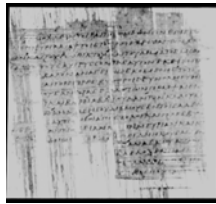


REL 204 THE BIBLE

Earliest Christianity

The Acts of the Apostles

- Continuation of Luke's Gospel
- Selective history that emphasizes:
 - Peter, James, John (chaps. 1-12)
 - Paul (chaps. 13-28)
- Many sermons & speeches
- Main theme: inclusive salvation



Acts 15 in 3rd cent. CE papyrus manuscript

Theme # 1: Geographic spread of Christianity



- 1:8 “... be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”
- In Acts, the earth's “end” = Rome

**Theme # 2:
Spread Across
Social Barriers**

- Languages
- Ethnic differences
- Ritual restrictions



Pentecost

- = Jewish Feast of (7) Weeks, *Shavuot*
- Coming of Holy Spirit > preaching in multiple languages
 - *Not* “speaking in tongues”
- Christian emphasis on *translations*
- But linguistic/ethnic tensions persisted
 - Palestinian vs. Hellenistic Jewish Christians

Inclusion of

- Samaritans, traditional rivals of Jews
- “God-fearers” = unconverted gentile followers of Judaism
 - Ethiopian eunuch:
 - African
 - Ritually excluded
 - Roman centurian:
 - Diet rules



Gentiles

- In Acts (not in history), Paul first converts gentiles to Christianity
- Journeys of the “apostle to the gentiles”



Social World of Late Antiquity

- Politics: Rome rules multicultural empire
- Hellenistic culture & Greek language dominate literature & business
- Society:
 - Urban
 - Trade economy
 - Much travel
 - Easy communication



Model of ancient Pergamum

Religions in Late Antiquity



- Roman civil religion = political loyalty
- Popular, competing religions:
 - Mystery religions: secret rites of salvation
 - Gnosticism: salvation through knowledge
 - Philosophical schools: Epicureans, Stoics, Platonists
- 1st cent Judaism was similarly diverse
