

THE “SPEECHES” IN ACTS

Virgil Warren, PhD

Besides historical narrative in The Acts, Luke includes significant verbal presentation from conversations, prayers, letters, and sermons. Below in order of appearance are the major examples of spoken material.

Selection of Matthias	1:16-22	Peter
Sermon on Pentecost	2:14-26, 38-39	Peter
Sermon at Gate Beautiful	3:12-26	Peter
First Defense to the Sanhedrin	4:8-12, 19-20	Peter
Prayer (Ananias and Sapphira)	4:24-30 (5:3-4, 8-9)	Jerusalem Christians (Peter)
Second Defense to the Sanhedrin	5:29-32	Peter
Gamaliel’s Speech	5:35-39	Gamaliel
Ministration to the Widows	6:2-4	The “twelve”
Stephen’s Speech	7:2-53, 56	Stephen
Denunciation of Simon the Sorcerer	8:20-23	Peter
Sermon to Cornelius’ Household	10:34-43	Peter
Sermon to the Jerusalem Elders	11:5-17	Peter
Sermon at Antioch of Pisidia " " " " "	13:16-41 13:46-47	Paul Paul
Sermon at Lystra	14:15-17	Paul
Conference on Circumcision	15:6-11	Peter
Conference on Circumcision	15:14-21	James
<u>Letter</u> to the Gentiles	15:23-29	
Sermon on the Areopagus	17:22-31	Paul
Speech to the Ephesian Silversmiths	19:25-27	Demetrius
Speech to the Ephesian Mob	19:35-40	the town clerk
Sermon to the Ephesian Elders	20:18-35	Paul
James’ Proposal to Paul in Jerusalem	21:20-25	James
Sermon to the Jerusalem Mob (Defense Before the Sanhedrin)	22:1-21 (23:1, 3, 5, 6)	Paul (Paul)
<u>Letter</u> to Felix	23:26-30	Claudius Lysias
Accusation of Paul Before Felix	24:2-8	Tertullus
Paul’s Defense Before Felix	24:10-21	Paul
Inquiry Regarding Paul’s Case	24:14-21	Festus
Paul’s Defense Before Agrippa	26:2-23	Paul

Observations on this data include the following. (1) Most, if not all, the sermons are surely condensations. The sermon on Pentecost, for example, lasts only about two and a half minutes. The two letters preserved in The Acts could be complete since their length is

appropriate to their purposes. Since the presentations by Paul and Tertullus in Caesarea occurred in official courtroom settings, Luke may have had access to stenographic records of what transpired. Nevertheless, they, too, are not apt to provide full accounts of accusation and defense.

(2) The several presentations of the gospel to first-time hearers maintain good variety. There is little repetition of Old Testament background, testimony from personal experience, or the form of polemic. Even the three accounts of Paul's conversion vary significantly despite being condensations.

(3) Besides being informative, these discourse sections serve a rhetorical purpose: they heighten interest by creating variety, realism, and focus. They are to the narrative in The Acts what the *logia* ("sayings") are to Luke's gospel.

(4) Each speech fits its audience. The earlier sermons in Palestine are natural for Jewish hearers. Paul's presentation to pagan philosophers in Athens follows a pattern they could appreciate. Similarly, his urgent words to the heathen worshipers in Lystra offer an interpretation of nature and experience rather than presuppose a knowledge of Old Testament revelation. There is respect in the way both Tertullus and Paul present themselves before Felix. The same demeanor is evident in Paul's defense before Agrippa. Tertullus, an orator, has an especially flowery statement of accusation against Paul. Paul's characteristic boldness shines through in his appeal to Agrippa right during the court proceedings (26:27).