their views about Jesus’ main topic, the kingdom? Certainly not. To them the kingdom was still future and political, as seen by their question just before He ascended to heaven. They asked if He was about to “restore the kingdom to Israel” (Acts 1:6, NIV).

“Restore” implies that the kingdom had existed before but was now in abeyance. That could only refer to the kingdom that was the main theme of the Old Testament, God’s former rule over the nation of Israel. That kingdom had aspects political and material as well as spiritual. “Restore the kingdom to Israel” implies a future for that same kingdom over the same nation. It is just what Micah had said to Jerusalem, “To you it will come—Even the former dominion will come, the kingdom...” (Micah 4:8). Many prophets had enlarged on Micah’s prediction.

How did Jesus answer the disciples’ question about restoring the kingdom? He did not correct their understanding but assured them that the Father knows the timing (Acts 1:7). In other words, such a kingdom will come—only God knows when. Therefore, when we preach that Jesus is Messiah, we imply that He will someday rule in a kingdom that is material as well as spiritual. His goal and ours is that kingdom, as seen, for example in

Matthew 7:21-22 “Not every one who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father...Many will say to Me on that day....”

Matthew 25:34 When Jesus “comes in His glory” to “sit on His glorious throne” (v. 31), “Then the King will say ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”

Acts 14:22 Paul and Barnabas returned to the new, largely Gentile, churches and warned them that “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”

2 Timothy 4:1 In this last letter Paul charged Timothy “in the presence of God and of Messiah Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom.”

Acts 2:36. *The title Lord.* The basic meaning of *Lord* was “Master” (one to be obeyed, as in Luke 6:46). It had a variety of uses, from simple respect (like “sir”) to substituting for the Hebrew name of God (*Yahweh*), as it does in the quotation in Acts 2:21. When referring to Jesus, many contexts show that it kept its basic meaning of “Master.” In Acts 2:36, for example, God has **made** Jesus Lord (the same thought as in Phil. 2:9-11). He could be made Master but not *Yahweh*. Other such examples are: “Lord of the Sabbath” (Matt. 12:8), “Lord of all” (Acts

10:36), and the frequent use of possessive personal pronouns, such as, “**my** Lord” (Matt. 22:44; 24:48; Luke 1:43; John 20:28) and “**his** Lord” (Matt. 24:46; Rom. 14:4).

Acts 2:36. The title *Messiah*. In Matthew 2:4 “the Messiah” clearly means the same as “King of the Jews” in 2:2. Aramaic *Messiah* stands for Hebrew *Mashiach*, which means “Anointed.” As a verbal adjective, this word was used to describe the High Priest (*ha-cohen ha-mashiach*, Lev. 4:3, 5, 16) as anointed with the holy oil. When used as a substantive/title, it referred to God’s chosen king, anointed not only with oil but with the Holy Spirit. This was true of any legitimate king of God’s people Israel. For example, David used it of Saul in 1 Samuel 24:6, 10. It was especially appropriate for the promised future Ruler (as in Psalm 2:2, 6), whose full anointing is described in Isaiah 11:2. The Greek translation of *Mashiach/Messiah* was *Cristos* (also meaning anointed), which in the New Testament passes into English as *Christ*, as seen in John 1:41. Thus, readers in the Greek version of the Old Testament find *Cristos* (*Christ*) there just as in the New Testament. In neither Testament was it a personal name but a royal title, which I suggest by using *Messiah*.

Acts 3:12-26. The title *Servant*. Jesus is called God’s “Servant” (*paidos*) several times in the early sermons of Acts (3:13, 26; 4:27, 30). Though the term can also mean “child” (as translated by KJV in 4:27, 30), it is not a normal word for “son” (KJV in 3:13, 26). In fact, the KJV translates it “servant” where it refers to David in Acts 4:25 and to Jesus in Matthew 12:18. The term is used often in the Greek version of Isaiah, as a title for the future Servant who would both suffer and rule, the Messiah. Jews listening to the Acts sermons would recognize that meaning. There are four prophetic “songs” by that future Servant in Isaiah 42:1-9; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; and 52:13–53:12. Jesus began fulfilling these Servant prophecies during His ministry, as stated in Matthew 12:17-21, and will finish fulfilling them when He returns to rule.

Acts 3:19-21. “Times of refreshing...from the presence of the Lord,” “the period of restoration of all things.” These phrases refer to the future kingdom, which will begin when Jesus returns. The Jews also called that kingdom “the kingdom of God” (for its Ruler) and “the kingdom of heaven” (for its source). It drew near during Jesus’ ministry (Matt. 4:17; 10:7; Luke 10:9, 11) but was not established then, as Jesus made clear in Luke 19:11-27. Instead, He revealed that He would come a second time, bringing the kingdom with Him (Luke 19:12, 15; 21:31; 22:29-30). At that time He will restore all things, as described in many prophecies (such as, Isaiah 11 and 35) and as He Himself summarized (Matt. 19:28). Remember that His title *Messiah* relates Him to that kingdom—see my comments on Acts 2:36. Since the church is being prepared for that kingdom (James 2:5; 1 Cor. 6:9-11), the Christian message has to do with the kingdom.

Acts 4:13-22. The “Council.” This was the supreme Jewish authority in Jerusalem, composed of the high priest and seventy other priests, scribes, and elders.

Acts 9:20. The title *Son of God*. In the Book of Acts Jesus is called the “Son of God” only in 9:20. In 13:33 “My Son” is quoted from Psalm 2:7 with the same meaning. A different Greek word is sometimes translated “Son” in 3:13 and 3:26; for its meaning, see my comments on Acts 3:12-26.

In the KJV, which is based on the *Textus Receptus*, Acts 8:37 also calls Jesus “Son of God.” For centuries, however, none of the Greek manuscripts had that verse. “The earliest known New Testament manuscript that contains the words dates from the sixth century” (Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition, p. 315). It is found neither in the Majority Text (the textual family of most Greek manuscripts) nor the Alexandrian Text (usually considered the best textual family). It is one of many interpolations (paraphrases and additions) by the Western Text in the Book of Acts. In fact, the verse was not even in the key medieval manuscripts from which the Humanist Erasmus prepared the *Textus Receptus*. Assuming that the verse gave a necessary explanation omitted by careless scribes, Erasmus inserted it from the margin of another manuscript. There are other examples of his using ingenuity in place of evidence. For example, since his Greek manuscript lacked Revelation 22:16-22, he translated those verses to Greek from Latin. But his Latin version was defective. As a result, he used the word “book” in 22:19 instead of “tree,” which is found in every Greek manuscript of Revelation! These changes continue in versions based on the *Textus Receptus*, such as the KJV.

What is the meaning of “Son of God” in Acts 9:20 and its equivalent in 13:33? Certainly Jesus sometimes used the term in reference to His deity. But if it meant deity in Acts, it would be strange to have that message there only twice. There is another meaning for “Son of God,” one that agrees with the other summaries in Acts: “royal Heir,” a synonym for King or Messiah. This was its meaning (a) in many Near Eastern coronation texts, which are reflected in Psalm 2:7; (b) in other Old Testament Scriptures, such as, 2 Samuel 7:14, which applied the term originally to Solomon; and (c) in Matthew’s account of the Great Confession (Matt. 16:20).

In the three parallel accounts of that confession, only Matthew 16:20 includes “Son of God” as part of it (“the Messiah, the Son of God”). Mark 8:29 has only “the Messiah,” and Luke 9:20 has “the Messiah [Anointed] of God.” But there is no difference in meaning of the three accounts. “Son of God” in Matthew simply states what is already implied in “Messiah,” that He is the royal Heir. This meaning for “Son of God” also clarifies the argument in Hebrews 1:4-5, which says that Jesus “inherited” (obtained by inheritance) the name “Son.” In that case it referred to His dignity as a human, not to His deity.

Acts 10:42. “Judge of the living and the dead.” This is another synonym for *Messiah*. In the Bible judging normally implies all the functions of ruling.

Acts 10:43. “Forgiveness.” This is the most basic need for sinners, the first of many eternal blessings. The method for obtaining it seems exceedingly simple: “believe” in Jesus. No human works are required—nor confession to a human priest. However, genuine and lasting faith is required—not merely saying “Lord” (John 8:31-32; Matt. 7:21). Such faith involves a costly decision—to die with Jesus (Luke 9:23-26)—and is **proved** by works (Matt. 7:16-23; James 2:14-26).

Acts 14:15-17. When dealing with pagans, it was necessary to lay a foundation for the gospel beginning with the God of creation. Jews and proselytes already had that part of the foundation.

Acts 17:30-31. Paul preached the bodily resurrection even to the Athenian culture, which scorned such an idea. It was probably part of every complete sermon (see Contents II.1).

Without the Messiah's resurrection, implying our own, there is no gospel and no hope (1 Cor. 15:13-18; see the next paragraph here).

Acts 24:14-16. In Acts chapters 23-26 Paul repeatedly declared that the Jewish hope is the resurrection of the body (23:6; 24:15, 21; 26:8). "Hope" denotes confidence, not uncertainty, about the future. Jesus had showed that eventual resurrection is implied in God's still being the God of the patriarchs centuries after their death (Luke 20:27, 37-38). This is true because only in raised bodies can they inherit His promises (1 Cor. 15:42-50).

II. Contents of Evangelistic Sermons in Acts

A. Sermon Summaries by Categories

In this study the evangelistic sermons in Acts are considered in three categories:

1. Sermons summarized in Acts in two or more sentences (also analyzed in a table)
2. Sermons summarized in Acts in a sentence or less (listed in categories)
3. Sermons summarized by unbelievers, as reported in Acts

1. Sermons Summarized in Two or More Sentences in Acts

(These same sermons are summarized in much more detail in the table later in this section.)

- 2:14-40 David's Descendant, Jesus, was attested by His miracles but murdered; His resurrection and ascension to God's throne as predicted, prove that He is Messiah.
- 3:12-26 After His Servant Messiah suffered as predicted, God raised Him; He will send Him back to restore all things (also as predicted) and destroy the disobedient.
- 4:8-12 This man has been healed by Jesus Messiah, the rejected One now raised to first place.
- 5:29-32 Though the Jewish leaders killed Jesus, God raised Him to be Ruler.
- 7:2-53 (Defense) In Israel's history God revealed Himself in places besides the Promised Land, did not need the temple, often worked through those Israel rejected.
- 10:34-43 God's Anointed (Messiah) did miracles but was crucified; by raising Him, God showed that He is the coming Ruler and only Savior.
- 13:16-41 Israel's history leads to David's Descendant, the Savior, whom the Jews killed but God raised, and who will forgive believers but punish scoffers.
- 14:15-17 (Pre-evangelism) Don't worship idols but the good Creator.
- 17:22-31 (Partly pre-evangelism) The Creator does not need for us to sustain Him but wants us to know Him—to turn to the Man about to rule, as proved by His resurrection.
- 22:1-22 (Defense) Paul told how Jesus stopped him from persecuting believers and made him His witness to the Gentiles.
- 24:10-21 (Defense) Paul claimed that the main issue in his ministry was God's promise to raise the dead.

- 26:1-29 (Defense) Paul told how Jesus stopped him from persecuting believers and made him His witness to the Gentiles—that Messiah has risen from the dead.

2. Sermons Summarized in a Sentence or Less in Acts

a. *The resurrection (of or from the dead) or Jesus and the resurrection*

- 4:2 Peter and John to people in the temple were “proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.”
- 4:33 The apostles “were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.”
- 17:18 Paul in Athens “was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.”
- 23:6 Paul cried out to the Council that he was “on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead.”

b. *Messiah or Jesus (is) Messiah*

- 5:42 The apostles every day in the temple and house to house “were teaching and preaching Jesus as Messiah.”
- 8:5 Philip to the city of Samaria was “proclaiming Messiah.”
- 8:12 Philip to the city of Samaria was “preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Messiah.”
- 9:22 Paul to the Jews at Damascus was “proving that this Jesus is the Messiah.”
- 17:3 Paul from Scriptures in the Jewish synagogue in Thessalonica was “explaining and giving evidence that the Messiah had to suffer and rise again from the dead” and that “this Jesus is the Messiah.”
- 18:5 Paul to Jews—and Greeks?—in Corinth was “solemnly testifying...that Jesus was the Messiah.”
- 18:28 Apollos refuting Jews in Achaia “was demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.”
- 20:21 Paul to Jews and Greeks in Ephesus testified “of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Messiah.”
- 24:24 Paul to Felix and Drusilla in Caesarea spoke about “faith in Messiah Jesus.”
- 28:31 Paul in Rome to all who came was “preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Messiah.”

c. *Jesus, or the Lord Jesus, or the name of Jesus—without the words Messiah or resurrection*

This category probably means the same as the preceding category, that Jesus is Messiah.

- 8:35 Philip to the Ethiopian, starting in Isaiah 53, where the latter was reading, “preached Jesus.”
- 9:15 The Lord Jesus told Ananias that Saul would “bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel.”

- 9:28 Paul in Jerusalem was “speaking out...in the name of the Lord Jesus.”
- 11:20 Scattered believers speaking in Antioch to Greeks also were “preaching the Lord Jesus.”
- 16:31 Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailer to “believe in the Lord Jesus.”
- 18:25 Apollos in Ephesus “was speaking and teaching...the things concerning Jesus.”
- 19:4 Paul told John the Baptist’s disciples at Ephesus that John the Baptist told people to believe in Jesus.

d. *The gospel (=good news) or the word of the gospel—without specifying what gospel it is, such as of the kingdom or of grace*

- 8:4 Philip from Ashdod to Caesarea “kept preaching the gospel.”
- 14:7, 15, 21 Paul and Barnabas to Lystra, Derbe, and the surrounding area “preached the gospel.”
- 15:7 Peter summarized his message at Caesarea as “the word of the gospel.”
- 16:10 Paul and his group were called to Macedonians to “preach the gospel.”

e. *The gospel (or word) of God’s (or the Lord’s) grace*

This category makes the preceding category more specific.

- 14:3 When Paul and Barnabas were at Iconium, the Lord was “bearing witness to the word of His grace.”
- 20:24 Paul summarized his ministry received from the Lord: “to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.”
- 20:32 Paul summarized his message at Ephesus: “the word of His [God’s] grace.”

f. *The kingdom, or the kingdom of God, or the gospel of the kingdom of God**

Assuming that the apostles understood the kingdom correctly in Acts 1:6 (see the note about the kingdom), this category combines the meanings of the preceding categories: the good news that Jesus is risen, is Lord and Messiah, and will come to rule as predicted.

- 8:12 Philip to the city of Samaria was “preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Messiah.”
- 19:8 Paul in the synagogue at Ephesus was “reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.”
- 20:25 Paul summarized his former message in Ephesus as “preaching the kingdom.”
- 28:23 Paul in his lodging in Rome to many Jews was “testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus” from the Scriptures.
- 28:31 Paul in Rome to all who came was “preaching the kingdom of God and...the Lord Jesus Messiah.”

g. Miscellaneous

- 4:19-20 Peter and John to the Council said they must testify to “what we have seen and heard.”
- 5:20, 21, 25 After he freed them, the angel told the apostles to speak in the temple “the whole message of this life.”
- 9:20 Paul in the synagogues of Damascus proclaimed Jesus, that “He is the Son of God.”*
- 18:26 Priscilla and Aquila helped Apollos by teaching him “the way of God.”
- 20:27 Paul summarized his message at Ephesus as “the whole purpose of God.”
- 24:24-25 Paul to Governor Felix and his wife Drusilla, spoke of “faith in Messiah” and “righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come.”
- 28:28 Paul to the Jews of Rome who rejected his message, quoted Isaiah 6:9-10 and said that “this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles.”

h. *The word, or words, or, the word of God, or the word of the Lord, or the teaching of the Lord—without further specification*

This category classifies the message as to origin (word or words from God).

- 11:1 In Caesarea the Gentiles had received “the word of God.”
- 11:14 In Caesarea the angel told Cornelius that Peter would speak “words by which you will be saved.”
- 11:19 The believers scattered from Judea spoke to Jews “the word.”
- 13:5 In the synagogues of Salamis Barnabas and Saul spoke “the word of God.”
- 13:7 In Paphos Sergius Paulus wanted to hear from Barnabas and Paul “the word of God.”
- 13:12 In Paphos after Barnabas and Paul preached, Sergius Paulus was amazed at “the teaching of the Lord.”
- 13:44 In Pisidian Antioch nearly the whole city wanted to hear from Paul and Barnabas “the word of God.”
- 13:46 In Pisidian Antioch Paul and Barnabas spoke to the Jews first “the word of God.”
- 13:48 In Pisidian Antioch Paul and Barnabas spoke to the Gentiles “the word of the Lord.”
- 14:25 In Perga Paul and Barnabas spoke “the word.”
- 15:35 In Antioch of Syria Paul and Barnabas and many others were teaching and preaching “the word of the Lord.”
- 15:36 Paul and Barnabas summarized what they preached on their first journey as “the word of the Lord.”
- 16:6 The Holy Spirit forbade Paul and his company to speak in the Province of Asia “the word.”
- 16:32 To the Philippian jailer and his household, Paul and Silas spoke “the word of the Lord.”

- 17:11 In Berea the Jews received eagerly from Paul and Silas “the word.”
- 17:13 In Thessalonica and Berea Paul had proclaimed “the word of God.”
- 18:11 In Corinth Paul for eighteen months had taught “the word of God.”
- 19:10 During Paul’s ministry in Ephesus, “all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord.”
- 19:20 During Paul’s ministry in Ephesus “the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.”

3. Sermons Summarized by Unbelievers in Acts

- 6:11-14 In Jerusalem a false report said that Stephen spoke “against Moses and God...against this holy place and the law, [and that] Jesus will destroy this place and alter the [Jewish] customs.”
- 16:17 At Philippi the girl with the evil spirit said that Paul and his company “are proclaiming to you the way of salvation.”
- 17:7 In Thessalonica Jews complained to the authorities that Paul and his company were saying “that there is another king, Jesus.”
- 19:26 In Ephesus Demetrius the silversmith complained to other craftsmen and workmen that Paul was saying “that gods made with hands are no gods.”
- 21:28 In the temple at Jerusalem Jews from the Province of Asia complained to Jews that Paul “preaches...against our people and the law and this place.”
- 25:19 At Caesarea Governor Festus informed King Agrippa that the Jews disagreed with Paul “about their own religion and about a certain dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive.”

B. Table of Longer Sermon Summaries

In the following table are more detailed summaries of Category 1 sermons. For terms marked * see Comments.

SERMONS SUMMARIZED IN TWO OR MORE SENTENCES IN ACTS			
VERSES	SPEAKER,AUDIENCE PLACE,OCCASION	SUMMARY OF SERMON	RESULTS
2:14-40	Peter, to Jews from every nation at the temple in Jerusalem. At the Feast of Pentecost a crowd gathers when disciples from Galilee speak in many languages.	14-21 Peter explains the miracle as God's gift of the Holy Spirit, which will lead to the judgment of the day of the Lord, as predicted in Joel 2. 22-32 He gives witness that Jesus, attested by His miracles but killed on a cross, has risen from the dead. This fulfills King David's prediction about his descendant, the Messiah (Ps. 16). 33-35 He explains that as David predicted (Ps. 110), Jesus has ascended to God's right hand, from where He has poured out the Holy Spirit. 36 He concludes that God has made Jesus Lord* and Messiah.* 37-40 He exhorts them to respond with repentance and baptism, in order to be saved from that generation.	37 Pierced to the heart, the Jews ask what to do. 41 About 3000 are baptized in the name of Jesus Messiah.
3:12-26	Peter, to a large crowd of Jews in the Portico of Solomon in the temple at Jerusalem. Peter heals the man born lame, who has been put every day at the Beautiful Gate.	12-16 Peter explains that the man has been healed by faith in Jesus, God's Servant* (the Holy and Righteous One, author of life), whom God has glorified (raised up) after the Jews have rejected and killed Him. 17-18 He explains that through the Jews' acting in ignorance God has fulfilled His predictions that His Messiah would suffer. 19-21 He appeals to the Jews to repent and return to God, which will result in cleansing from sin and God's sending back the Messiah with the kingdom* (to restore all things). 22-23 He warns them that they must obey the prophet like Moses or be destroyed (Deut. 18:15, 19). 24-26 He announces that the predicted times have come to fulfill the Abrahamic covenant, beginning with the Servant's being sent to wicked Israel.	4:1-3 Upset by the apostles' message, the temple authorities put Peter and John in jail. 4:4 Many who hear believe.
4:8-12	Peter, as prisoner, to Jewish leaders at Jerusalem, who ask him by what power or in what name he and John have healed in the temple.	Peter explains that this man—previously lame—is well by the name of Jesus Messiah, whom the Jews have crucified but God has raised. Jesus is the rejected stone that has become the most important—the only means of salvation.	13-22 The Council* forbids them to speak in Jesus' name.

SERMONS SUMMARIZED IN TWO OR MORE SENTENCES IN ACTS			
VERSES	SPEAKER,AUDIENCE PLACE,OCCASION	SUMMARY OF SERMON	RESULTS
5:29-32	Peter & apostles, to the Jewish Council at Jerusalem. An angel releases the apostles from prison. When the leaders find them teaching in the temple, they remind them of their earlier prohibition.	29 The apostles explain that they must obey God rather than men. 30-32 They assert that God has raised up Jesus, whom the leaders have killed, and has exalted Him as Prince and Savior—to which the apostles and the Holy Spirit give witness.	33-41 Persuaded by Gamaliel not to kill the apostles, the Council flogs them and repeats the prohibition. Freed, they rejoice in their suffering.
7:2-53	Stephen, to the Jewish Council at Jerusalem. Men from the Synagogue of the Freedmen drag Stephen to the Council and accuse him of false teaching.	2-8 Stephen tells of Abraham, to whom God appeared in Mesopotamia and in the Promised Land—but gave him no inheritance there. 9-16 He tells of Joseph, who, though rejected by his brothers, got his family safely to Egypt. 17-43 He tells of Moses, who was also rejected by his brothers though prepared and willing to deliver them. God appeared to him in the desert both before and after he delivered Israel—but they again rejected him and turned to idolatry. 44-47 He reminds them that from Moses to Solomon the fathers had no temple—just the tabernacle—but God’s blessing. 48-50 He reminds them that though Solomon built God a house, God does not dwell in such a house. 51-53 He asserts that the present generation resists the Holy Spirit just as their fathers did. The fathers persecuted the prophets; these have killed Messiah.	54-60 The Council become quite angry, more so when Stephen reports seeing Jesus at God’s right hand. They stone him to death.
10:34-43	Peter, to the Centurion Cornelius plus relatives and close friends in the house of Cornelius at Caesarea. Through Cornelius and a vision, the Lord prompts Peter to go from Joppa to evangelize these Gentiles at Caesarea.	34-35 Peter remarks that God welcomes men from every nation. 36 He introduces God’s word of peace through Jesus Messiah. 37-39 He presents the ministry of Jesus, God’s Anointed, beginning with John’s baptism and continuing through His crucifixion by the Jews. 40-41 He asserts that God raised Jesus and let Him appear to chosen witnesses. 42-43 He explains that the witnesses teach that Jesus is the appointed Judge of all* and that those who believe in Him receive forgiveness.*	44-48 The Holy Spirit falls on these Gentiles, making them speak other tongues (as at Pentecost). Peter has them baptized.

SERMONS SUMMARIZED IN TWO OR MORE SENTENCES IN ACTS			
VERSES	SPEAKER,AUDIENCE PLACE,OCCASION	SUMMARY OF SERMON	RESULTS
13:16-41	Paul, to Jews & God-fearers in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch. Paul & Barnabas are invited to speak.	16-22 Paul sketches Jewish history from the Exodus to King David. 23-25 He asserts that from David's offspring God has brought a Savior, Jesus, so recognized by John the Baptist. 26-29 He asserts that the people and rulers in Jerusalem fulfilled Scripture by killing this Savior. 30-37 He declares that in fulfillment of Scriptures, God raised Jesus, who appeared to the witnesses. 38-41 He promises forgiveness to believers and warns scoffers.	42-43 The people want to hear more; many Jews and proselytes follow Paul and Barnabas. 44-48 Jewish jealousy causes Paul and Barnabas to turn from them to the Gentiles.
14:15-17	Paul & Barnabas, to a crowd of idolaters at Lystra. Because Paul heals a man born lame, the crowd wants to worship him and Barnabas as gods.	The missionaries claim to be only men, trying to turn others from such idolatry to the Creator,* who has given evidence of Himself through food and gladness.	18 The people still want to worship the missionaries. 19 Won over by Jews from Antioch and Iconium, they stone Paul.
17:22-31	Paul, to the Areopagus (men of Athens) at Athens. Some philosophers think Paul is teaching about strange deities; they bring him to explain.	22-23 Paul offers to tell of the God they worship in ignorance. 24-28 The Creator does not need for men to provide Him lodging or anything else. He determined the time and place for each nation—so that they might seek their Source of life. 29 Idolatry is wrong: God is not dead like idols but alive like us. 30-31 Repentance is now proclaimed through the Man about to judge the world, as accredited by His resurrection.*	32-34 Some sneer at the message of the resurrection; some promise to hear again; some believe.
22:1-21	Paul, to Jews, from the stairs between the temple and the Roman barracks in Jerusalem. Roman soldiers rescue Paul from a Jewish lynch mob that thinks he is desecrating the temple.	1-2 Paul gets their attention when he speaks in Aramaic. 3-5 He recounts his strict Jewish upbringing and zealous persecution of the church, which activity took him toward Damascus. 6-10 He recounts the Lord Jesus' appearing to him and directing him into Damascus. 11-16 He recounts the Lord's instructing him through Ananias to become His witness and to get baptized. 17-21 He recounts the Lord's revelation to him in Jerusalem—telling him to flee and go to the Gentiles.	22-24 This so enrages them that the commander has Paul brought into the barracks, where he intends to scourge and question him.

SERMONS SUMMARIZED IN TWO OR MORE SENTENCES IN ACTS			
VERSES	SPEAKER,AUDIENCE PLACE,OCCASION	SUMMARY OF SERMON	RESULTS
24:10-21	Paul, to Governor Felix in a Roman court in Caesarea. Jewish leaders, through their attorney Tertullus accuse Paul of being a troublemaker.	10-13 Paul denies engaging in public discussions in Jerusalem or causing a riot there. 14-16 He admits serving God because of his belief in the Scriptures, specifically the hope that God will raise the dead.* 17-21 He explains why he was in Jerusalem and challenges his accusers to bring witnesses—or tell what he did wrong before the Council, where he cried out that the issue was the resurrection.	22-23 Felix says that he will decide the case later—and gives orders to let Paul’s friends visit him.
26:1-29	Paul, to King Agrippa (II), Bernice, commanders, prominent men, & Governor Festus, in an auditorium in Caesarea. Agrippa wants to hear Paul; Festus wants something to write to the emperor.	1-3 Paul appreciates the opportunity to defend himself before Agrippa. 4-8 He points out the irony that a well-known strict Pharisee is now accused for believing that Israel’s great hope—resurrection—is now being realized. 9-11 He recounts his zealous persecution of Jesus’ saints. 12-18 He recounts Jesus’ appearing to him near Damascus and appointing him to open the eyes of Gentiles, so that they also may inherit. 19-23 He affirms that he has obeyed the vision and preached repentance to the Gentiles—and that Jews have tried to kill him because he preaches that Messiah rose from death. 25-29 Accused of madness, Paul appeals to Agrippa to believe that prophecies are being fulfilled (in Jesus Messiah).	24 Festus accuses Paul of being mad. 28, 30-32 Agrippa remarks that Paul wants him to become a Christian, tells Festus that Paul has done nothing worthy of death.

C. Main Teachings of the Evangelistic Sermons

As you have seen, the Book of Acts gives nearly eighty summaries of “gospel” sermons to the unsaved: (a) twelve summaries in two sentences or more, (b) about sixty summaries in a sentence or less, (c) about six summaries by unbelievers. In those sermons five main teachings are found over and over. Each of those main teachings is summarized in the first row of the table below (see A to E). In two cases (B, C) related but secondary teachings are added in parentheses. In the column below each teaching is the evidence for it in Acts. Using this table, a serious student can verify that these teachings were emphasized—and can infer what was not taught.

The evidence for each teaching is given (a) on row 2 from the “general” (short) Acts summaries, then (b) on the other rows from most of the longer summaries. Excluded are two self-defense sermons (7:2-53 and 24:10-21) and one pre-evangelistic sermon (14:15-17). A term different from but equivalent to one in my summary, is marked “EQ.” In order to remember the import of the title Christ, its equivalent Messiah is used instead. The following abbreviations are used:

Abbreviations:
col. column
EQ equivalent

J Jesus
L Lord (Master)

M Messiah (coming
King = Christ)
res. resurrection

Reference in Acts ↓	A Jesus is Messiah/Lord. [Coming King/Master]	B MJ suffered & died (a Jewish crime).	C God raised MJ from the dead (as the first of many, and exalted Him to His own throne).	D MJ will return to rule. [Many of these are implied.]	E Repent (turn to God) & believe in MJ for forgiveness; be baptized in Jesus' name.
Stated in a general summary	<i>Messiah, or Jesus (is) Messiah:</i> 5:42; 8:5, 12; 9:22; 17:3; 18:5, 28; 20:21; 24:24; 28:31 <i>Jesus or Lord</i> <i>Jesus:</i> 8:35; 9:15, 28; 11:20; 16:31; 18:25; 19:4 17:7 another king 9:20 EQ Son	implied by col.C 17:3	<i>The res. or Jesus & the res.:</i> 4:2, 33; 17:18; 23:6 17:3 25:19	<i>EQ The kingdom (of God):</i> 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31 (assuming that the kingdom is future and as predicted)	11:1 EQ received the word 16:36 believe in the LJM 19:4 believe on MJ 20:21 repentance toward God & faith in LJM 24:24 faith in M 24:25 EQ righteousness, self-control
2:14-41 (includes response)	31 Messiah 36 Lord & M 30 EQ David's Heir 22 EQ did Messianic works	23 by Jews	24-32 33-35 adds His ascension to God's throne.	Implied by col.A 35, 40	38 Repent, be baptized 41 received his word, were baptized
3:12-26	18, 20 13, 26 EQ Servant 14, 15 EQ titles	13-15 by Jews 17-18	13-15 21 involves His ascension.	20-23 He will bring refreshing and restore all.	16 faith 19, 26 repentance 22-23 EQ listen
4:8-12	10b	10c by Jews	10d	11-12 EQ cornerstone, to save	
5:29-32	31 EQ Prince & Savior	30b by Jews	30a, 32a 31a adds His ascension.	implied by col.A	31b repentance 32b obey
10:34-43	36 Jesus Messiah, Lord of all 38 God anointed Him 38b-39a miracles	39b by Jews	40-41	42 EQ appointed judge of living and dead	43 believe [cf. 47-48 be baptized]

Reference in Acts ↓	A Jesus is Messiah/Lord. [Coming King/Master]	B MJ suffered & died (a Jewish crime).	C God raised MJ from the dead (as the first of many, and exalted Him to His own throne).	D MJ will return to rule. [Many of these are implied.]	E Repent (turn to God) & believe in MJ for forgiveness; be baptized in Jesus' name.
13:16-41	23 EQ promised Savior from David 34 EQ to give the sure blessings of David 33 EQ Son	27-29 by Jews	30-31 32-37	40-41 EQ coming judgment	38-39 believe [also 48]
17:22-31	implied by col.D		31b His res. proves He will judge.	31 EQ a day fixed for judgment	30 repent
22:1-22	8, 10, 21, etc. Lord 14 EQ the Righteous One [7:52]		implied by col.E 6-10 requires ascension [7:55-56]	implied by col.A	16 be baptized
26:1-29	15 Lord 23 Messiah		implied by col.E and 6-8 23b first to rise 13-18 requires His ascension.	implied by col.A	18 forgiveness & inheritance 20 repent 27 believe

III. Conclusions about the Sermons in Acts

1. Most of the sermon summaries in Acts state or imply the complete gospel. Some of the sermons, however, were not intended to be complete, since they were pre-evangelism of pagans (telling of the Creator) or defense before authorities.
2. As seen in the chart entitled "Main Teachings of the Evangelistic Sermons in Acts," there are five elements constantly repeated or implied in the Acts sermons. It can be assumed that these elements were essential to the gospel preached then.

- A Jesus is Messiah/Lord.**
- B Messiah Jesus suffered and died (a Jewish crime).**
- C God raised Messiah Jesus from the dead (as the first of many, and exalted Him to His own throne).**
- D Messiah Jesus will return to rule.**

E Repent (turn to God) & believe in Messiah Jesus for forgiveness; be baptized in Jesus' name.

3. One short summary embodies or implies all the parts of the gospel in Acts: “Jesus is God’s Messiah,” that is, the One who will rule, fulfilling all of God’s promises. This summary is identical to the Great Confession in the Gospels (see my note on “Son of God”). In fact, since the Gospels all have that main theme, they **are** the gospel. The gospel in Acts, however, primarily reflects the content and emphasis of the Synoptic Gospels, especially Mark. For although the Gospel of John has the same theme (20:31), it adds supplementary teachings.
4. None of the sermons in Acts includes the following teachings: Jesus’ preexistence, His virgin birth, His divinity; or the divine reasons for His death. I conclude that these truths—important as they are and quickly added in early evangelism—are not the best basis for faith. The best basis is to first see Jesus as Messiah, as the apostles preached, then learn other implications after faith begins. By following the apostolic example, we will first direct attention to God’s Word and its promises Messiah must fulfill. If we presented Him first as divine or sinbearer, we might fail to lay that foundation. (See the appendix to my [Acts Study Guide](#).)
5. Statements of the gospel in the Epistles can and should be harmonized with those in Acts. We should remember that the Epistles deal with many corollaries of the gospel as well as the gospel itself. For example, consider Corinthians 15, the most important chapter on the resurrection of the body. Its statement of the gospel in verses 3-8 not only emphasizes the resurrection; it also includes the reason for Messiah’s death:

Messiah **died for our sins** ... was buried ... was raised ... appeared.

But according to Acts 18:5, the message (gospel) first preached at Corinth was much simpler and shorter:

Jesus is Messiah.

Can the two versions be harmonized? Yes, by simply emphasizing the fact from the longer version that **it was “Messiah”** who died and rose. The reason for His death, though not essential to the original message, was a corollary important to 1 Corinthians 15 (see v. 17).