Lecture 1: Paul and the Book of Acts  
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This course studies the correspondence of Paul with his churches and his thinking. It also takes into account what we can reconstruct of his travels and his work, for which we will also need to attend to reports about him in the book of Acts. I want to spend today talking about what we gain from Acts’ portrayal of Paul and the problems this presents.

Paul is a main player in the book of Acts, although not initially. He is absent from chapters 1-6, which report early developments within the church in Jerusalem. He appears for the first time in chapter 7, the report of Stephen’s speech and martyrdom, in connection with which we are told, almost as an addendum, that the witnesses – i.e. those stoning Stephen – laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. Saul then figures prominently at the beginning of chapter 8, which reports that persecution by Saul, in particular, forced many in Jerusalem to flee, the upshot of which (as the story proceeds) is that the gospel message spreads beyond the borders of Judea, into Samaria and Galilee. But before the Gospel is carried into Gentile regions, chapter 9 relates the story of Saul’s encounter with the risen Jesus, his call to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, and his baptism, at which time. Only then do we find, in chapter 10, the gospel message being carried to Gentiles, with a story of Peter being summoned in a vision to proclaim the Gospel in the house of a centurion named Cornelius, whose whole house embraces the faith. Reports of this reach Jerusalem and cause quite a stir, since no one anticipated that the Gospel would be proclaimed to the Gentiles. And so in chapter 11 a meeting of the church’s leaders is held to hear Peter’s story and, ultimately, the evidence he presents leads the body to authenticate that God has authorized the mission to the Gentiles. Notice, then, that while chapter 9 foreshadows that Saul will be a missionary to the Gentiles, only in chapter 11 do we have the path cleared for that in the Jerusalem council’s ratification of the mission executed by Peter under divine command.

Paul is introduced again in the concluding verses of chapter 11, which resume the narrative setting of chapter 8, with people living in exile from Jerusalem due to persecution: “19 Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that took place over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, and they spoke the word to no one except Jews. 20 But among them were some men of Cyprus and Cyrene who, on coming to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists also, proclaiming the Lord Jesus.”

V. 20 singles out “some men of Cyprus and Cyrene” as doing something singular. The pattern for those who dispersed from Jerusalem had been to speak only to Jews. Only these men who have come to Antioch is the gospel proclaimed to “Hellenists” – a word that here denotes Gentiles, over against Jews. When the
Jerusalem leadership heard of the growth of this Gentile group, they sent to oversee matters the man named Barnabas, who summoned, as his assistant, Saul, whom he had sent back home to Tarsus after things began to get hot for him in Jerusalem.

In chapter 12 the scene switches back to Judea, with a report that King Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great, had ordered James, the brother of John, put to death and then, seeing that his execution of James pleased the people, he imprisoned Peter, who, however, was freed by an angel the night before his scheduled execution. At the conclusion of the story, Herod pays for his hubris by a divinely sent illness that rots him to death.

Beginning with chapter 13, Paul, as he is called from here on, becomes the prime actor, even outstripping Barnabas who had summoned him to Antioch. The two are sent out on a missionary adventure that extends through chapter 14, traveling to Cyprus and then throughout Asia minor, after which they return to Antioch with glowing reports of their work among the Gentiles. But they also come home to renewed insistence from some that unless Gentiles obey the Mosaic Torah, they cannot be reckoned among the saved. And so chapter 15 reports on a council that Paul and Barnabas attend in Jerusalem to settle this issue. Neither Paul nor Barnabas play a prominent role in this conference, and Peter hands down the final ruling that confirms inclusion of Gentiles without requirement that they observe the Torah.

At the end of chapter 15, Barnabas proposes that they visit the churches they established on their first trip. But Paul disagrees with Barnabas over what personnel should accompany them, and so he sets off on his own with a new companion, named Silas. The section from 15.41 through 18.22 narrates Paul’s second journey, beginning with a visit to some of the churches of Asia Minor established on the first journey, after which Paul & Silas move west-ward, even reaching into Macedonia and then south to the Greek mainland. The journey concludes with a report to the Jerusalem leaders, followed by a return to Antioch.

18.23 mentions, in passing, that Paul spent some time there, but then in the same breath reports that Paul returned to his old stomping grounds, “strengthening all the disciples” in the churches he had founded. From there through 20.38 (the last verse of that chapter), Paul conducts a third missionary journey, visiting his communities. Upon landing on Judean soil, he heads for Jerusalem, bringing an offering for the “poor of Jerusalem” which he had collected from his Gentile congregations in the west.

In chapter 21, Paul falls prey to what was likely a trap set for him by his foes in Jerusalem, the upshot being that, not only was he arrested by the Romans for causing a disturbance in the temple, but he also came under threats of his enemies to kill him while in Roman custody. By the end of chapter 23, then, Paul’s Roman
captors are forced to spirit him away to a safe location away from Jerusalem. This is the first stage in a process that, over the course of chapters 24-28, sees Paul work his way through the legal system, until he is brought to Rome to stand trial before Caesar – something Paul, appealing to his rights as a Roman citizen, has requested. And that is where the book of Acts ends its story.

It’s clear, then, that Paul dominates the story of Acts from chapters 13 on, even if in chapter 15 he is merely present at the council where the decision about the status of Gentiles is pronounced by Peter. And, of course, he has already had significant appearances in chapters 7, 8, and 9. It isn’t too much to say that Paul is the hero of the story for the author of Acts. Paul is the one who takes the Gospel message to “the ends of the earth.” And so for that reason, we need to pay attention to its portrayal of Paul.

What’s more, the book of Acts provides information Paul doesn’t reveal in his letters. E.g. without Acts we would not know that Paul was a Roman citizen, or that he came from the city of Tarsus. Again, without Acts we would not know of Paul’s Hebrew name, Saul; we would know only his Roman name, Paul, which he uses exclusively in his letters. And only Acts provides a narrative of Paul’s call as an evangelist to the Gentiles, to which Paul merely alludes in Gal 1. These and other details are found only in Acts.

The reason these details become important in the study of Paul is that he makes himself an issue in his letters. In Galatians, as well as 1 & 2 Corinthians, he defends his status as an apostle against those who discount his claim, and he asserts his honor and integrity over against those who call it into question. In Philippians he puts forward his own character and behavior as a model for the congregation to follow. What’s more, throughout his letters Paul’s status as founder of the communities he addresses is the basis of his appeal for them to follow his written directions. For this reason, gleaning what we can discover about Paul, the person, can help us understand the roots of his demands for respect and compliance.

But paying attention to Paul, the man, serves one other purpose, also. In the course of composing his letters, Paul’s reasoning and conclusions undergo development as he faces new challenges. In the process, we find him to be a bright and well-informed man, steeped in the traditions of both Judaism and the Greco-Roman world. We gain a clearer understanding of his thinking and writings if we understand something of his background and training.

But using Acts to understand Paul is not as simple as coordinating the reports of Acts with Paul’s letters; for there are dissimilarities and even contradictions between the Paul of Acts and the Paul of the letters. And it is to these differences and other problems with Acts’ portrayal of Paul that I want to direct our attention today, so that next session we can begin using Acts as one resource for constructing an image of what Paul was like.
E.g. in Galatians 1, Paul documents the limited contact he had with Jerusalem from the start, claiming that after his encounter with the risen Jesus, “I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus. Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas [Peter] and stayed with him fifteen days; but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord’s brother.”

Paul’s point is that, as he says just before this, he did not spend time in Jerusalem, learning the gospel message from its apostles. As we’ll see, in the opening paragraphs of Galatians, Paul defends his status as an independent apostle, claiming that he is not at all indebted to those who are apostles in Jerusalem. And he seals his claim with the exclamation, “In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!”

But here we run into a conflict with Acts’ narration of Paul’s activities following his encounter of the risen Jesus. According to Acts, after having spent time in Damascus, Paul fled, under attack from his fellow Jews, and wound up in Jerusalem: “When he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, brought him to the apostles, and described for them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus. So he went in and out among them in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.”

Now, this could be the visit to Jerusalem Paul mentions as his first, taking place three years after his conversion. That would be a reasonable amount of time for Paul to have been in Damascus before raising the hackles of his religious compatriots. However, it is difficult to square the story of Barnabas introducing Paul to the apostles with Paul’s claim that the only apostles he saw while in Jerusalem were Peter and James.

Moreover, the report that Paul lived in Jerusalem, going “in and out among them” and “speaking boldly in the name of the Lord” depicts him as highly engaged with the Jerusalem church, which creates a rub for Paul’s subsequent claim in Galatians 1 that when he left to go “into the regions of Syria and Cilicia…I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ; they only heard it said, “The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy.”

The kind of interaction Acts posits for Paul with believers in the environs of Jerusalem fits ill with Paul’s claim to be “unknown by sight to the churches of Judea.” And there is no reason not to trust Paul’s own words in this matter. More likely it is Acts that has expanded this visit into a full-fledged integration of Paul with the Jerusalem church. As we’ll see, Acts is concerned to show a stronger
bond between Paul and Jerusalem than is reflected in Paul’s own writings.

Let’s notice also that Paul’s itinerary in Galatians allows no room for the time Acts says he spent back in Tarsus, where his Jerusalem friends sent him after he had aroused the ire of Greek speaking Jews. This period after Paul first visited Jerusalem, he reports, saw him traveling through the regions of Syria and Cilicia, regions not as narrowly defined as the city of Tarsus. I.e. whereas Acts has Paul staying put in Tarsus during this period, Paul recalls himself traveling about throughout rather large tracts of land. Consequently, Acts’ itinerary for Paul at this stage is more restricted than Paul’s own report.

Not only that, but Acts fits in yet one more visit to Jerusalem by Paul before the first missionary journey. Just after Paul arrives in Antioch, a prophet comes from Jerusalem, predicting a great famine. The church in Antioch responds as follows: “29 The disciples determined that according to their ability, each would send relief to the believers living in Judea; 30 this they did, sending it to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.”

Following this, in chapter 12, comes the report of Herod’s execution of James, his thwarted attempt to do the same to Peter, and Peter’s flight from Jerusalem. Only at the end of that do we find reported Barnabas’ and Saul’s return to Antioch: “Then after completing their mission to Jerusalem Barnabas and Saul returned and brought with them John, whose other name was Mark.” — So Acts reports Saul making two trips to Jerusalem during the period Paul says he made but one, and both put him in contact with more leaders of the Jerusalem church than Paul is willing to admit in Galatians 1. It is differences between Paul’s own reports and those in Acts that cause many scholars to view Acts’ reports about Paul cautiously, giving preference to Paul’s own reports.

Acts contains differences, also, in its report of Paul’s words, compared to what we find in Paul’s letters. Granted, a speech is not the same as a letter, and so we are bound to find differences of form. But the differences extend beyond the different literary forms.

One thing to understand about the speeches in Acts is that they are anything but verbatim transcripts. For one thing, while Acts portrays characters giving speeches, it gives us nothing approaching full-blown speeches. At best, we are given summations of what was said.

But beyond that, there are indications that the author of Acts, while perhaps relying on some tradition available about a person’s words, nevertheless formed the substance of each of the speeches.

The prime indicator of this is in the case of Paul’s speeches is that they are permeated with themes not found in Paul, but distinctive to the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, two works written by the same author, as becomes apparent from the fact that each begins with an address to a man named “Theophilus,” who in
Luke is addressed as “most excellent Theophilus,” suggesting he was a member of the Roman aristocracy. Moreover, the author of Luke specifies his purpose in writing his account as providing “assurance concerning the things about which you have been instructed,” indicating that this Theophilus has recently become a convert to the faith.

The author of Acts reveals himself to be the same author responsible for Luke’s gospel in his address of Theophilus that begins with a look back to his first book, in which he “wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning.” He means this book as the second installment in his attempt to provide Theophilus with reassurance concerning his faith.

Not surprisingly, the author’s attempt to address Theophilus’ concerns are apparent in Acts as much as in Luke, and in the speeches of his characters, as much as in the narrative. As a result, there is a good deal of overlap in the speeches, no matter which character is speaking, so that there is something of a homogenization of the preaching in Acts.

E.g. in chapter 13, Paul addresses an assembly of Jews in Antioch, describing Jesus’ death and resurrection in these words: “My brothers, you descendants of Abraham’s family, and others who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent. Because the residents of Jerusalem and their leaders did not recognize him or understand the words of the prophets that are read every sabbath, they fulfilled those words by condemning him. Even though they found no cause for a sentence of death, they asked Pilate to have him killed. When they had carried out everything that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead; and for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, and they are now his witnesses to the people.”

When one compares the Gospel of Luke to the first two gospels (Matthew and Mark), there is a marked emphasis on the innocence of Jesus, even though he was executed by the Romans in the form of punishment reserved for enemies of the state. This is most strongly apparent in words uttered by a Roman centurion upon Jesus’ death. In Mark the centurion, having witnessed the way Jesus died, announces, “Truly this man was God’s Son!” In Matthew, the centurion again proclaims Jesus God’s son, although in Matthew it is not how Jesus dies, but rather the earthquake, opened tombs and resurrected saints that prompt his confession. Luke, like Mark, has the centurion’s statement provoked by the scene of Jesus’ death, but his words differ: “Truly this man was innocent.”

As elsewhere in Luke, the author has modified the words he received in order to convey a theme he regarded as significant; here it is the assertion of Jesus’ innocence. And that comes even more to the fore in his narrative of Jesus’ trial before, first, the Jerusalem council and, then, Pilate. He portrays the council as
forwarding Jesus to Pilate for crucifixion without finding legitimate grounds to do so, while he portrays Pilate absolving Jesus of any crime no less than three times. This emphasis on Jesus’ innocence tallies with Luke’s purpose of writing Theophilus to give him assurance concerning his faith.

The notion that a man executed by Rome for crimes against the state should be the savior and Lord of the world would have been problematic, just as anyone proclaiming that Timothy McVeigh was savior and Lord would cause derision among most people in our society. Luke addresses this problem for Theophilus by stressing that Jesus’ crucifixion was the product of a manic rush to judgment by the Jewish leaders, not because Jesus deserved it.

And so it is not surprising to find that Luke invests Paul’s words to the crowd in Pisidian Antioch with this theme: “Even though they found no cause for a sentence of death, they asked Pilate to have him killed.” – This stress on Jesus’ innocence is a recurrent theme in Luke-Acts, but is nowhere used by Paul in his epistles.

Similarly, the notion that those to whom Jesus appeared following his resurrection should be “his witnesses to the people” is a distinctively Lukan theme. E.g. at the conclusion of Luke’s gospel, Jesus instructs his disciples, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” (This phraseology does not occur in Matthew, Mark or John; only Luke.)

Similarly, in the opening verses of Acts Jesus tells his disciples, “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” And, in fact, the Paul of Acts 22 recalls that Ananias, who baptized him, declared to him, “The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard.”

The appointing of the disciples as Jesus’ witnesses is vocabulary distinctive to Luke-Acts, whose early Christian preachers regularly cast themselves as witnesses. However, this sort of language is not found elsewhere in the New Testament, including Paul’s letters. Nowhere in his letters does the Paul describe himself as a witness in the way that the Paul of Acts recalls being appointed a witness in the words of Ananias. Again, the words of Paul are here infused with a theme distinctive to Luke-Acts.

That’s not to say that the author of Acts was unfamiliar with any distinctive features of Paul’s thought. Slightly later in this speech, in vv. 38-39, Paul is portrayed as declaring, “Let it be known to you therefore, my brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you; by this Jesus everyone
who believes is set free from all those sins from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.”

The author shows familiarity with Paul in the statement that everyone who believes is “set free from all those sins from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.” – Paul argues, especially in Romans, that the Law is incapable of setting people free from the dominance of sin. And yet, speaking of “sins from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses” is a very peculiar summary of what Paul says. At the least, for anyone familiar with Paul’s diction, this is quite uncharacteristic phraseology for Paul.

Moreover, this proclamation of “freedom from sins” is made equivalent to “forgiveness of sins,” while in Paul, as we’ll see, freedom from sins is not a matter of forgiveness so much as it is liberation to live an upright life. In fact, while forgiveness is a major theme in Luke-Acts, it isn’t in Paul. The noun “forgiveness” never appears in the epistles that surely go back to Paul, while the verb “forgive” appears within them in only two verses.

So while the author of Acts shows himself familiar with an item distinctive to Pauline diction, his use of it is anything but Pauline. And this is another reason scholars are cautious about taking Acts’ portrait of Paul at face value.

A feature of Acts that might lead one to assume that its author had personal familiarity with Paul is a set of five sections known as the “we passages” of Acts. Each of these stands in the context of reporting Paul’s journeys, and in each the author seems to cast himself as one of Paul’s companions on the trip. The first of these is Acts 16.10-17, which reports Paul and his companions traveling to Macedonia in response to a vision, beginning with their stay in Philippi, where Paul and Silas were jailed. The peculiarity of these “we passages” can be illustrated from this case, where the switch to a first person narrative at its onset is sudden and jarring: “They [Paul and his traveling companions] went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days.”

While the initial verses report the activities of Paul and his companions as things they did, suddenly in v. 10 the narrator includes himself in this group that responded to Paul’s vision, even to the point of seeing the mission of proclaiming
the good news being as much his as any of the others accompanying Paul. This first person narrative continues through a report that they were followed by a clairvoyant who kept announcing that they represented the Most High God. But when Paul is arrested for exorcising the clairvoyant, and thus depriving her masters of income, Silas is the only companion jailed with Paul, and the narrator again speaks of what happens to them. That narrative perspective persists through the story of imprisonment and release, the outcome of which is reported at chapter’s end: “After leaving the prison they went to Lydia’s home; and having seen and encouraged the brothers and sisters there, they departed.” Then chapter 17 opens with the report, “After Paul and Silas had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica,” with the narrator reporting the continuation of the journey without including himself in Paul’s company.

The next “we” passage is 20.5-15. The chapter opens with Paul fleeing Ephesus after a confrontation: “1 After the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples; and after encouraging them and saying farewell, he left for Macedonia. 2 When he had gone through those regions and had given the believers much encouragement, he came to Greece, 3 where he stayed for three months. He was about to set sail for Syria when a plot was made against him by the Jews, and so he decided to return through Macedonia. 4 He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Beroea, by Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, by Gaius from Derbe, and by Timothy, as well as by Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia. 5 They went ahead and were waiting for us in Troas; 6 but we sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we joined them in Troas, where we stayed for seven days.”

The whole of Paul’s work in Ephesus (since 19.1) has been narrated as a report about Paul alone, as it is again in vv. 1-4 of chapter 20. But suddenly, in v. 5, the narrator insinuates himself again as a traveling companion of Paul. The “we” narration continues through Paul’s stay in Troas, at the end of which the narrator reports: “13 We went ahead to the ship and set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul on board there; for he had made this arrangement, intending to go by land himself. 14 When he met us in Assos, we took him on board and went to Mitylene. 15 We sailed from there, and on the following day we arrived opposite Chios. The next day we touched at Samos, and the day after that we came to Miletus.”

In the remainder of the chapter the narrator reports Paul summoning the Ephesian elders to Miletus and delivering a farewell address to them. While nothing in the context prevents this from continuing to be the report of the eyewitness who spoke earlier in the chapter, the narrator speaks of Paul’s actions, without mentioning himself or any other individual.

The third “we” passage then appears at the conclusion of that speech, in 21.1-18, which narrate Paul’s journey from Miletus to Jerusalem, with the narrator again
portraying himself as part of Paul’s entourage.

After the arrival at Jerusalem, the narrator tells of the plot against Paul, the attack on him in the temple, his arrest, his transfer from Jerusalem to Antipatris, and his several hearings before Roman magistrates there – all without implying that he accompanied Paul in any of these events. And then again, suddenly, we find the “we” voice at the start of the narrative of chapter 27: “1When it was decided that we were to sail for Italy, they transferred Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort, named Julius. 2Embarking on a ship of Adramyttium that was about to set sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica.”

This manner of narration continues through the first stages of the journey and into a report about a storm that threatened to destroy the ship, concluding with the report, “Fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come.” — Again the narrator implies his presence by associating himself with the sailors: “fearing that we might run on the rocks.” But shortly after, he just as strikingly absents himself from the course of the story: “33Just before daybreak, Paul urged all of them to take some food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day that you have been in suspense and remaining without food, having eaten nothing. 34Therefore I urge you to take some food, for it will help you survive; for none of you will lose a hair from your heads.”

Similarly, his report of the outcome of the shipwreck is, “And so it was that all (not “we” or “we all”) were brought safely to land.” And then suddenly, at the beginning of chapter 28, the narrator associates himself with the action once again: “1After we had reached safety, we then learned that the island was called Malta.”

After reporting that Paul performed wonders on the island, including the healing of many of its inhabitants, the narrator associates himself with Paul, reporting that, as a consequence of Paul’s healings, “They bestowed many honors on us, and when we were about to sail, they put on board all the provisions we needed.”

The “we” narration continues through the report of their arrival in Rome, after which, in the final 15 verses of the book the narrator describes Paul’s activities in Rome, without insinuating himself into the scenes.

While the traditional explanation of the “we” passages has been to understand them as “Luke’s” own recollections of journeying with Paul. However, there are problems for this solution. The first has to do with the differences in the narrator’s descriptions of Paul’s actions and his reports of Paul’s words that we’ve already explored. If the author of Acts was a traveling companion of Paul, then how do we account for the fact that his portrayal of Paul’s actions – such as his journey’s to Jerusalem before his first missionary journey – are at odds with Paul’s own summary? And how do we reconcile the difference between speeches the author attributes to Paul and Paul’s own language about himself and his ideas?
The second problem has to do with the peculiar way the narrator suddenly insinuates himself as a companion of Paul, but then just as abruptly speaks of Paul’s and others’ actions as if he was not present. Other Hellenistic historians speak of themselves as present during an action, but they do not slip in and out of that mode of speech the way the narrator of Acts does. This is a most peculiar mode of writing, compared to patterns in other historical writing of the period.

In this light, some have suggested that perhaps the use of “we” is a literary device, since other Hellenistic authors frequently recount ship voyages in which they participate. How-ever, such narratives use the first person throughout, rather than intermittently. Moreover, it is not just sea voyages that Acts narrates in the first person, but also events in cities Paul visited. E.g. while the beginning and end of 20.5-15 begins and ends with the report of traveling by ship, the bulk of it deals with an event at the stop in Troas, where Paul raised from the dead a man who fell out a window after falling asleep while Paul was preaching. That story consumes six of the eleven verses of the narrative, which gives no attention to the sea voyages except to note that they transported Paul from one place to another.

The most likely explanation to the “we” passages is that the author of Acts made use of a written record/journal from someone who had accompanied Paul on certain of his journeys. The author of Luke-Acts acknowledges his use of sources in writing his gospel, and it is equally likely that he used sources in writing the Book of Acts.

The kernel of truth in the observation that the sea voyages are the prime constituent of the “we” passages is that each “we” passage contains an account of Paul’s travel from one city to another (even if not always by sea). Moreover, each “we” passage has a destination that is the starting point for the next “we” passage, no matter what intervenes between them.

One implication of this is that the author of Acts utilized some type of a “journal” kept by one of Paul’s companions, and into it he has inserted episodes of Paul’s interactions with various people or groups along the way. As was fairly common among authors using source material, the author of Acts refrained from large-scale changes in his source, even retaining the pronoun “we,” in spite of the fact that it made for abrupt shifts in the narrative.

Another implication of these observations is that, since the “we” passages are taken from a source, they do not provide evidence of the author’s familiarity with Paul. And this underscores the caution in using Acts to reconstruct an image of Paul. While we will use it as a source of information about Paul, we will need to do so with due caution.

We will begin doing so next session, as we try to reconstruct “Saul,” the man first depicted in Acts as a persecutor of those who followed the movement called “the Way.” What can we know about Paul’s early life?