

# The Good News ("Gospel") about Salvation According to the Apostles

(In the book of Acts)

The focus of this study is on the nature of the good news itself ("What is salvation all about?"), with less emphasis on the ongoing types of things that occur because of it ("What are the consequences of being saved?"). Both of these will occur in the life of the person who follows Jesus.

## About the verses used in this study

1. Based mainly on these verses: [Acts 2:14-47](#); [3:11-4:4](#); [7:1-60](#) (esp. [v. 37](#), [52-53](#), [59-60](#)); [8:4-40](#); [9:20-22](#); [10:1-11:18](#) (esp. [10:34-43](#); [11:15-18](#)); [13: 6-49](#); [14:15-17](#); [16:22-34](#); [17:1-4](#), [16-34](#); [18:4-8](#), [28](#); [19:8-20](#); [20:20-31](#); [22:6-21](#); [24:24-25](#); [26:14-29](#) (esp. [v. 19-23](#)); [28:17-31](#); and a few verses that just make a brief comment about "believing." Altogether, there are 23 references to the good news. (The brief comments to "believing" are grouped together as one "reference.")
2. Some of these passages make only brief comments about the good news; others contain extended descriptions. Some accounts tell us that additional things were said, though the specific details are not mentioned. Some accounts were interrupted before the complete message had been given (such as when Stephen was killed before he finished – [Acts 7](#)).
3. The apostles did not present a pre-planned, memorized speech. The various descriptions of the good news are not duplicates of each other (with the same things being said the same way each time). Nevertheless, certain basic features were common to all. Paul's comments about proclaiming "the whole will of God," and about telling the people everything that would be helpful ([Acts 20:20](#), [27](#)) would have expressed the goal of everyone who proclaimed the good news. By the time the apostles were finished speaking, the people had everything they needed. (A failure to say these things would have been an act of disobedience! Compare to [Acts 26:19](#).)
4. Though all people needed to be told certain things, those who knew nothing about the true God (such as the pagans) needed to be told more of the foundational matters, than did others who were familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures (such as the Jews and the God-fearing non-Jews). For those who already knew the Bible, there was a greater focus on quoting Scripture and on showing how Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy.

## PART 1 – BASIC CONCEPTS ABOUT THE GOOD NEWS

### I. The good news briefly summarized

#### A. *Defining and proclaiming the good news (overview)*

Certain features were foundational to the good news, regardless of the occasion.

## 1. It involved testifying about Jesus – who he is, what he did, etc.

- Testifying about the resurrection – [Acts 2:32](#); [3:15](#).
- The need to trust Jesus Christ – [Acts 20:21](#).
- (Jesus as the fulfillment of O.T. prophecy): The Messiah (Jesus) would suffer, would be the first to rise from the dead, and would spread light (knowledge of the truth) to Jews and non-Jews – [Acts 26:22-23](#).

## 2. It demanded a response – a change in one's attitude and conduct. (Note that all of these verses are a continuation of the passages mentioned in the previous section.)

- You must turn to God and repent, and be baptized in Jesus' name so that your sins will be forgiven. ... You must save yourselves from this corrupt generation! – [Acts 2:37-40](#).
- You must repent and turn (to God) so that your sins may be removed – [Acts 3:19](#).
- You must repent (in your attitude and actions toward God) and trust Jesus Christ – [Acts 20:21](#).
- You must repent and turn to God, and do works that show the genuineness of your repentance – [Acts 26:20](#).

## ***B. It must be proclaimed accurately and be accepted by the hearer***

### 1. Jesus commands that we testify about it.

- Jesus to the apostles: "You will receive power... and will [must] testify about me..." – [Acts 1:8](#).
- Jesus to Paul: "I ... appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you" – [Acts 26:16](#).
- The rest of Scripture shows us that this obligation applies to all who receive the good news (not just the apostles). Note various instances in Scripture of other people proclaiming the good news (example: [Acts 11:19-21](#)) and of commands to do so (examples – [2 Timothy 2:2](#); [4:2](#)).

### 2. The power to do so will come from God.

- Jesus to the apostles: "You will have power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you..." – [Acts 1:8](#).
- Paul's example: "To this day God has been helping me (to testify)" – [Acts 26:22](#).

### 3. It has a factual basis.

- Paul to Festus, after Festus heard the good news and accused Paul of being insane: "What I am saying is true and rational" – [Acts 26:25](#). [[v. 26](#) – Paul could safely tell him that King Agrippa (also listening) would have been aware of all these facts, for these events were done out in the open.]
- Dozens of passages also make reference to Old Testament prophecy, which was fulfilled in Jesus' life and actions.

### 4. The obligation to speak the truth and to do so accurately.

- The seriousness of the matter is shown in the fact that Paul strongly emphasized these two things: (1) He did not fail to tell the people everything they needed to know; and (2) since he did not withhold anything that was a part of God's plan/purpose, he was innocent of anyone's blood (if they perish eternally) – [Acts 20:20](#), [26-27](#).

- A failure to say these things would have been an act of disobedience – [Acts 26:19](#).

## 5. The obligation for the hearer to accept the truth.

- In the past God let people do as they pleased; yet he provided plenty of evidence that he existed, through the things he did in creation – [Acts 14:16-17](#). [This left them without excuse – see [Romans 1-2](#).]
- God overlooked the times when people didn't know any better – he let them go their way (instead of judging them immediately). But now that he has given us the good news, he commands all people everywhere [all who are exposed to the good news] to repent, and he has appointed a day of judgment (and guaranteed it will take place, by raising Jesus from the dead) – [Acts 17:30](#).

## C. Two common misunderstandings

### 1. The required response (a change in one's attitude and conduct) is not the same as performing religious activities and rituals.

- Example: [Acts 15](#) – Certain Jewish believers were trying to get the non-Jews to practice Jewish religious practices ([v. 1, 5](#)). / The apostles strongly opposed it ([v. 6-21](#)). / [Acts 21:25](#) – Another affirmation of this by the Jewish leaders, several years later. [Note: The "believers" who promoted this false teaching are called "false brothers" in [Galatians 2:4](#).]

### 2. "Believing and getting baptized" has no value, if there is no change in attitude and conduct. [The modern "false gospel" doesn't emphasize this fact.]

- Example: [Acts 8:9-24](#) – Simon the magician believed and was baptized, because he was amazed by the miracles he saw. (He apparently thought that they were an expression of magic, and offered to pay for the ability to do them.) Yet Simon Peter told him that he was in danger of perishing ([v. 20](#)), his heart was not right before God ([v. 21](#)), and that he needed to repent of his attitude and talk to God (pray) about the sinfulness of his heart ([v. 22-23](#)). The magician asked Peter to pray that he wouldn't perish ([v. 24](#)), but nothing in the passage says that he ever repented or that he himself ever prayed! [Most people claim they don't want to perish; unfortunately, most don't want to repent, either. Church history tells of a "Simon the magician" who later led many astray with a false gospel.]
- Example: [Acts 15:5](#) – This verse describes people who are called "believers" in [Acts 15](#), yet they are described as "false brothers" in [Galatians 2:4](#).

## D. Dealing with distortions of the good news

Though this is not the main focus of the book of Acts, two events illustrate how to deal with distortions of the good news.

### 1. Genuine error must be opposed and rejected.

- Example: [Acts 15](#) – Certain "believers" who were Pharisees, added a demand that the Gentiles to follow the Law of Moses ([Acts 15:5](#)). Their claims were evaluated and shown to be false – contrary both to Scripture and to the very things they could see God doing in the world at that time. (In [Galatians 2:4](#), they are called "false brothers," and by implication, they come under the curse of [Galatians 1:8-9](#).)

## 2. Incomplete expressions of the good news can be corrected.

- Example: [Acts 18:24-28](#) – Apollos, for a short time, taught a partial "good news"; but once he was exposed to the entire truth, he began to teach it more accurately. (Note: This assumes that the person has a noble character and is willing to submit his views to the Scriptures. If the person refuses to change his message to the full truth, then he must be opposed and his message rejected.)

## II. The issue of "God's sovereignty" in the good news

### A. Introductory comments

1. Unlike most people today, the apostles were quite willing to make reference to God's involvement in the affairs of humans – and especially in regard to his role in salvation. To them, what people did and what God did worked together, harmoniously and with no contradiction.
2. The concepts of "God's sovereignty" and "human responsibility" are often mentioned in the same passage. The "sovereignty" aspect is often mentioned after the people have exercised their "human responsibility" and decided how they want to respond to the good news. (There are some instances in which it is mentioned in advance of their response.)
3. Verses which mention fulfilled prophecy also imply God's sovereignty.

### B. God's involvement in the world (and salvation) is described various ways

1. At times, the people's actions are described as accomplishing God's eternal purposes (though the people often didn't realize it): "Jesus was delivered over, according to God's counsel and foreknowledge... and you killed him, etc." – [Acts 2:23](#).
2. At times, God's activity is described as "overruling" that people intended to do: "You killed Jesus, but God brought him back to life" – [Acts 2:23-24](#).

### C. God's general involvement in history was sometimes included as part of the good news

1. God created all things – [Acts 14:15](#). (This would include those who were being told the good news, of course!)
2. God's blessings in creation – they are God's "witness" to himself – [Acts 14:17](#).
3. God's involvement in Israel's history was often mentioned to the Jews – [Acts 7](#), etc.

### D. God's specific involvement in salvation

1. References to fulfilled prophecy, to God sending Jesus, etc. – [Acts 2](#), etc.
2. God purchased the church with his own blood (a reference to Jesus' death on the cross) – [Acts 20:28](#).
3. All who were appointed to eternal life believed – [Acts 13:48](#).
4. God "called" some (who would become recipients of the promises given in the Old Testament) / he added to their number (the total number of those who were saved) – [Acts 2:39, 47](#).

5. God sent Jesus to bless you by turning you from your wicked ways / God granted repentance – [Acts 3:26](#); [11:18](#).
6. God gave the Holy Spirit – [Acts 11:15-17](#).
7. Regarding those who refused to believe the Scriptures, God was involved prophetically (a prophecy quoted from Isaiah); this was also a warning to them – [Acts 28:25-27](#).

### **E. God's involvement in the salvation of specific people**

1. God told Philip to go to the Ethiopian official, to tell him about Jesus – [Acts 8:26-29](#).
2. God specifically called Paul to be an apostle to the non-Jews – [Acts 26:15-18](#).

## **III. The concept of "witnessing" or "testifying"**

### **A. What is "witnessing" or "testifying"?**

1. Witnessing or testifying has to do with the proclamation of something factual.
2. A person may be an "eyewitness." The apostles physically saw Jesus and talked with him.
3. A person may have learned something factual and may try to make others aware of the same facts. (This could include testifying about the observable effects or consequences of those facts.) Those who heard the apostles can testify about the facts – now recorded in Scripture – as well as about the impact of those facts on the lives of people.
4. In all instances in these passages about "witnessing" or "testifying" about the good news, the focus is on Jesus, whether directly or indirectly.

### **B. What did the apostles "witness" about?**

1. A general reference to the "message" (about Jesus): The good news about God's grace (grace = undeserved kindness toward us) – [Acts 20:24](#) / the word (message) of the Lord – [Acts 8:25](#).
2. Who Jesus is: The "Christ" (which means, the one "set apart" by God for a special purpose) – [Acts 18:5](#) / the appointed judge of the living and the dead – [Acts 10:42](#).
3. What Jesus did (during his ministry on earth) – [Acts 10:39](#).
4. Jesus' physical resurrection from the dead – [Acts 2:24-32](#); [3:15](#), [26](#); [10:40-41](#); [13:30-37](#). [This is the primary emphasis, and the foundation that gives significance to all these other concepts. Two of the passages go into great detail about the fact that the resurrection involved Jesus' *physical* body.]
5. A reference to what the apostle Paul had seen/heard, and what he would be shown – [Acts 22:14-15](#); [26:15-16](#), [22-23](#). [Since the apostle Paul was called to be a witness at a later date (after all the other apostles had been called), the way the "witnessing" is described is a little different. Yet the focus of the message was the same.]

## IV. The concept of "believing" – what were the people to "believe"?

### A. *Some preliminary comments about the concept*

1. The good news demands an *action-based* response. Because of this, the required actions are more strongly emphasized than is the concept of "believing." This is because *genuine "believing" results in these actions*. The person who claims to have "faith" without such actions is still spiritually dead. (See the book of James.)
2. Because of this, the concept of "believing" doesn't occur very often in these accounts of the good news. But when it does, it refers to the acceptance of factual truth about Jesus. It is very specific in its focus. [Contrast this to the modern-day concept of "believing," which tends to be vague, superficial, and often irrational and distorted.]
3. In the "good news" accounts in Acts, the concept of "believing" (or "faith") is mentioned 15 times; being "persuaded" is mentioned once. All of them have to do with acceptance of the facts that were being communicated. (In some passages, this may include several facts.) The word "convinced" is also used (along with "believed") in one passage.

### B. *The immediate context of the word "believe" (or equivalent): a focus on Jesus*

1. If we look at the immediate context (or sentence) in which of the word "believe" occurs, we will normally find a reference to something about Jesus. (In some instances, there is a general reference to the "message" the people were being told.)
2. Believing the good news, the Word of God, or what the apostle taught – [Acts 8:12-13](#); [13:12](#); [26:27](#) (the message of the prophets); etc. [The second passage includes a statement about the person believing "what he saw," when an enemy of the good news was blinded by God.]
3. Passages that make a general statement about "believing" (or trust or faith) in Jesus – [Acts 16:31](#); [17:34](#); [19:9](#) (they *didn't* believe the good news), [18](#) (they *did* believe it); [20:21](#); [24:24](#); [26:15-18](#); [28:23-24](#). [These passages have reference to accepting the facts about Jesus (who he is, what he did, etc. – the good news) and responding the proper way to those facts (changes in values, lifestyle, actions, etc.). It goes far beyond merely accepting (or memorizing) a list of facts!]
4. Believing the facts about Jesus' death and physical resurrection – [Acts 4:2-4](#); [10:39-43](#); [13:37-39](#); [17:2-4](#) ("persuaded").
5. Believing various other facts about Jesus (such as who he is) – [Acts 8:37](#) (some mss.); [17:2-4](#) ("persuaded"); [18:5-8](#).

### C. *The greater context in which the word "believe" is found: the broader picture of what must be believed*

1. Note: The word "believe" might not be found in the specific verses listed, but will be found somewhere in the context.
2. A foundational understanding of who God is – [Acts 17:23-31](#) (given to people who had absolutely no comprehension of the true God).
3. A reference to the Bible (the Old Testament, which is all that they had at that time), the word (message) of the Lord, etc. – [Acts 10:43](#) (what the prophets testify); [13:7](#) (word of God), [12](#) (teaching about the Lord), [26](#) (message about salvation); [16:32](#) (word of the Lord); [17:2](#) (the

- Scriptures); [20:27](#) (the whole will of God); [26:22](#) (Moses and the Prophets); [28:23](#) (the Law and the Prophets).
4. The death and resurrection of Jesus – [Acts 3:15](#); [10:39-41](#); [13:28-31](#), [34](#), [37](#); [17:3](#), [18](#), [31-32](#); [26:22-23](#). (His burial might also be mentioned, or the fact that the resurrection involved his physical body.)
  5. Something specific about Jesus, such as a title or name that describes him: Lord, Christ, Son (of God / man), etc.
    - Lord – [Acts 8:16](#); [10:36](#); [11:17](#); [13:12](#); [16:31](#); [19:17](#); [20:21](#); [28:31](#).
    - Christ or "anointed one" – [Acts 3:18](#); [8:5](#), [12](#); [10:36](#), [38](#), [48](#); [11:17](#); [17:3](#); [18:5](#); [24:24](#); [26:23](#); [28:31](#).
    - Son – [Acts 8:37](#); [13:33](#).
    - Other – [Acts 3:14-15](#), [22](#) (Holy and righteous one / Author of life / Prophet like Moses); [13:23](#), [35](#) (Savior / Holy One); [16:34](#) compared to [16:31](#) ("believe in God" parallels "believe in the Lord Jesus").
  6. A reference to forgiveness or a similar concept (along with an explanation of what is needed in order to receive that forgiveness) – [Acts 3:19](#) (sins wiped out); [8:22](#); [10:43](#); [13:38](#); [26:18](#).
  7. A reference to the future judgment, the kingdom of God, etc. – [Acts 3:23](#) (being "cut off"); [4:2](#) (resurrection from the dead); [8:12](#) (kingdom of God); [10:42](#) (the living and dead to be judged); [17:31](#) (resurrection and judgment); [24:25](#) (the judgment to come, etc.); [28:31](#) (kingdom of God).

#### **D. Some general observations about the concept of "believing" in the proclamation of the Good News (in Acts)**

1. Today, many people say that the "good news" is summarized by the word "believe" – often without even defining what the "believing" is all about! In the Bible, "believing" is *not* the "good news," but a response to it! People were told to "accept" the good news, or to "trust" Jesus for their salvation (based on the *facts* they were shown in the Scriptures).
2. Believing as a command: In about 30% of the passages, the people are told (= a direct command) that they must "believe" what had been proclaimed (or told that they must "trust" Jesus). Or else "believing" (or "trusting") is described (= an implied command) as part of what must be done in order to be saved.
3. Believing as a response: In about 30% of the passages, "believing" is simply a response to what was spoken. We read that the people "believed" what they were told. (These passages contain no command or factual statement that tells the people they need to "believe.")
4. Believing not mentioned: In about 40% of the passages which describe the good news, the word "believe" (or something similar) is not even mentioned. Of these, about half are general statements (or in one case, the speaker was killed before he was finished); the other half focus on the person's need to change his conduct or actions.

#### **E. Things that happen before and after "believing" – the sequence of events**

1. These relationships are not mentioned very often in these verses – and it shouldn't surprise us, since the word "believe" is not too often used as a part of the message. (More often, it is either not present, or else the word is used as a response to the good news.)
  - Things that come first: Repentance and/or turning to God – [Acts 20:21](#); [26:18](#).

- Every time in the New Testament that "repentance" and "believe" (or "faith") are found together, "repentance" is mentioned first.
2. "Turning to God" seems to be a more general concept. Though often mentioned before the concept of "believing," there are passages in which the concept seems to occur at the same time, or after the "believing" occurs. If nothing else, we can at least say that the two are inseparable.
  3. Things that come afterwards: baptism, salvation, justification, forgiveness, a public confession of sins and a change in lifestyle (values and actions).
    - Baptized – [Acts 8:12](#); [8:37-38](#); [18:8](#).
    - Forgiveness – [Acts 10:43](#).
    - Justification – [Acts 13:39](#).
    - Salvation – [Acts 16:31](#).
    - Public confession of sins / a change in lifestyle – [Acts 19:18](#).
  4. Other passages that explain more fully the nature of salvation (such as Paul's epistles) would need studied, in order to better understand the relationships between all these concepts.

## PART 2 – SPECIFIC DETAILS ABOUT THE GOOD NEWS

### I. The message: A focus on Jesus

#### A. *Some general comments*

1. These observations are based on the passages which go into some detail about what was said. (General statements and short summaries tend to omit specific details.)
2. In all instances except one, the focus of the good news was something about Jesus.
3. In one instance, the focus was on foundational issues – who God was and how he has left a "witness" for himself in the things of nature. (The apostles were trying to keep the people from worshipping them! Until the people understood something about who God was, nothing else would have any value to them.)

#### B. *Teaching about foundational matters*

1. Those who were totally unfamiliar with the Bible (such as idolaters and pagan philosophers) were first told about foundational matters: who God is and his relationship to people. [Acts 14:15-17](#) (God as creator and giver of good things); [17:23-28+](#) (the God who made everything, etc.).
2. There are two instances (the Proconsul at Paphos and the Philippian jailor) in which we don't know what they were told. We also don't know what they previously knew. [Acts 13:7b](#), [12](#); [16:29-30](#), [32](#).

#### C. *Jesus and the fulfillment of prophecy*

1. Jews and God-fearing Gentiles (non-Jews) – people who already understood something about the Bible – tended to be shown how Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy.

2. Some specific Old Testament passages mentioned in these accounts include: [Isaiah 53:7-8](#) (in [Acts 8:26-40](#)) / [Joel 2:28-32](#); [Psalm 16:8-11](#); [Psalm 110:1](#) (in [Acts 2:14-47](#)) / [Psalm 2:7](#); [Isaiah 55:3](#); [Psalm 16:10](#) and more (in [Acts 13:13-49](#)) / [Deut. 18:15](#) (in [Acts 7:37, 52-53](#)).
3. There are numerous general references to the apostles "proving" that their claims about Jesus were true, or to "explaining" the Law and the Prophets, etc. The word "prove" (or similar) is commonly used in these passages, to demonstrate that what they were saying was historical fact. (When people didn't accept the facts, it wasn't because of lack of evidence; rather it was because of their stubborn, unrepentant hearts. They didn't want to admit that they had been living in error for their entire lives!)

#### **D. Jesus' death and resurrection**

1. This emphasis was common to all three types of people who are mentioned in these passages: Jews, God-fearing Gentiles, and pagans (once the foundational matters were understood by them).
2. Some passages emphasize the fact that this refers to a genuine physical death and a genuine physical resurrection, often stating that afterwards he was seen by many people – [Acts 2:23-24](#); [3:15](#); [10:39-40](#); [13:28-31](#).
3. One passage mentions Jesus' burial in the tomb – [Acts 13:29](#).
4. Two passages also emphasize that Jesus' body did not decay – [Acts 2:25-32](#); [13:34-37](#).
5. The Jews were sometimes also told that Jesus had to suffer, perhaps because they were looking for a Messiah who would be a glorious king, rather than one who would be a servant, and who would suffer and die – [Acts 17:3](#); [26:23](#). (The Old Testament tells us that the "suffering" aspect would come first, but many of the Jews would not accept it.)
6. Generalized statements about the good news tend to not mention these details; but simply allude to Jesus as the "Lord" (Master over all) or "Christ" (the one who was chosen or "anointed" for a special purpose).

#### **E. Jesus as Lord (Master) over all**

1. This is not a mere "religious" term. It means "master" – the opposite of the words "slave" and "servant." It refers to Jesus as the ultimate ruler over all people and things, with no exceptions. Even those who presently reject his Lordship (or who pretend he doesn't exist) will someday bow down to him and acknowledge that Jesus is Lord over all.
2. 10 times – There is a direct or indirect statement about Jesus being "Lord." [Acts 2:36](#); [7:59](#); [8:16](#); [10:36](#); [13:12](#); [16:31](#); [19:17](#); [20:21](#); [22:8](#); [28:31](#).
3. Of the 13 times that "Lord" is not mentioned...
  - 10 times: Some other title (most often the word "Christ") is attributed to Jesus.
  - 1 time: The good news focused on the foundational issue of who God is.
  - 2 times: The passage makes only a general comment about the good news.

#### **F. Jesus as the Messiah or Christ (or a similar concept)**

1. This is not a mere "religious" term. It means "chosen or anointed one" – someone who has been set apart or chosen for a special purpose. In reference to Jesus, it refers to the person God has chosen for a special purpose, whether the focus is on Jesus' rule over his people (Israel), or on him bringing salvation to people of all nations.

2. 12 times – There is a direct or indirect statement about Jesus being "Christ" (or an equivalent term, such as "anointed"). This includes one passage which describes him as "appointed" by God. [Acts 2:36](#); [3:20](#); [8:12](#); [9:22](#); [10:48](#); [17:3](#), [31](#); [18:5](#), [28](#); [24:24](#); [26:23](#); [28:31](#). (Some of these passages have multiple references to "Christ," but only one instance per passage is listed here.)
3. Of the 11 times that "Christ" (or equivalent) is not mentioned...
  - 8 times: Some other title (most often the word "Lord") is attributed to Jesus.
  - 1 time: The good news focused on the foundational issue of "who God is."
  - 2 times: The passage makes only a general comment about the good news.

### **G. Other titles attributed to Jesus**

1. The "Son" ("of God" or "of man") – [Acts 7:56](#) (Son of Man); [8:37](#) (Son of God); [9:20](#) (Son of God); [13:33](#) ("my Son" – quoting God in [Psalm 2:7](#)).
2. "A prophet" (like Moses), focusing on his fulfillment of a prophecy recorded by Moses – [Acts 3:22](#); [7:37](#).
3. The "Righteous One," focusing on his character or nature – [Acts 3:14](#); [7:52](#); [22:14](#).
4. The "Holy One" (or "Holy"), focusing on his character or nature – [Acts 3:14](#); [13:35](#).
5. "Author of life" and "Savior," focusing on his relationship to us (and what he has done for us) – [Acts 3:15](#); [13:23](#).
6. In comparing [Acts 16:31](#) and [16:34b](#), "believing in the Lord Jesus" parallels "believing in God."

## **II. The message: A focus on sin, judgment and forgiveness**

### **A. Some general comments**

1. Here our focus is on the content of the message. (Actions which are related to these issues will be examined in another section.)
2. Nearly 45% of the passages have a reference to sin or the need to be forgiven.
3. Most of the other passages are brief, general statements that mention very few specifics about the good news. Some of them mention something that *implies* the need to deal with sin, or they mention *actions* related to dealing with sin. (Actions are examined in another section.)

### **B. Passages that mention sin, judgment and forgiveness**

1. There are 10 passages. Some of them contain two or more of the following concepts. Also, *all* have a reference (direct or implied) to Jesus.
2. 4 times – Specific sins are mentioned (see the context of the verses listed). In order to be saved, the hearer must deal with these sins.
  - You put Jesus to death – [Acts 2:23](#). (Also [v. 40](#) – they were part of a "corrupt generation.")
  - You killed / disowned Jesus – [Acts 3:13-14](#); [3:26](#) (wicked ways, also [v. 19](#) – sins).
  - Israel's rebellions history recounted / you (Israel's offspring) betrayed/murdered Jesus and haven't obeyed the Law (Old Testament) – [Acts 7](#) (various verses).

- Wanting to buy the Holy Spirit; heart not right before God; wickedness; bitterness; captive to sin – [Acts 8:20-23](#).
  - Additional passages make a general reference to sin that must be forsaken, forgiven, or dealt with in some manner.
3. 5 times – There is a direct reference to the coming judgment. The resurrection of the dead (which implies judgment) is also mentioned.
    - The resurrection of the dead – [Acts 4:2](#).
    - Simon the magician was in danger of perishing because of his sins (and his sinful heart) – [Acts 8:20](#).
    - Jesus, the judge of the living and the dead – [Acts 10:42](#).
    - God will judge the world – [Acts 17:31](#).
    - Paul discoursed on the judgment to come – [Acts 24:25](#).
  4. 6 times – The need for forgiveness is mentioned, sometimes in reference to specific sins. There will often be specific details about what must be done to receive this forgiveness – repent, trust Jesus, etc.
    - Forgiveness of sins – [Acts 2:38](#); [10:43](#); [13:38](#); [26:18](#).
    - Repent / pray... perhaps the Lord will forgive you... (a warning to Simon the magician) – [Acts 8:22](#).
    - Stephen's prayer: Don't hold this sin against them – [Acts 7:60](#).
  5. There are also passages in which a related concept is mentioned (such as peace with God, or having sins removed).
    - Peace through Jesus Christ – [Acts 10:36](#).
    - Sins wiped out – [Acts 3:19](#).
    - Wash your sins away – [Acts 22:16](#).

### **C. Passages that don't make a direct reference to these issues (but they are sometimes implied)**

1. Though not directly stated, some references to the good news mention something that *implies* judgment or the need for forgiveness. Other references to the good news are so brief that they hardly mention anything about its definition. (Example – [Acts 13:12](#), where it is simply described as, "The teaching about the Lord.")
2. 1 time – The need for justification ([Acts 13:39](#)) implies that a wrong has been committed, and needs dealt with. (This concept is more frequently mentioned in Paul's epistles, where the nature of salvation is explained in greater detail.)
3. 3 times – Passages mention the "kingdom of God" – a topic that has implications about judgment and justice. [Acts 8:12](#); [19:8](#); [28:23](#), [31](#). These expressions of the good news are directed toward people who already knew about the Bible – Jews and God-fearing Gentiles.
4. 1 time – The passage focuses only on foundational issues – who God is and who we are. [Acts 14:15-17](#). God's goodness and the need for us to change our attitude toward him are mentioned. Our need to "turn" implies that we aren't doing what we should.
5. 2 times – The account involves conversations that were initiated by the hearers. We are not told what they already knew, nor what the apostles said. But the hearers understood their need to change, as shown by their request to be baptized ([Acts 8:36-38](#)) or to be saved ([Acts 16:30](#)). [Baptism signified a public rejection of one's past ways and the decision to follow a new way of life. It had a lot more significance than people often give it today.]

6. 8 times – Some passages are short summaries or general references to the good news. About half of these refer (directly or by implication) to the need to deal with sin, or to baptism (which signified the rejection of one's past way of living).

### **III. The message: Additional concepts sometimes mentioned**

#### **A. *These are additional concepts that define what it means to follow Jesus.***

1. Depending on the context, they may be included as part of the presentation of the good news, or they may be mentioned as part of the people's response.
2. They are fully compatible with those concepts that are more commonly mentioned (already examined above), and are often implied by them.

#### **B. *Concepts related to people and the good news***

1. We are God's "offspring" – [Acts 17:28-30](#). (This was spoken to pagans who understood nothing about the good news, and is related to our being created in God's "image.")
2. People who fear God and do what is right are accepted by God – [Acts 10:34-35](#). (This was spoken to people who already desired to follow God. Everyone present was eager to hear what God wanted Peter to tell them – [v. 33](#); some were also described as "devout and God-fearing" in a previous verse – [v. 2](#).)
3. Through the good news, Christ would proclaim "light" (truth) to both Jew and Gentile – [Acts 26:23](#).

#### **C. *Concepts related to people once they have chosen to follow Jesus***

1. Peace (with God) through Jesus Christ – [Acts 10:36](#).
2. Blessed by God – [Acts 3:25-26](#).
3. Receive the Holy Spirit – [Acts 2:38](#), etc.
4. Justified from what they previously couldn't (when under the Old Testament Law) – [Acts 13:39](#).
5. Having a place among those who are sanctified (= made holy) – [Acts 26:18](#).

### **IV. Actions – a part of the good news (introductory comments)**

#### **A. *General overview***

1. Actions are mentioned in 15 of the passages (about 2/3 of them).
2. According to Paul, a focus on actions was a standard part of his presentation of the good news. (See the section about repentance.)
3. Of those instances in which actions are not mentioned (about 1/3 of the passages), most of them are short summaries or statements, often with little else mentioned. A few are instances in which the good news was rejected by the hearer.

## **B. The importance of actions in salvation**

1. Described as a command: In the majority of the passages in which actions are mentioned, the actions are described as mandatory or required. (This may be directly stated or may be implied by what is said.)
2. Described as a fact: In the remaining few passages, the actions are described factually – such as, "They did it." Either: 1) they had been told that those actions were required (though the passage does not include such a statement), or 2) they simply considered it to be the logical "next step" in their response.

## **V. Repentance, "turning around," etc.**

### **A. The importance of repentance or "turning around"**

1. Repentance refers to a change in one's attitudes, values and actions, and includes a rejection of one's past way of life. "Turning" may refer to the same concept, or to some other necessary change.
2. Though repentance is commonly described as something a person is required to do, it is also described as a gift from God – [Acts 11:18](#). In this respect, it is similar to faith, which is also both an obligation and a gift.
3. Repentance, or turning around, are mentioned in about 40% of the passages. *In every instance*, they are described as a required response, either in a direct command or implied. One passage describes it as "repentance unto life," implying that repentance is part of the process or means by which a person received eternal life.
4. Though repentance and turning (away from sin or to God) are not directly mentioned in *every* reference to the good news, we read that it was a standard part of Paul's presentation – [Acts 20:21](#); [26:17-20](#). Note also that it is a requirement that God gives to *all* people everywhere – [Acts 17:30](#).
5. Verses that mention this concept:
  - Repent and be baptized... for the forgiveness of your sins – [Acts 2:38](#).
  - Repent and turn to God... so that your sins may be wiped out, etc. – [Acts 3:19](#).
  - Simon the magician was told: Repent of this wickedness and pray... maybe the Lord will forgive you... – [Acts 8:22](#).
  - Jewish Christians: Rejoicing that God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life – [Acts 11:18](#).
  - God commands all people everywhere to repent – [Acts 17:30](#).
  - Paul: I declare to (all people) that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus – [Acts 20:21](#).
  - Paul: I preached (to all people) that they should repent and turn to God, and prove their repentance by what they do – [Acts 26:20](#).
  - (God sent Jesus) to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways – [Acts 3:26](#).
  - We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from worthless things to the living God – [Acts 14:15](#).
  - (Paul sent) to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God... – [Acts 26:18](#).

- A prophecy against those who refused the truth: Their hearts have become calloused (etc.)... otherwise they might see/hear/understand and turn, and I would heal them – [Acts 28:27](#).

## **B. Comparison to the concept of "believing"**

1. Repentance (or turning) is *always* given as a required response. Compare this to the concept of "believing," which is described as a required response in only about half the instances in which the concept is mentioned!
2. In many passages, the command to "repent" (or "turn") is present, with no mention of "believing." However, when the two concepts do occur together, repentance and turning are *always* mentioned first.

## **VI. Baptism**

### **A. The importance of baptism**

1. Baptism is directly mentioned in about 30% of the passages. In about half of these, it is described as a *requirement* or *obligation*. In the other half, it is described as a *fact*, such as, "They were baptized." (In one case, the hearer seemed to know that baptism was necessary, though there is no record that the speaker had ever mentioned it.)
2. When baptism is mentioned along with repentance or believing (faith or trust), it is placed *after* those concepts. Repentance and belief (in that order) must occur first.
3. Note that, in the book of Acts, baptism had a different significance than it often has for people today. In Acts, it was normally the first expression of believing and obeying the Scriptures. It was done publicly – which means it was often observed by unbelievers, people who might respond with hostility. It was not a "religious ritual," but a *public* acknowledgement of change in one's life and perspective about life. [Today, many people have redefined the word "public" to mean "private" – that is, behind the closed doors of a "church building" (a concept that never existed in the New Testament), where the world does not know what is happening.]
4. Verses that mention this concept:
  - Repent and be baptized! / Those who accepted his message were baptized – [Acts 2:38, 41](#).
  - They believed (the good news) and were baptized – [Acts 8:12-13](#). (So did Simon the magician.)
  - The officer: Why shouldn't I be baptized? Philip: You need to believe in Jesus (etc.) – [Acts 8:36-38](#).
  - Peter: These people have just received the Holy Spirit! (See [11:15-18](#) – this was described as being "baptized" with the Holy Spirit, and was connected with God giving them "repentance unto life.") How can we refuse to let them be baptized? (He then ordered that they be baptized.) – [Acts 10:47-48](#).
  - What must I do to be saved? Believe in the Lord Jesus... Immediately they were baptized – [Acts 16:30-33](#).
  - They believed and were baptized – [Acts 18:8](#).
  - Ananias to Paul (shortly after Paul's conversion): Why wait? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name – [Acts 22:16](#).

## **B. Relationship to the concept of "believing"**

1. When baptism is described as a *requirement* or *obligation*, the concept of "believing" is often *not* present. But in such instances, some other required action (such as "repent" or "call on Jesus' name") is mentioned.
2. The concept of "believing" is mentioned in each of the passages in which baptism is described as a *fact*. In these instances, the baptism occurred as the logical "next step" (after "believing") in following Jesus.
3. In one instance (Simon the magician), the person believed the good news and was baptized, yet his heart was still not right before God ([Acts 8:20-23](#)). This underscores the importance of actions, such as repentance, in the process of salvation. (Believing can be temporary or may be done for the wrong reasons. Baptism can be a mere ritual with no significance, if the person's heart hasn't changed.)

## **VII. Other actions**

### **A. Introductory comments**

1. In about 20% of the passages, some other action is mentioned. In about half of these, it is a command (or implied as needed); in the other half, it is presented as a fact describing what the people did.
2. In most of these instances, either "trust" (faith) in Jesus or "believing" (the Scriptures or the facts about Jesus) is also mentioned.

### **B. Commands (or actions that are implied as necessary)**

1. Seeking and reaching out for God (implied as needed, spoken to people who were totally ignorant of the true God) – [Acts 17:26-27](#).
2. Demonstrate one's repentance by one's deeds/actions – [Acts 26:20](#).
3. Righteousness and self-control (implied as needed) – [Acts 24:25](#).
4. Calling on Jesus' name (results – sins washed away) – [Acts 22:16](#).

### **C. Descriptions of what the people did (not a command), with the implication that it was a good action**

1. Honoring Jesus / his name – [Acts 19:17](#).
2. Confessing sins and destroying things they used in their practice of sin – [Acts 19:18-19](#). (In this instance, it involved occult writings.)
3. A description of how the believers lived – [Acts 2:42-47](#).