

The Authority of Apostles and Prophets in the Book of Acts

For

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By

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Introduction:

This paper will explore the authority of apostles and prophets found within the book of Acts. The book of Acts is significant because from it we can gather not only historical data from it but also a narrative theology about prophets and apostles. In other words, what does Luke the theologian have to teach us about the subject of prophets and apostles?

A look at the authority of prophets will be considered at first and then a look at the authority of apostles. The last section will examine the Jerusalem council in Acts 15 and to determine the authority of individual members verses the membership at large. It is the contention of this paper that prophets and apostles were servants of the word of God and to the church. They had unique gifts but they did not have absolute authority that some place anachronistically on them today. I will try to show that the Jerusalem council acted in an already formed Jewish model of governance, that of group consensus and not individual autocracy.

1. A look at the authority of prophets in the book of Acts

Prophets do play a part in the book of Acts, but not major one. Between the two groups being examined, apostles are shown to be as the prevalent group that Luke concentrates on as servants of the gospel in the formation of the early church. I would like to examine the etymology of the word prophet used in the book of Acts and its derivative. I would also like to trace each time a prophet or prophets are mentioned in the book of Acts to establish their authority.

1.1 The word prophet and its derivatives found in the book of Acts.

The Greek word for prophet is transliterated “prophetes.” It means, “*prophet* as proclaimer and interpreter of the divine revelation...”¹ It is used about 30 times in the book of Acts but the majority of the uses are about Old Testament prophets² (Joel 2:16; David 2:30; Moses 3:22, 7:37, 22:26; Abraham 3:25; Samuel 3:24, 13:20; Amos 7:42, 15:15; Isaiah [the prophet or the book³] 7:48; 8:28, 30, 34; 28:25; Habakkuk 13:31; and in general O.T. prophets⁴ 3:18, 7:52⁵; 21,25: 10:43; 13:27) It is also used in the context of the double tradition meaning the Hebrew Scriptures (“Law and Prophets 13:15; 24:14; 28:23⁶; [“prophets and Moses” 26:22]; “prophets” 26:27?). It is used of Jesus twice as a prophet⁷ (3:22; 7:37). There is also a false prophet⁸ mentioned (Bar-Jesus 13:6). The rest, being the minority, are used in the case of a New Testament prophets⁹ (general N.T. “prophets” 11:27; 13:1; Agabus 11:28; 21:10; Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen and Saul 13:1; Judas and Silas 15:32). It is interesting to note that the word prophet does have authority but only when it is connected to the context of the written Scriptures. Also note that Luke takes pains to root the activity of the Spirit and the newly found church in the Scriptures not though inspired speech of the Spirit.

¹ Bauer, Walter et al. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*. The University of Chicago Press, 1979. p. 723. (Italics theirs).

² Ibid. “of prophets and prophetic personalities in the OT...” p. 723.

³ Ibid. “The prophet also stands for his book...” p. 723.

⁴ Ibid. “The (plural)... brings *the prophets* together under one category...” p. 723. (italics theirs)

⁵ Ibid. “also in other senses, without excluding the actual prophets, of men who proclaimed the divine message w. special preparation and w. special mission...” p. 723-724.

⁶ Ibid. “of the prophets as a division of scripture...” p. 723.

⁷ Ibid. “Jesus as a prophet... w. reference to the messiah and hence to Jesus...” p. 723.

⁸ The Greek word for false prophet is ‘pseudoprophetes’ meaning, “*false prophet*, one who falsely claims to be prophet of God or who prophecies falsely...” BAGD. p. 892.

⁹ Ibid. “Christians, who are endowed w. the gift of (prophecy). p. 724.

The word “prophesies” is used four times in the book of Acts. The Greek word is transliterated “propheteuo”, which means to, “proclaim a divine revelation”¹⁰. In Acts 2:17 and 18 Luke quotes a passage from Joel which the New Testament translates it as “prophesy”. The tense in the Greek for both these verses is future active indicative, meaning that when the Spirit is poured out on individuals they will in fact prophesy themselves. This is the same word the Septuagint translates for prophesy in Joel 2:28. It is used in the context of the democratization of the Spirit to all believers with the accompanying Spirit inspired speech, in this case prophesy. This could include prophetic speech by New Testament prophets but Luke uses it in the sense of the Spirit being given to all believers and the accompanying gift of Spirit inspired speech.

It is also found in Acts 19:6 and is translated as prophesied. The Greek tense of the word prophesied is the imperfect active indicative, which means when Paul placed his hands on the Ephesian believers they prophesied and were able to do it continually. This does not mean that these individuals became New Testament prophets but that they received the gift of the Spirit accompanied by Spirit speech which included the ability to speech in tongues and utter prophet speech. It is also is found in Acts 21:9 in the context when Paul and his companions arrived in Caesarea they were given hospitality by Philip called an evangelist and his four daughters who prophesied. Whether these daughters were prophets Luke does not say. The tense in the Greek the present active participle suggesting these daughters were prophesying at the time Paul was with them. Luke seems to be setting up the scenario for the following verse when a named prophet, Agabus prophesies over Paul about what will happen to him if he proceeds to Jerusalem.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 723.

1.1 The Authority of the prophets in the New Testament

There are only limited references of actual New Testament prophets in the book of Acts; Agabus in 11:28: 21:10; Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen and Saul in 13:1 and Judas and Silas 15:32. The purpose of this section is to find out how Luke portrays prophets in the book of Acts and particularly what authority; if any did they exercise in the early church. The four times the word prophesy or prophesied will be examined as well for any hint of authority.

1.2.1 Agabus and the Prophets in Antioch (11:27-28)

“During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.)”¹¹

The question that is being asked of this text is what if any authority did the prophets including Agabus have in the early church? In other words, were prophets seen as leaders in the newly forming church?

The context is the larger pericope is verses 19-30. It is found after Peter receives the vision of large sheet being lowered from heaven and God speaking to him essentially about a mission to the gentiles. After he explains his presence in Cornelius' house to the believers in Jerusalem and how God has opened a door of ministry to the gentiles some disciples who had been scattered in the persecution after Stephen's martyrdom when to Antioch and had success preaching to the gentiles there. When the church in Jerusalem heard about what was happening in Antioch they sent Barnabas to help in this situation. He went and found Paul and they stayed for a year teaching the new disciples in Antioch.

¹¹ All quotations of the scriptures following are from the NIV.

At that time, as we read above in verses 27 and 28, prophets came down from Jerusalem apparently to minister to the new converts in Antioch. At that time one of the prophets named Agabus speaks through the Holy Spirit and predicts a famine. The believers act on this prediction and gather a collection for the believers in Judea.

There are a number of things to note about this pericope. The church in Jerusalem sends Barnabas when they hear of the events in Antioch. This is juxtaposed to some prophets going to Antioch without apparently being sent. This would not mean that they are wrong in going but means it is not in an official capacity. On another note, Barnabas' commission entailed teaching (v. 26). He is sent by the Church in Jerusalem to pastor it.¹²

The passage does not say what the prophets did in verse 27 and why they came. Verse 28 may shed a little light on their ministry but not much. Agabus foretells by the Spirit something that will affect the known Roman world. This prediction is more general in nature and not specifically about the church in Antioch. The believers from Antioch will assist in the collection for the saints in Judea but this Spirit inspired speech seems to be meant for the greater church body. The prophets in this verse do not exercise authority over the newly formed Antioch church. These prophets are, as French Arrington states, “inspired mouthpieces of the Spirit to promote and guide the church in its mission of spreading the gospel.”¹³ Therefore this passage of scripture does not indicate that these prophets acted in any capacity of leadership in the newly formed Antioch church.

¹² Arrington, French. , Stronstad, Roger. *Life in the Spirit New Testament Commentary: Acts of the Apostles*. Arrington, French. Zondervan, 1999. “Barnabas and Saul serve as pastors for a year. Their work includes both evangelism and building up existing converts.” p. 593.

¹³ Ibid. p. 593.

1.2.2 The prophets at the sending of Barnabas and Saul in Antioch (13:1-3)

“In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.”

Did this group of prophets exercise authority in sending Barnabas and Saul or were they acting in a meditative capacity between the two and another party? At a cursory glance it may suggest that these prophets had authority to send Barnabas and Saul but when the text is examined this is not the case.

Luke begins by mentioning the church at Antioch the beginning of this pericope. This is not an inconsequential statement only to place where the event transpired. It is part a larger Lucian theme of placing authority within the church or the cooperate people of God in a local setting. In Acts 11: 22 when gentiles in Antioch came to faith in Christ the church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas to pastor them. In Acts 14:27 Paul and Barnabas came back to the church at Antioch and reported to them their ministry with the gentiles and then stayed with them for a while. In Acts 15:3 the church at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to the church at Jerusalem to see what the apostles and elders of that church would say about the question of circumcision and salvation. In Acts 15:4 the church in Jerusalem welcomes them as does the apostles and elders. In Acts 15:22 the church at Jerusalem decides to send Paul, Barnabas and some of their own people back to the church in Antioch with the decision they have reached about the issue. In Acts 15:30-31 they arrive in Antioch and bring the church together to share the church at Jerusalem’s decision. The people of the church read it and were glad and encouraged about their

decision. Antioch, the capital of Syria, becomes the launching pad so to speak of the gentile initiative. Arrington posits, “Barnabas and Saul are then sent off as representatives of the church at Antioch.”¹⁴ Authority is in the whole of the community, not a select few such as prophets.

Prophets are linked with and unrecognizable from teachers according to this passage. We do not know who were prophets of the names listed in the text were and who were teachers. In fact, there probably was no real distinction in the mind of Luke when he wrote this gospel. What this suggests is that Luke is rehearsing to his readers that various gifts of the Spirit were used in building up the church. These prophet-teachers were used in commissioning Barnabas and Saul as servants of the Spirit.

Our passage centers on the authority of the Spirit. Twice, in verse 2 and 5 Luke underscores the Holy Spirit as the one setting apart and sending the duo. The prophet-teachers were the ones who heard and placed their hands and then sent them off in obedience to the Spirit. As noted above they were also acting on the behalf of the church at Antioch. There is no inherent authority in this group of prophet-teachers, they are acting as mediators of the Spirit and Barnabas and Saul.

1.2.3 Judas and Silas, prophets who encourage the church at Antioch (Acts 15:30-35)

“So they were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers. After spending some time there, they were sent off by the believers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them. But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.”

¹⁴ Arrington. p. 598.

The context in this segment of is one of bringing encouragement to the Church at Antioch after the confusion from the circumcision group. First, the letter encouraged them (vv. 30-31). Then Judas and Silas encouraged them presumably, by not solely, through prophecy (v. 32). They stayed for some time in this capacity and then were sent on there away after completing there task. It was Paul, Barnabas and a number of others who stayed and continued minister to those at Antioch. They were at Antioch to speak encouragingly to them and there is little evidence that they exercised any authority over the church.

1.2.4 Agabus the prophet warns Paul of upcoming danger (Acts 21:10-14)

“After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming over to us, he took Paul’s belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, “The Holy Spirit says, ‘In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.’” When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, “Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, ‘The Lord’s will be done.’”

The context is that Paul is on his way to Jerusalem compelled by the Spirit (20:22). Paul is staying in Caesarea with Philip, one of the seven (6:1-7). While Paul and his companions were there Agabus a prophet comes from Judea and in an Old Testament fashion¹⁵ prophetically speaks of the fate of Paul if he goes to Jerusalem. Paul stays committed to the task the Spirit has directed him despite the longings of those around him. They finally give in putting him into the Lord’s hands. Did Agabus have any authority as a leader or was he being a servant of the Spirit and relaying a message. The

¹⁵ Arrington. “As a striking parallel to some of the Old Testament prophets, he expresses the Spirit’s message words... and symbolic actions...” p. 649.

passage suggests the former. Agabus was not sent from Judea, Luke just states he came to Caesarea seemingly on his own accord. Luke even re-introduces him by his name and giftedness after we are introduced to him in chapter eleven. He does not therefore seem to be a prominent individual in the Judean church. If Agabus had an official position, Paul may take his warning a little more seriously, but he does not. Even though Agabus is reminiscent of an Old Testament prophet he does not have the authority they and their words carried. Paul already knows that he will face difficulties when he goes to Jerusalem (20:23). He does not treat lightly what Agabus says but he does not comply with Agabus' interpretation of it either. Agabus and those around Paul who are trying to dissuade him finally capitulate and surrender Paul to the Lord's plan for him to go to Jerusalem. This prophetic utterance shows that Agabus was there as a messenger of the Spirit and did not act in any capacity of leadership or authority.

1.2.5 The word prophesies in the book of Acts and any inherent authority attached to it.

As noted above, the word prophesies are mentioned four times in the book of Acts. These occurrences will be examined to see if the individuals connected with these prophetic utterances have any authority in the early church.

The first and second time it is used is in Luke's quotation of Joel's prophecy about the Spirit being poured out on all flesh found in Acts 2:17-18.

*“In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.*

*Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.*

The context is Peter's message in explaining the recent events of those gathered in the upper room and speaking in tongues. Peter roots this event in the Old Testament Scriptures by quoting Joel. Both Luke the writer and Peter the speaker liken tongues to prophecy.¹⁶ Peter explains to the onlookers that they are not drunk but in contrast filled with the Spirit of God.

The first thing to note is that this passage is about the democratization of Spirit inspired speech to all believers, not a select few. Those who will prophesy will be from every walk of life. This includes age, gender and social standing. It is a greater theme in Luke's writings that is being stressed here; the Spirit given to all people and the authority of the Spirit now inherent in all people. This is reminiscent of another Old Testament passage found in Numbers 11:29. "But Moses replied, 'Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!'" The Spirit comes upon seventy elders and two other elders in the camp prophesied. Joshua wanted Moses to stop them but he refused and wished the democratization of the Spirit and the ability to prophesy on all people. This came true on the day of Pentecost in the book of Acts. Those who prophesy according to Luke do have an authority but it is the collective authority through the Spirit. There is no individual prophetic authority found in this passage.

¹⁶ Burgess, Stanley, M. et al. *Dictionary of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*. The Gift of Prophecy. Robeck, C.M. Zondervan. 1988. "Evidentially... the ability to speak in tongues... was understood first by Peter, then by many in the multitude, to be a form of 'prophetic' speech. This allowed Peter to appeal to Joel in the way he did." p. 734.

The next time prophesy is used in the book of Acts is 19:6. The context is that Paul is in Ephesus and he meets up with some disciples who have not received the Spirit yet. Paul explains the gospel message to them and they believe and are baptized in water. He then places his hands on them and the Spirit comes on them and they speak in tongues and prophesy. There were about twelve of them in number.

“When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.”

Notice that tongues and the ability to prophesy are joined together in this passage as well. This is as well about the democratization of the Spirit and his gifts especially Spirit inspired speech. Paul placing his hands on these disciples is so they would receive the gift of the Spirit. It has not the same connotation that laying on of hands in other instances of sending or authorizing them to do anything. Their prophecies were not recorded and therefore have no authority. This ability to prophesy is included with tongues as a sign gift that the Spirit has come on them. These twelve individuals are not acting in nor commissioned to any positions of authority.

The final time prophesy is used in the book of Acts is in 21:8-9. In the context, Paul arrives in Caesarea and stays with Philip the evangelist. Philip, we are told have four unmarried daughters who have the ability to prophesy. Luke introduces Agabus in the next verse and the theme of whether Paul should go to Jerusalem is continued here.

“Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.”

Luke does not let us know what these daughters prophesied about, but he does suggest they were active in this gift while Paul was present as the Greek tense indicates.

If they are apart of the larger theme of people trying to dissuade Paul from going to Jerusalem, and they were prophesizing as such, Paul would have took their words as warnings as well and continued on his way. The daughter's prophesies were not considered something that needed to be obeyed and did not carry any authority over the situation at hand. These daughters of Philip were gifted by the Spirit but Luke does not show them as leaders in the Church at Caesarea. Therefore they had no authority because of their gift to prophesy.

1.2.6 Summary:

I have found no suggestion that those who were called prophets or had the ability to prophesy to have any authority in the book of Acts. This does not mean to diminish to gift or the function of prophecy, but it does answer the question posed above to whether prophets were church leaders in the early church. Luke's emphasis is more on the democratization of the Spirit and Spirit inspired speech. The prophetic gift may have been utilized by leaders in the early church but the gift of prophecy does not constitute this authority, other gifts may provide them with authority.

In some instances, such as Agabus, there seems to be an attachment to the Old Testament prophets. This is seen in the way he spoke, for example "the Spirit says..." is indicative of a messenger formula, meaning it is reminiscent of The Old Testament formula, "thus says the LORD..." There is also the symbolic nature that Agabus uses in tying Paul's hands posits Cecil Robeck Jr. "It is clear that this particular oracle was given in a *form* that is similar to many found in the O.T."¹⁷ What this may suggest is that the concept of prophets and the nomenclature itself was influence by the Old Testament. This

may be why Luke easily calls individuals prophets. These again were gifted individuals but they did not have the authority that some are placing on them anachronistically today.

2. A look at the Authority of the Apostles in the Book of Acts

We now turn our attention to Luke's treatment of apostles in Acts. The same question that was posed above for prophets in Acts will be posited. What type of authority, if any, did the apostles possess? In other words, what is the task of the apostle according to Luke in Acts?

First I would like to examine the word apostle as it is found in Acts. I then want to trace the word apostle in Acts to come to an understanding of the authority they might have possessed. The book has been traditionally called The Acts of the Apostles not without good reason. The first half of the book narrates the early activities of the 12 apostles and primarily the ministry of the apostle Peter (chapters 1-12). The second half of Acts follows the ministry of Paul who is called an apostle many times in the New Testament but only once in Acts (chapters 13-28). Arguably it is the acts of the Holy Spirit, but we do see the predominance of apostolic ministry from beginning to end of Luke's second book. There is therefore much content on apostles in the book of Acts. I would like to treat thematically the times that the word apostle is used in Acts highlighting important texts to come to an understanding of the topic of apostles and authority.

¹⁷ Burgess. p. 734. (*Italics his*).

2.1 The word Apostles as found in the book of Acts

The Greek word for apostle is “apostolos” which means, “sending out...” *ambassador, delegate, messenger...*” (especially) of God’s messengers....” And “(especially) a group of highly honored believers, who had a special function.”¹⁸ Bauer et al continue, “at first it denoted one who proclaimed the gospel, and was not strictly limited...” In this broad sense, Barnabas is called an apostle (14:14). Paul is also called an apostle in this passage.

It is also used in a stricter sense, that of the twelve apostles. Bauer et al. posit this sense, “then (especially) of the 12 apostles Ac 1:26... Peter and the apostles Ac 5:29.”¹⁹ The rest of the time it is used in the general sense, “the apostles... Ac 1:2; 2:42f; 4:33, 35, 37; 5:2, 12, 18, 40; 6:6; 8:1, 14, 18; 9:27; 11:1...”²⁰ It is also use in the sense of according to Bauer et al. as, “a governing board. (with) the elders Ac 15:2, 4, 6, 22f; 16:4...” This “governing board” will be the topic of section three in this report below.

2.2 Paul and Barnabas called apostles (14:14-15)

As Bauer et al. point out above it was not strictly limited in its overall use at times. Luke uses it in 14:4 and 14 as messengers of God. Usually in Acts it is used of the 12 apostles as we will see bellow. But this is an important verse in regards to whether other apostles had authority, especially Barnabas and Paul mentioned in this passage.

“But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: ‘Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them.’”

¹⁸ Bauer et al. p. 99. (Italics theirs).

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 99.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 99.

The context is when Barnabas and Paul were at Lystra and the people there thought that they were Zeus and Hermes because Paul called out to a lame man and he was healed. The people from Lystra started to worship and sacrifice to them. Luke introduces them as apostles. These two references (14:4, 14) are the only times in Acts where Luke calls anyone else than the 12 an apostle. So Acts 14:14 is a significant text. The passage in 14: 4 introduces us to these two being called apostles but 14:14 will be examined because of its content.

The question posed here is, by calling Barnabas and apostles meant that they exercised leadership in the church or were they functioning in a different role? In other words, what was their task in Lystra?

Barnabas is sent by the church in Jerusalem to Antioch to pastor the new disciples after the Christian Diaspora (11:22). He then found Saul and brought him to Antioch to help him in his duties (11:25). They stayed in Antioch for a year teaching (11:26) and then went to Judea to deliver a collection from the disciples at Antioch because of the impending famine (11:30). Barnabas and Saul then return to Antioch, because they were sent to Jerusalem by the church at Antioch in the first place, (12:25). They are then commissioned by the church at Antioch at the Spirit's prompting to do "the work to which I have called them" (13:1-3). They proclaim the word of God in the synagogue in Cyprus (13:4-5), and then dealt with a false-prophet named Bar-Jesus. This confrontation resulted in Sergius Paulus the proconsul becoming a believer (13:6-12). From Cyprus they went to Pisidian Antioch where Saul now called Paul and his companions (note the name change and the preference of Paul over Barnabas) preached the gospel in the

synagogue there with great success (13:13-48). After some Jews stir up persecution in Pisidian Antioch Paul and Barnabas leave and travel to Iconium (13:49-52). In Iconium they spoke the word effectively but the Jews there tried to stop their ministry, and this divided the crowd. After Paul and Barnabas learn of a plot to kill them they leave to go to Lystra to preach the gospel (14:1-7).

The reason I rehearse the beginning of Paul's ministry is to show the Lucian theme of he and his companion's task of preaching the gospel, whether by word or demonstration. The same is in Lystra, Paul and Barnabas task was to preach the gospel (14:7, 9). They were missionaries sent by the Spirit, commissioned by the church at Antioch to preach Christ to the gentiles. Luke calls them apostles because they are messengers sent to preach the good news. They did not act in an official capacity of leadership. Therefore in this one time that Luke calls any other individuals as apostles it is in the context of being missionaries spreading the gospel.

It is interesting to note Paul and Barnabas' reaction to the circumstance when those at Lystra thought they were Greek gods because a man was healed from being lame. Paul's response helps use to understand what he thought about their authority and task. Once Paul and Barnabas understand what the people of Lystra believe about them and that they are trying to sacrifice to them they as Arrington suggests are, "shocked beyond measure."²¹ Paul states that they are human; they were there to preach the gospel, the people of Lystra needed to believe in God. Through this Paul underscores their task again, that of to preach the good news.

2.3 Money is laid at the apostle's feet. (4:32-5: 4)

“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet. Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God.”

This is a self contained pericope, at least part of it for our purposes. Therefore the context is supplied for us. The issue faced in this passage is about the authority the 12 apostles had over the church in Jerusalem at that time. The Christian Diaspora had not happened so the question is limited at this point to believers in Judea. It will help to review the events up until this circumstance to understand the larger context and any themes that Luke is bringing out.

The book of Acts begins by Jesus giving instructions by the Spirit to the 12, the ones he has chosen which Luke calls apostles (1:2). Jesus instructs them about the kingdom of God, and about waiting for the Spirit in which the Father has promised them (1:4-5). Then, after clarifying what he is talking about to the disciples, he says the gift of the Spirit is about being witnesses in Judea to the ends of the earth (1:6-8). The apostles meet together after the ascension of Jesus and choose Matthias to replace Judas (1:12-26). An important note here is that of the qualifications to be numbered with the 12. The

²¹ Arrington. p. 607.

individual chosen must have been around from the very beginning up until the resurrection and the ascension. This was important because the individual will have to become a witness as well (1:22). The apostles with many others continue to wait for the promise of the Spirit and on the day of Pentecost the Spirit is poured out upon them and Peter speaks to the crowd that is gathered there; in his sermon he says that they are witnesses to Jesus' resurrection (2:32). Peter's conclusion to the crowd is beckoning them to repent and be baptized so they will be forgiven and receive the gift of the Spirit themselves (2:38-39). Three thousand people were added to the church, and these people were devotees to the apostles teaching and were amazed at the miracles that accompanied the apostles message (2:42-47). After Peter commands a beggar to walk and he does the people are amazed and Peter takes the opportunity to speak to the crowd. He, like Paul as we have seen above defends the miracle as from God and not from them. Peter explains the gospel and states that they are witnesses to the resurrection (3:15). He continues to preach and brings them to a point of decision asking them to repent (3:17ff). Peter and John are taken by some of the Jewish leaders and put in jail, the leaders question them and Peter is able to give a defense of the gospel (4:8-12). After Peter and John were warned not to preach in the name of Jesus they were released and they in prayer asked for boldness to continue to speak the word of God and have accompanying miracles to confirm their message (4:13-30). The Spirit descends similar as on the day of Pentecost and they preach with boldness as on that day as well (4:31).

Two significant events occur in the events of the early church at this time; the believers sharing their possessions as the need arose (4:32-5:11) and the appointing of the seven deacons (6:1-7). They are significant because the apostles must deal with some

matters other than their assigned task of preaching the gospel as witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. This brings us back to our original question, that of the apostles' authority. Do the apostles take on a new or expanded task at this juncture? As a result of the persecution and the dispersion of the church do the apostles cease from preaching and healing and become leaders of the greater church? Let us look at the passage above found in Acts 4:32- 5:4 to begin to answer this question.

The issue here is, does the phrase “and put it at the apostles’ feet” signify authority of some sort (4:35, 37; 5:2)? Arrington posits it may mean that the apostles are teaching.²² This seems to be the case in Luke’s other book when Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to him speak (Luke 10:39). But Luke uses it in two other senses as well. The first is in acts of humility, reverence or submission; a woman who had lead a sinful life (Luke 7:83); a demon possessed man (Luke 8:28, 35); Jairus (Luke 8:41); the woman who was bleeding (Luke 8:47); a Samaritan leper (Luke 17:16); Sapphira (Acts 5:10) and Cornelius (Acts 10:25). The second seems to be in the sense of having authority to some extent. Two instances in Acts are of objects being put at the feet of individuals. The first is the passage we are examining (Acts 4:35, 37; 5:2). The second is people laying their clothes at Saul’s feet (7:58). The context of this action is found in 8:1 where Luke says that Saul is giving his approval to Stephen’s death. Saul seems to have some authority because he is able to go from house to house arresting believers and incarcerating them (8:3). He latter gets letters to present to synagogues in Damascus and deport believers to Jerusalem (9:1-2).

²² Arrington. “The phrase ‘at the apostles’ feet’ (v. 25, 5:2) indicates that the apostles are sitting and perhaps teaching.” p. 557.

So in our passage, the laying of money at the apostles' feet may mean besides being teachers of the gospel they were leaders of some sort. But what was the extent of their authority? Arrington posits about the money laid at their feet, "they serve as administrative authorities for its distribution to each person according to need."²³ Is this something they have solicited? In other words, were the apostles comfortable with this task and does it mean they are leaders?

Notice Luke continues the above mention theme that the apostles are doing what Christ called them to do in the first place; that is testifying to his resurrection (4:33). Notice as well that their new task was distributing the money as was needed. This is an administrative position, not necessarily a leadership task (4:35). Notice Peter's reaction when he found out that Ananias and Sapphira lied about the money; he said they have not lied to them the apostles but to God (5:4). They take the onus off of themselves as we have seen above, and put it on God where it should be. Luke returns to his theme of the apostles ministering the word of God through a demonstration of miracles (5:12-16). After being interrogated by the Jewish Sanhedrin, being flogged and commanded not to speak in the name of Jesus the apostles continue to preach the gospel openly (5:17-42); the administrative task is picked up again in chapter 6.

The issue here is distribution of food to widows (6:1-8). This time the apostles make a proposal to all the disciples gathered that they should not neglect their calling and appoint seven individuals to oversee this task. The group of disciples agreed to their plan and found seven capable individuals. This decision results not only this administrative task being looked after but it released the apostles to their calling of preaching the gospel (6:7). Notice that this was not an imposed decision by the apostles, it was their

²³ Ibid. p. 557.

recommendation that was adopted by a larger group; we will see this theme later as we study the issue of apostolic authority.

2.4 The twelve apostles in Jerusalem and their authority

There are a number of instances that situations or people are brought to the attention of the apostles after the dispersion of believers because of persecution (7:1-8:3). The apostles stay in Jerusalem while the rest of the church is scattered into Judea and Samaria. What does it mean that the apostles are notified and act on these circumstances?

The first is found in 8:14, the apostles sending of two of their own to Samaria. *“When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.”*

The church up to this point was primarily made up of Jewish disciples. This passage is found within a time where the church seen growth but only in Judea (2:46). Peter’s vision about the gentiles has not taken place yet (10:9-16), and the church had just been scattered because of the persecution that ensued after Stephan’s death (7:54-8:1). The Spirit was compelling the church to be witnesses beyond Judea. Philip, one of the seven deacons previously mentioned now assumes the task of being a witness to Christ as he goes through Samaria. He shares the gospel through preaching and miracles and the Samaritans believed the message and were baptized (8:4-13). The apostles, not the greater body of disciples, make the decision to send two of their own. The church is scattered, the 12 are alone, and they as a small group of believers sent these two on their behalf to help preach the gospel. The apostles are servants of the word, so when Peter and John arrive in Samaria they laid hands on the new disciples to receive the Spirit and preached Christ. As they return to Jerusalem, they continue to witness in each village

they pass (8:14-25). Luke distinctly shows the apostles' task is to proclaim the good news and the sending was not a checking up on or to give their apostolic approval, it was to help spread the good news.

In chapter 9 we find the story of Saul coming to Jerusalem after his conversion and ministry in Damascus and trying to join the apostles (9:26-31).

“When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was really a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews but they tried to kill him. When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.”

In bringing Saul to the apostles mean that he needed their approval? In other words are they a ruling body over the church deciding what happens and who can minister? The context suggests otherwise. As noted above Luke demonstrates to us the apostles were servants of the word of God. When Barnabas brings Saul to the apostles he shares Saul's conversion experience; that the lord has spoken to him, and then how God has used him to preach just as they do the gospel. Notice after Barnabas' endorsement of Saul that he freely preaches the Gospel in Jerusalem. And when there is a plot to kill him the brothers send him away to continue his work elsewhere. All the apostles were concerned with was if he was a disciple or not. Once they found out he was genuine and he had the same ministry they did not stop him from preaching the gospel. Luke does not show them as authorities over Saul but fellow servants of the word.

The last passage I would like to consider about the authority of the apostles is found in chapter 11:1-18. The first part sets the tone of the event (11:1-3).

“The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

This meeting of Peter the other apostles and the brothers happens as a result of Peter’s ministry to the house of Cornelius (10:23b-48). The circumcised disciples were displeased that Peter went into the home of a gentile and ate with them. Peter testifies to the vision, the voice from heaven, his meeting with Cornelius and how the Spirit was poured out upon the gentiles just as he was on them. All those who heard this were satisfied that God was saving the gentiles as well and were filled with praise.

Notice that the apostles are mentioned with other believers; “the brothers” (11:1) and not alone. Notice as well that it was a group of circumcised believers and not the apostles that questioned Peter. It was also “all who heard” that were satisfied at Peter’s explanation. This is not an apostolic gathering to determine if Peter was correct in his actions, it was a gathering of the believers hearing that the preaching of the gospel has started with the gentiles just as the Spirit commissioned them to do in the very beginning (1:8).

2.5 Summary

In this overview of the apostles’ authority I have tried to show that one of the primary tasks of the 12 was to preach the gospel with word and miraculous power. It was the Spirit who called them to this task and they continued with it. There were times were they were engaged in administrative activities, but they made efforts to keep to their calling as preachers of the gospel and let others take that responsibility. I believe they were highly respected and honored for their appointment and ministry from Christ and the Spirit. They were a unique group of believers set apart and sent to continue the work

that Christ started. I do not want to diminish there role in the church both in its foundation and the eschatological in the coming Kingdom (Luke 22:29-30). I want to question recent beliefs that posit to restore authority to modern apostles by finding what Luke has to show as the apostles' task in the book of Acts. I believe that the apostles' primary task was to preach the gospel and not have some great authority over the early church. I would like to explore this thesis in the next section in light of the so called Jerusalem council found in Acts 15.

3. The Authority of the Apostles at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-35)

In this third and final section, I would like to look at the council in Jerusalem to determine the type of authority the apostles had and especially the authority of James. At present there is a movement to restore the office of apostle and one of their arguments is a reference to Acts chapter 15 and the authority of James in particular.²⁴ I would like to posit that there was an antecedent type of governance and authority in the church of Jerusalem but not the type of autocratic authority that some believers would put anachronistically on them today. Luke seems to be rooting this council in an already existing paradigm of authority, that of the Jewish Sanhedrin.

3.1 The context of Acts chapter 15

The pericope in question is Acts 15:1-35. The topic is an important decision about the requirements to be converted now that the gospel is being preached to non-Jewish

²⁴ See Peter Wagner *Apostles and Prophets: The Foundation of the Church*. Gospel Light. pp. 46-50. Wagner posits that James, a sort of chief apostle, called the council together and after deliberations made a decision as a "vertical apostle" in which he calls in a theocratic model of governance. It seems to me that

people. As mentioned above, the church was primarily made up of Jewish people until this point. Now the Lord has opened the way for gentiles to hear the message and respond to it, thus fulfilling the word of Jesus that the promise of the Father, the Spirit, will be preached and received to the ends of the earth. This is a pivotal chapter in the book of Acts, both theologically and programmatically. Theologically, the question that must be answered is what should be the requirements of the gentiles to become Christians? Is it as Peter says, by grace alone (15:11)? Or is it as what the believers from the pharisaical party said, to obey the Law of Moses and presumably grace (15:5)? Programmatically, there is a shift from the ministry of Peter to the ministry of Paul. Luke focuses on the gentile mission after this chapter.

This all came about when some individuals came to Antioch from Judea and started to teach the new church that they had to convert to Judaism to be saved. They came on their own volition apparently to instruct these gentile converts to full sense of being saved. There are those who believe these individuals were sent by James.²⁵ They believe that this council is the same meeting that Paul had in Galatians 2. But there are too many inconsistencies between the two accounts, the primary one being found in Acts 15:24; that these individuals were not sent by anyone in Jerusalem.

Their new teaching confused to believers at the church at Antioch and so the church decided to send Barnabas and Paul to Jerusalem to find out what they had to say in the matter. It seems that there was confusion to whether these individuals were actually sent by the church in Jerusalem and therefore this was a valid teaching (15:24). Paul and

this is an autocratic decision not a theocratic one. A theocratic decision would have been, "It is the Lord's judgment..." not "It is my judgment..."

²⁵ See Simon Kistemaker *New Testament Commentary: Acts*. Baker, 1990. "Paul's account in Galatians 2 generally harmonizes with Luke's description of the Jerusalem Council." p. 536.

Barnabas would have to find out if these individuals were sent by the church in Jerusalem and receive a ruling. Paul and Barnabas were teaching the believers that they are saved by grace alone and did not mention the need for the Law of Moses or circumcision. So Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem and are received by the church and they explain their ministry in Antioch (15:2-4).

3.2 Models of governance: The question of who is in charge, a group or an individual

The early church in Jerusalem was faced with an issue that if not dealt with could cause a schism or render the new church just as a sect of Judaism with little influence in the Greek speaking world. They convened a meeting of the leaders in the church which included apostles and elders (15:4, 6, 22, and 23). Who called this meeting, Luke does not say.

The question here is what if any model of governance did they use? Did they follow a secular one found within the Roman culture around them? Or did they pattern themselves after an existing form of governance that found in Judaism already, such as the Jewish Sanhedrin?

Luke seems to contrast the Roman style of governance opposed to the church's style of governance in the book of Acts. He begins this distinction in the Gospel of Luke found in 22:24-30.

“A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so

that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

In this Jesus sets out the program of leadership that he wants the apostles to follow. Not like the Roman model around them but of one of service. Each time Luke in Acts portrays Roman authorities as autocrats; King Herod (12:1-5, 18-23); some magistrates (16:19-23, 35-39); a city clerk (19:35-41); a commander of Roman troops (21:31-40; 22:14-29); Claudius Lysias a commander (23:10-35); Felix the governor (24:10-27); Festus the governor (25:1-27; 26:32); King Agrippa (26:1-31) and Julius the centurion (27:1-28:16). Although they all were subject to the Roman Emperor, they ruled in an autocratic manner. Autocracy means, “government by a single absolute ruler...”²⁶ For example King Herod. “He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also” (12:2-3). This is juxtaposed to how Luke portrays the early church especially in Acts 15 and how he portrays the Jewish Sanhedrin; in an oligarchy, that is, “a form of government in which power is in the hands of a few.”²⁷ This does not mean that the early church acted as the Sanhedrin in their abuse of a group system of governance (Acts 6:13). Nor was it an elite group individuals, but was made up of apostles and elders who called themselves “brothers” to other believers (15:13, 23). The thing that I would like to demonstrate is the type of structure²⁸ the council in Jerusalem utilized not the spirit in how it was conducted. The Sanhedrin became an elitist group governing Jewish affairs in Palestine. The Jerusalem council was a group of individuals who were called by God and recognized by

²⁶ *New Webster’s Dictionary and Thesaurus: of the English Language.* p. 64.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 699.

²⁸ Bruce, F.F. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of Acts.* Eerdmans, 1988. He calls this “as a kind of Nazarene Sanhedrin...” p. 292.

the church as leaders who were servants of the Spirit, the gospel and the church. The structure of a group is the model in which we are looking at for our discussion. Luke uses a formula as he discusses the decision of the Jerusalem council; this formula is found in chapters 4, 5 and 15. Chapters 4 and 5 have the Jewish Sanhedrin deliberating and chapter 15 has the early church leaders deliberating.

The following is a Lucian formula of a group's decision; also see chart below. Luke begins by listing the member's of the council; the Sanhedrin (4:5-6; 5:27); the Jerusalem council (15:4). He then shows the councils begin to confer on a matter; the Sanhedrin (4:15, 5:33); the Jerusalem council (15:6). Members and guests are allowed to address the council on the matter being considered; the Sanhedrin (4:6-75:27); the Jerusalem council (15:7, 12). One member brings a recommendation to the group on the matter being discussed: the Sanhedrin (5:34, 40); the Jerusalem council (15:13, cf. 28). The council's joint decision; the Sanhedrin (4:18); the Jerusalem council (15:20). The council executes the decision; the Sanhedrin (5:40); the Jerusalem council (15:23).

There are a number of things to note about the above formula. In the list of members the Jewish Sanhedrin and the Jerusalem council both mention elders; the difference is of course is that the Sanhedrin mentions rulers, teachers of the law the high priest and members of his family. Note the Jerusalem council only has two designations apostles and elders, no mention of a leader figure such as the high priest. The high priest was a prominent member of the Sanhedrin and as James VanderKam writes, the leader. "The Sanhedrin in Jerusalem was a ruling and judicial body, consisting of seventy

Luke's Treatment of Council Decisions

Series of Events:	Jewish Council:	Church Council:
<i>1. The Members of the council:</i>	4:5-6 Rulers, elders, teachers of the law, Annas the high priest and the other men of the high priests family, 5:27 The Sanhedrin and the high priest.	15:4 The church, the apostles and the elders.
<i>2. The consultation of the council.</i>	4:15 “conferred together...” 5:33 “They were furious...”	15:6 “The apostles and the elders met to consider this question...”
<i>3. Members address the council.</i>	4:15 “They... began to question them...” 5:27 “question them by the high priest.”	15:7 “Peter got up and addressed them...” 15:12 “they listened to Barnabas and Paul.”
<i>4. One member brings a recommendation to the council.</i>	5:34 Gamaliel “I advise you...” (cf. 18:14)	15:13 James “it is my judgment...”
<i>5. The members agree on the recommendation.</i>	5:40 “His speech persuaded them.”	cf. 15:28 “It seemed Good to the Holy Spirit and us...”
<i>6. The council's joint ruling.</i>	4:18 “commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.”	15:20 “we should write to them...”
<i>7. The execution of the council's decision.</i>	5:40 “had them flogged. Then ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus...”	15:23 “they sent the following letter...”

prominent men and headed by the high priest.”²⁹ In chapter 15 there is no mention of a leader at the beginning, they are all brothers (15:13). Notice as well that chapter 5 and 15 have a member give a recommendation to the council that will be accepted and acted upon. In chapter 5 Gamaliel says “I advise you...” and in chapter 15 James says “It is my judgment...” Both of these men were prominent leaders in their communities; Gamaliel (5:34b) and James (12:17; 15:13:21:18). Notice as well that the final decision is from the group, not an individual. This is the case in the Sanhedrin (4:18, 21; 5:40), note the use of the plural “they”; and the Jerusalem council (15:24, 25, 27 and 28), again note the use of the plural “we”.

In the case of a letter being sent, the one from the Jerusalem council is a collaborative effort as shown above. This suggests that the model of governance is based on the Jewish system of a group of leaders which is not an autocracy. An example of a letter from an autocrat is found in Acts 23. This letter is from a Roman commander Claudius Lysias to Felix a Governor. Notice the use of the first person singular “I” in his letter (23:25-30). The Jerusalem council’s letter is from a group not an individual. The above demonstrates that the early church followed a group type of governance not an autocratic one.

3.3 The Authority of James in the Jerusalem Council

If the Jerusalem council was fashioned after a group, than what is the predominance of James indicate? Was he a type of chief apostle or did he function in a different manner?

²⁹ VanderKam, James C. *An Introduction to Early Judaism*. Eerdmans, 2001. p. 35.

There are a number of individuals who are called James by Luke. James the son of Zebedee (Luke 5:10, 6:14, 8:51, 9:28, 54; Acts 1:13, 12:2); James the father of Judas (Luke 6:16). James the son of Alphaeus (6:15); James the son of Mary (Luke 24:10); and simply, James (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18). The son of Zebedee is Jesus' disciple the brother of John. Judas (not Judas Iscariot) the disciple who has a father named James. James who has a father named Alphaeus is a disciple of Jesus. Lastly James the son of Mary, Jesus' half brother.

James the brother of John is put to death by Herod (Acts 12:2). The James found in Acts 12, 15 and 21 is the half brother of Jesus. Luke knows that his readers will understand this important individual by his name alone without having something attached to it. There is little doubt that this James has prominence in the early church. In Acts 12:17 it is Peter who singles out James with the brothers after he miraculously escapes from prison (12:1-19a). Another time James is mentioned is in chapter 21 when Paul and his companions arrive in Jerusalem. They go to see James and the elders to tell them about their ministry among the gentiles (21:18). This is closer to the end of Paul's final journey. In both of these references James is singled out with either "brothers" or "elders," but Luke does not mention apostles. To what role James holds, Luke is silent.³⁰ Antiquity and tradition assign him a place but Luke does not.³¹

There are a number of things to note about James according to Acts chapter 15. First he is not understood as an apostle by Luke. We can assume he is one of the "elders" mentioned at the council (15:4, 6, 22 and 23). Notice he is not mentioned separately as the other two references in Acts (12:17; 21:18). Second, his "judgment" is

³⁰ Arrington. "James appears to have been the chief leader in the Church (12:12; 21:18), though Luke does not identify him as such." p. 612.

based on two criteria; Peter's speech to the council (15:14) and Old Testament Scripture (15:15-18). James is one of the members of the council as Stanley Horton posits, "he speaks as a brother, not as one who had superior authority."³² He seems to be summing up the arguments and giving a recommendation to the council to what was already discussed. Third, the individualistic superiority that is anachronistically placed on James goes against the dyadic nature of the culture and the group setting of the council. The "judgment" that he brings is to be understood as their decision not his decision. Notice in his use of "we" in verses 19 and 20; this is also seen in the letter (15:24, 25, 27 and 28).

The final thing that is relevant to our discussion on the place of James in the Council of Jerusalem has to do with the Spirit and his working in all believers not a select few or an individual. Luke's theme of the Spirit being poured out on all people is significant here. We tend to understand the Spirit's ministry in individualistic and episodic terms. It could be said that James, the great leader had the word of the Lord, so to speak, by the Spirit. But what the letter states seems to suggest otherwise. "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and us..." (15:28). We are not told of all the discussion that took place in the council. There may have been the gifts of the Spirit in operation as Horton suggests.³³ But this seems to lay a Pauline grid on Luke's thinking. I believe the Spirit as referred to here is in a more pedestrian sense; the Spirit was with them in their joint discussions and decision making. James was not the final say in the matter; it was though Spirit and the group that were gathered there, that had the final say. This too me supports Luke's theme of the democratization of the Spirit on the people of God rather than

³¹ He is called James the Just, the patriarch of Jerusalem etc.

³² Horton, Stanley. *The Book of Acts*. Gospel Publishing House, 1981. p. 182.

³³ Ibid. "James was simply a Christian brother, a member of the Body, who gave a word of wisdom as the Spirit willed (See 1 Corinthians 12:8, 11)." p. 183.

placing James in individualistic terms as a leader wielding absolute authority. He was used in his process, as Kistemaker states, “James functions as the chairman of the assembly.”³⁴ Whether he was there officially or not, Luke does not say. His place in history is secure, but to use him as a paradigm for the modern apostolic restoration is unfounded.

3.4 Summary:

The pivotal nature of Acts chapter 15 must not be minimized or obscured. This was an important decision that affects us to this day. Peter’s wisdom at the council prevailed (15:11), “We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved...” Discussions about who had what authority are our questions that we bring to the text, issues that we are facing. The significant issue is the one that they debated upon and drew a conclusion on. They all seemed to know their place; the church, the apostles, the elders, and James. They all worked together, by the Spirit for to common good of the newly found church. There is more emphasis on the group than on a particular individual. Authority rested in a corporate sense not in an individualistic sense. As to James, Luke does seem to suggest that he was well respected and in a place of prominence, but we must not read anything more in to Luke’s treatment of James for he was just one of the brothers used by the Spirit to accomplish the Spirit’s work.

4. Conclusion:

In section one; we noted that prophets were part of the ministry of the Spirit in the early church. There are not too many references to them and their task is to edify the

³⁴ Kistemaker. p. 550.

church through the gift of prophecy. Luke does not portray them as leaders because of their prophet ability, but function as servants of the Spirit and the church. He does not place them in a hierarchical sense above any other function in the early church. Therefore it is unfounded to place them as leaders above other servants of the Spirit as some do today in the debate of the authority of apostles and prophets.

In the second section; we noted the predominance of apostles in Luke's treatment in Acts. Apostles are usually understood as the group of 12 Christ appointed for a specific task. Although they were leaders, they were servants of the gospel first. Their leadership style was not to be autocratic but understood as servants. To place them as great authoritative leaders is to impose leadership models from the present upon them. Their time to sit on 12 thrones judging will come in the eschaton not now (Luke 22:30). They were servants of the gospel, meaning it was their task to preach the Good News as witnesses to the resurrection of Christ (Acts 6:4). Luke does give the 12 preference because they were with Christ and they were witnesses to the resurrection. This does not make them an elite group but a unique group. No one, after the deaths of the 12 apostles, could claim this uniqueness; both in their time and now in ours. Luke's distinction of the 12 can not be restored today as some are claiming. Even if one could restore this apostleship they would have to function as servants of the gospel and not as authoritative leaders. Therefore the current restoration of apostles and prophets according to Luke in the book of Acts is a restoration of something that was not there in the first place.

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