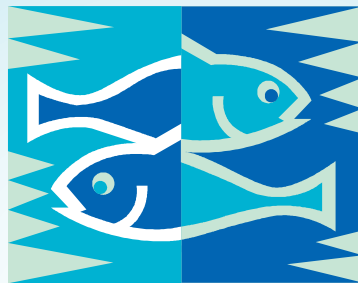


New Testament Survey

Jesus: the Living Lord

Studying the Acts



*And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us,
and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten
from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

John 1:14

6



CBLT

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Jesus: The Continued Story

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. Initial Observation
- II. In-depth Studies of Acts
- Conclusion

LESSON OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson you should:

- 1. Be able to draw a freehand map of the Bible lands.
- 2. Be prepared to outline Acts based on Acts 1:8.
- 3. Be encouraged in your personal evangelism.

LESSON ASSIGNMENTS

- 1. Read and complete this lesson and check your answers.
- 2. Read the entire book of Acts as you complete the lesson.
- 3. Complete the Study Project (outline Acts) and Practical Assignment (preach).

WORD STUDY

Judaizer — a person who tried to make the early Christians follow the Old Testament law

Now we are moving into one of the most dynamic books of the New Testament. Most people would think after Jesus' ignominious death that His movement would die out. Here was a man who only actively ministered for 3 years and then died as a criminal. If ever the truth of Christianity and what happened are in question, just turn to the book of Acts and see how these followers of Jesus took the world by storm. His resurrection was the crown of His ministry, and gave the final confirmation of who He was: God in the flesh.

Without the resurrection Jesus' band of cowardly followers, the disciples, would never have become the men of renown that we know them as. The resurrection spurred them on to share what they knew and now believed. They were the first Christians and are responsible for spreading Christianity all over the then known world! Just think what it would be like now if the disciples had not believed! How different the world would be without Christianity.

I. Initial Observation

As we have done with the Gospels our first step will be to just get the feel of Acts. You may have read this book many times and certainly know many of the stories. However, try to look at it as though you had never read it before. This is the story of the early Church in a nutshell. It is a dramatic book when you think of how quickly Christianity spread throughout the known world.



Exercise 1

Take time to scan the book of Acts in one sitting. Read out loud every tenth verse. This will just be enough to give you the feel of the book. Don't spend more than 20 minutes to complete this reading. Jot down any impressions that you get in your notebook. You will need these for the discussion at the next seminar.

In Section II of this lesson you will be reading through Acts more carefully and answering questions. As you do that, keep in mind the next two exercises. You need to have a good orientation for the geography of all that was going on. It will make the whole book much more meaningful to you as you chart the spread of the Gospel.



Exercise 2

Draw a freehand map of the Bible lands. You may use the maps from your study booklets or your Bible as guidelines, but do not merely trace them. Your map needs to include the entire Roman Empire at the time of Christ. Do not worry about plotting cities on your map at this point—you will do that later. Rather focus on identifying the different countries or provinces on your map. Do the original in black and white as you will be required to use colors later.

Now that you have the big picture, when you begin to read you can put into place specific points.



Exercise 3

*Plot the cities of Acts. As you read through Acts in this lesson note the different cities that are mentioned and plot them on the map that you have drawn. There are some cities which you may not be able to plot, but be sure to include all that you can. In your notebook write down **all** of the cities that you discover.*

II. In-depth Studies of Acts

Now that you have an overview of the book of Acts, carefully read the whole book keeping the following questions in mind and answering them as you proceed with your reading.



Question 1 Who is the main character of the first few chapters of Acts?



Question 2 Who is the main person of the last chapters?



Question 3 Where is he first introduced?



Question 4 At what chapter does he reappear to become the main character?



Question 5 Is any part of Acts not represented by a single main figure? Explain.

Paul was sent out several times, with varying companions. His first missionary journey takes place from Acts 13:4-14:28



Question 6 Where did it begin and end? What places did he visit?



Question 7 Who was his companion?

His second missionary journey is recorded in Acts 15:39—18:22.



Question 8 List the cities that he visited including where he began and ended.

His third missionary journey is in Acts 18:23-21:17.



Question 9 Again, list the places that he traveled to, as well as where he started from and ended.



Question 10 After Paul's missionary journeys what did he do?



Question 11 How many missionary journeys did Peter make? Where were these journeys to? (include the appropriate references)



Question 12 What did Peter do after he had finished all these journeys?



Question 13 What is the geographical center of the first few chapters of Acts?



Question 14 When does the narrative move away from this center?



Question 15 What were the first people groups that the gospel was brought to?



Question 16 In the second half of Acts what people group is the gospel being preached to primarily?



Question 17 Does persecution increase, stay the same, or decrease as you read through the account of Acts?



Question 18 Where in Acts is Paul's conversion reported?



Study Project : Outline Acts

Based on your reading, outline Acts. Create a detailed outline with main headings for every segment and subheadings for important sections within these segments. Bring this outline to the next seminar for discussion.

Conclusion



Exercise 4

Divide Acts according to Acts 1:8. In your notebook make an outline of Acts based on Acts 1:8. Make sure that you include all the chapters of Acts. You will want to memorize this outline for the exam.



Practical Assignment : Preach from Acts 1 and 28

Take time to carefully compare Acts chapters 1 and 28. Write down all the similarities and differences between these two chapters in your notebook. Note the last verse of the book; based on all that you have read in Acts and especially these two chapters what does this verse communicate to you? Use this research to write a sermon or lesson about the commission that we have been entrusted with. Preach this sermon or share the lesson before the final seminar. Make sure to bring your work to show to your course coach.

The story of Acts is incredible. The following map¹ is a picture of how the preaching of the Kingdom of God spread from the land of Israel all over the world.



According to church tradition each of the 12 disciples went to a different area. In Acts we have the record of Paul who was also an Apostle, but we don't hear the stories of the other twelve. All of the Apostles, including Paul, were martyred, except for John who died a natural death. Here is a quick summary of each man's evangelistic travels after the resurrection:

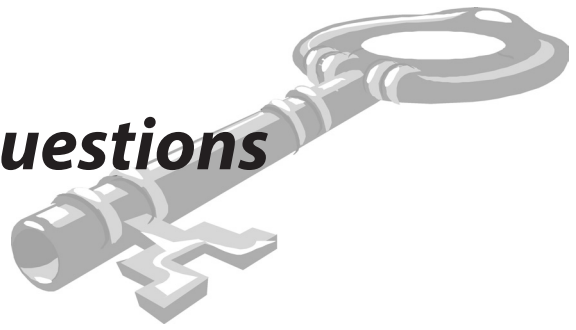
- Simon Peter went to Babylon (Iran/Iraq) and then to Rome.
- Andrew traveled to Armenia, Colchis (Georgia), Scythia (Ukraine), and Greece.
- James the Son of Zebedee was killed by Herod Agrippa I in Jerusalem, although some believe he went to Spain before that time.
- John, the Beloved, died peacefully in Ephesus after returning from his exile in Patmos.
- Philip witnessed in Galatia and Phrygia (Turkey); and some believe that he also traveled to Ukraine and/or France.
- Bartholomew teamed up with Philip at first, traveling to Turkey and then Azerbaijan.

¹ Simon Jenking. *Bible Mapbook*. — Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1985. — P. 102–103.

- Thomas traveled through Babylon (Iran and Iraq) and ended up in India where he founded a church which is still strong today.
- Matthew turned to the African continent evangelizing in Egypt and Ethiopia.
- James the Son of Alphaeus is believed to have been the first leader of the Church in Syrian Antioch (in present day Turkey) and to have witnessed throughout Syria.
- Thaddaeus is believed to have traveled to Armenia, Iraq and Azerbaijan spreading the Good News of the resurrection.
- Simon the Zealot traveled extensively, visiting Egypt, North Africa (probably Lybia), Britain, Syria, Armenia and Iraq before he was martyred in Iran.
- Matthias (chosen in Judas Iscariot's place) partnered with Andrew, traveling in Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine, Greece and ending in Jerusalem.

Each of these men was gripped with the desire to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. They changed the face of the world. Sometimes we wonder if it is possible for one person to make a difference...each of these men changed the world through their witness. Now we need to follow!

Answers to Questions



1. Peter
2. Paul
3. Acts 7:58
4. Acts 12: 25
5. Chapters 6-8 do not have any strong personalities; rather they record the stories of several people, primarily Stephen and Philip.
6. It began in Antioch and finished in Antioch. Places Paul visited: Seleucia, Cyprus, Salamis, Paphos, Perga, Pamphylia, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, Pisidia, Attalia
7. Barnabas
8. He began in Antioch and ended in Antioch; visited: Syria, Cilicia, Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Phrygia, Galatia, province of Asia, Troas, Samothrace, Neapolis, Philippi, Amphipolis, Apollonia, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, Caesarea.
9. Paul visited Galatia, Phrygia, Ephesus, Macedonia, Achaia, Greece, Philippi, Troas, Assos, Mitylene, Kios, Samos Miletus, Cos, Rhodes, Patara, Tyre, Ptolemais, Caesarea, beginning in Antioch and ending in Jerusalem.
10. Immediately at the end of his third journey Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea and then eventually made his way to Rome where he had to wait for quite a while to be tried before Caesar.
11. Peter made 2 (or 3 depending on how they are divided) missionary journeys.
His first journey was to Samaria (8:14-25).
Acts 9:31-32 reports Peter as traveling throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. He also went down to Lydda and Joppa (9:32-43).
From Joppa Peter went to Caesarea (Acts 10:23-38).
12. Peter gave a report of what he had been doing to the leaders in Jerusalem; he was imprisoned for a short while and released miraculously, and then we hear nothing more about him in Acts.
13. Jerusalem.
14. Chapter 13 is the definite move away from Jerusalem as the center of the story, but really this move had begun already in chapter 8.
15. Primarily the Jews, but also God-fearing people from other nations
16. Gentiles
17. Although the persecution recorded in Acts rises and falls it appears to stay about the same throughout the book.
18. Paul's conversion is reported in Acts 9:1-22; 22:1-21; and 26:1-20.

Answers to Exercises



- 1.** Your answer.
- 2.** Your answer. See maps included in this course for guidelines.
- 3.** Your map should include these important cities: Jerusalem, Antioch, Caesarea, Damascus, Philippi, Lydda, Iconium, Derbe, Ephesus, Athens, Corinth, Psidian Antioch, Alexandria, Salamis, Paphos, Lystra, Tarsus, Perga, Attalia, Seleucia, Thessalonica, Berea, Troas, Rome, Samaria.
- 4.** Your answer. An example might be:
 - I. Jerusalem (Acts 1—7)
 - II. Judea and Samaria (Acts 8—13)
 - III. Remotest part of the Earth (Acts 14—28)

There are also several other ways of outlining this book according to this verse. You may want to include an Introduction section or Conclusion or something else. Make an outline which is logical to you.

Acts: The Gospel Continued

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. Background Information
 - A. Authorship
 - B. Date
 - C. General Background
 - D. Audience
 - E. Geography of Acts
- II. Special Emphases
 - A. The Unfinished Story
 - B. The Holy Spirit
 - C. Key Verse
- III. Jesus: The Living Lord
 - A. Acts 1, 2
 - B. Acts 3, 4
 - C. Acts 5
 - D. Acts 6, 7
 - E. Acts 8-12
 - F. Acts 13-15
 - G. Acts 16—18:22
 - H. Acts 18:23—21:17
 - I. Acts 21:18—28:31

Conclusion

- A. Holy Spirit
- B. A Challenge

Conclusion of Course

LESSON OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson you should be able to:

1. Give from memory the author of Acts, an approximate date for the writing of Acts, the purpose of the book and the audience.

2. Understand the importance of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life.
3. Evaluate your Christian conduct.
4. Evaluate the witnessing power of your church.
5. Witness to someone who has not yet accepted the good news of Jesus.

LESSON ASSIGNMENTS

1. Complete the lesson and check your answers.
2. Read Appendix 1 from *A Look at the New Testament*.
3. Complete the Practical Assignment (witness) and the Study Project (Holy Spirit).

In the last lesson we studied Acts inductively in order to understand the overall picture it presents. In this lesson we will begin to fill in some of the details to broaden our understanding. It always opens new windows when we put a book into the context of its background. And once we have grasped the total picture we can begin to focus on some of the more specific applications to our present day and to our personal lives.

I. Background Information

A. Authorship



Exercise 1

Discover the author of Acts. Even if you already know who the author of Acts is, complete this exercise anyway. Read the first three verses of each of the Gospels and of Acts. Between the introduction to which Gospel and the introduction to Acts do you notice similarities? Now, who was the author of that Gospel? This person was also the author of Acts.

Much of Acts is obviously written from personal experience as can be seen from the use of “we” in certain passages, but whatever Luke did not personally experience he carefully got eyewitnesses to tell him about. Thus Acts has a very “alive” feel to it, because it was built from personal testimonies. Even though Luke does not refer to himself by name in Acts, he is identified as a traveling companion of Paul in two of his epistles. You may want to review some of the information you have already learned about Luke in Lesson 6.

B. Date

Since Acts is the companion book to the Gospel of Luke, and since it was obviously written after the gospel (see Acts 1:1), we can safely assume that Acts was written during the mid-sixties. So Acts can be placed between 63 and 68 A.D.

C. General Background

Just imagine! Acts was written only 35 years after the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. All the events recorded in Acts happened within a few years of Jesus' life and took place within 30 years' time. At the same time as the things which were recorded in Acts, church tradition tells us that the gospel was being spread to Armenia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq, India, Egypt, Ethiopia, and even Britain!² By the end of the first century A.D. most of the populated world had received at least one emissary of the gospel.

² Charles Kimball, <http://www.xenohistorian.faithweb.com/church/xr01.html>, 2000.

Acts is the first part of the great story of the spread of Christianity. It gives us the account of two great apostles, Peter and Paul, and how God used them and chose to work through them.

As the Gospels set forth the “Acts” of Christ so this book sets forth the “Acts” of the Holy Spirit. As Christ fills the Gospels revealing the Father, so the Holy Spirit fills the Acts revealing the Son and in making effectual His saving work. This book is the history of the early days of the Christian Church. It traces this history from the Genesis of the Church at Pentecost through the period of persecution and dispersion, the spreading of the Gospel in other regions, and finally the planting of the Church by the missionary labors of the Apostle Paul and his companions. Thus, from Palestine, where the greater portion of the Scriptures were written and where Jesus labored and brought salvation to mankind, Christianity spreads throughout the Roman Empire and the Church is established in the world’s capital.³

Acts can be easily outlined by using the divisions in Acts 1:8 as the guidelines. There are other ways of outlining Acts, such as the ministries of Peter and Paul or Jerusalem and Syrian Antioch, but the simplest is to divide it according to the spread of the gospel: from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the rest of the world. Note how critical the cities of Jerusalem and Antioch are in the narrative of Acts.

In the matter of the Gospel and God’s purpose in Christ these two cities are representative of the whole world—Jew and Gentile. It was at Jerusalem, the city of David, that Jesus of the royal lineage of David, offered Himself the supreme sacrifice for sinful humanity. It was at Jerusalem that the prophecies of Christ’s expiatory work and resurrection were fulfilled. It was at Jerusalem that the Holy Spirit descended. It was here in this great Jewish center the Christian Church was born, and here that Christian activities began. In these days the Gospel was preached to the Jews—”to the Jew first.”

It is possible that the disciples would have remained a longer time in Jerusalem if they had not been driven out by persecution. The dispersion of these preachers of the Word enlarged the scope of their activities for the Kingdom of Christ, which, in the labors of Paul and his fellow-workers, extended beyond all Jewish bounds.

It was Antioch in Syria that became the great center of evangelism. Christ was promised the Gentiles for His inheritance, and from this Gentile city went forth the great apostle to the Gentiles to carry the Gospel message to Gentile cities. We noticed in our study of Luke, the Gospel for the Greek, how Luke adapted his presentation of Jesus to the characteristics of the Greek relative to the universality of Christ and His Gospel. As the companion of Paul he is in the midst of this world-wide evangelism, is at home in these surroundings and circumstances, and with what interest he pens this narrative of these missionaries laboring in behalf of the Gentile as well as the Jewish world. It is quite probable that Luke was a native of Antioch, the center of these world-transforming activities, and if so, how suggestive it is that he belonged at the center of this new order of things. There are no two other cities that are thus related in the universal scheme of the Gospel as are Jerusalem and Antioch.⁴

The narrative of Acts is also the background for all of Paul’s epistles. In Acts we meet the churches of Philippi and Colosse, Corinth and Ephesus. It is here that we can learn about the founding of these churches and their circumstances, we also have opportunity to meet some of the leaders of these churches. The gospels give us the reason for what happened in Acts and for the teaching of the epistles; Acts gives us the background of the churches and epistles.

³ *The Holy Bible, King James Version, Analytical Ed.* (Chicago: John A. Dickson Publishing Co., 1941), 1245.

⁴ *The Holy Bible, King James Version, Analytical Ed.*, 1285.

D. Audience

Luke, as he states in his first verse, was writing to Theophilus, just as he had written the gospel account for this man's benefit. However it is obvious that Luke did not write for Theophilus alone, but for many others. Unlike his gospel, however, Acts is not aimed to please the Greek mind; rather Luke writes to encourage all Christians and to give them an account of the growth of the church and the work of the Holy Spirit after the death of Christ. Thus in his writing he is also writing to you and me.

E. Geography of Acts

The geography of Acts is extensive. No longer are our maps confined to the Palestinian world, but rather they cover all of the Roman Empire. We have already discovered the extent of the geography of Acts in Lesson 11 so now we will consider again Paul's journeys.



Exercise 2

Plot Paul's journeys on the map. Using the map that you drew in the previous lesson, plot Paul's journeys. Use a different color for each journey and make sure you note which color you are using for each journey. Don't forget to bring your map to the next seminar to share with the other students.



Question 1 How do we know that the author of Acts was Luke?



Question 2 What kind of man was Luke? (see Lesson 6, "Authorship")



Question 3 When was the book of Acts written?



Question 4 Why is Jerusalem important in the history of the Church?



Question 5 Why is Antioch important in the history of the Church? Read Acts 11:29-30 and 13:1-3 before you answer this question.



Question 6 To whom was the book of Acts written?

II. Special Emphases

A. The Unfinished Story

The Acts of the Apostles is not a normal account of history. It is not merely a recitation of dates and historical facts. It is God intervening in human history.

Because the story of Jesus is so impressive—God among us! God speaking a language we can understand! God acting in ways that heal and help and save us!—there is a danger that we will be impressed, but only be impressed. As the spectacular dimensions of this story slowly (or suddenly) dawn upon us, we could easily become enthusiastic spectators, and then let it go at that—become admirers of Jesus, generous with our oohs and ahs, and in our better moments inspired to imitate him.

It is Luke's task to prevent that, to prevent us from becoming mere spectators to Jesus, fans of the Message. Of the original quartet of writers on Jesus, Luke alone continues to tell the story as the apostles and disciples live it into the next generation. The remarkable thing is that it continues to be essentially the same story. Luke continues his narration with hardly a break, a pause perhaps to dip his pen in the inkwell, writing in the same style, using the same vocabulary.

The story of Jesus doesn't end with Jesus. It continues in the lives of those who believe in Him. The supernatural does not stop with Jesus. Luke makes it clear that these Christians he wrote about were no more spectators of Jesus than Jesus was a spectator of God—they are in on the action of God, God acting in them, God living in them. Which also means, of course, in us.⁵

This account of the acts of the Holy Spirit is being continued even today. We are a part of the story of Acts. The last verses in Acts leave Paul in prison, his story unfinished. Perhaps the Holy Spirit wished this so that we could also add our stories to Acts.

Acts takes us through the birth of the church, its early years, the various growth spurts that it experienced in the Roman world, and ends with the church coming into maturity.

It is so important to understand that this book is a continuation of the gospel of Jesus Christ! So often we view it just as the story of the early days of the church, or we think of it as merely the account of Paul's missionary efforts. It is so much more! Here we see Jesus' teachings put into action, we see His miracles come to fruition. We see Him living and working in the lives of His disciples and through them reaching others. We see Him establishing His Kingdom.

B. The Holy Spirit

Because this is a spiritual history it becomes obvious even with a cursory reading of Acts that these are supernatural events and they have a supernatural source. Chapter one starts with Christ's promise of the Holy Spirit followed in chapter two with the physical manifestation of the Spirit and His power. The change in these men is dramatic. We see confused, fearful men transformed into powerful leaders boldly proclaiming the message of a Resurrected Saviour to everyone they meet—even those who crucified Jesus.



Exercise 3

Mark in your Bible the references to the Holy Spirit. In Section III you will again be reading the book of Acts through. As you do that use a colored pencil to mark every place the Holy Spirit is mentioned.

⁵ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 1966.

The Holy Spirit was Jesus' gift to His disciples and thereby the church. His power is available today. We are still writing the "Book of Acts."

C. Key Verse

It isn't difficult to see that 1:8 is a powerful verse in which Jesus predicts (or promises) what will happen.



Question 7 Write Acts 1:8 here and then memorize it.

As you memorize this verse, think about whether it is a promise you can claim for your own life.

III. Jesus: The Living Lord

At this point read Appendix 1, "Let's Look at Acts". The following questions cover both the text and the whole book of Acts chronologically. As you go through the questions and answer them, refer to the outline you made of Acts in the last lesson. Try to fix some of these events in your mind as to chronological order. It will help open up your understanding of what was happening.

A. Acts 1, 2



Question 8 What two great Christian events does Acts alone record for us?



Question 9 For what specific reason were the disciples filled with the Holy Spirit?



Question 10 What is the real objective of the church as Dr. Mears stated?



Exercise 4

Think about your church. What are its objectives? Do you know? Do the leaders know? If you are not a leader, ask one of the leaders what the objectives of your church are. If you are a leader, remember, these are not your objectives, but the objectives your church is putting into practice. Biblically evangelism must be an objective of the church. Dr. Mears asks, "Are we seeing it today in our churches?" Write your answers for your church in your notebook.

B. Acts 3, 4



Question 11 What event aroused opposition for the new church?



Question 12 List the people before whom Peter and John appeared.

Does this list sound familiar? What a shock to these people to have to deal again with the issue of Jesus Christ! We do not know how long it was from the time of Pentecost, but the time lapse is minimal as this is the first recorded event after Pentecost.

At the end of chapter 4 we see a remarkable display of the unity and love of Christ shining through the early Church.

C. Acts 5



Exercise 5

Evaluate yourself. What manifestations of love do you show to other people in your church? How do you compare with the early believers? Is your love for your fellow believers so great that you are willing to give unselfishly to them? Are you a Barnabas (a Son of Encouragement)? Or an Ananias or Sapphira? Do you show by your life and conduct that you are a Christian? Write your answers in your notebook. Note in which areas you are strongest and weakest.

Wonderful things were happening in Jerusalem. The power of the Holy Spirit was physically present in the miraculous signs and wonders the apostles performed. But the High Priest and his cohorts responded with jealousy, not with wonder and awe, and persecution began in earnest.



Exercise 6

Look at your Christian life. The apostles taught, and lived, that we should obey God rather than men. Do you live this? Think about a recent time when you did not obey God. Why did you disobey? Was it because of fear of men? What can you do to help yourself obey next time?

D. Acts 6, 7



Question 13 Who is the key figure in this passage?



Question 14 What had he done to cause hostility?



Question 15 What was the charge brought against him and by whom?



Question 16 Why did Stephen spend so much time telling the history of Israel?

E. Acts 8-12

With the martyrdom of Stephen we see the dynamics of the church begin to change.



Question 17 Who was a key figure who heard this long speech of Stephen and witnessed his martyrdom?



Question 18 What is one of the greatest aids for the spread of Christianity?



Question 19 Who went to Samaria to preach?



Exercise 7

Philip the soul winner. Think about Philip and what made him successful as a soul winner. List some of your ideas in your notebook. Why was he able to lead the Ethiopian to faith? How effective are you as a soul winner? What can you learn from Philip?

And so we begin to see the spread of the Gospel, going hand in hand with Saul breathing out his threats. And God suddenly reaches down and stops Saul's life. He turns from persecutor to convert in a moment's time because He met his Lord face to face.



Question 20 What did the Lord say about Saul in 9:15?

So often we want God to speak to us and tell us what to do, but are we ready to do it? Obviously, despite his zeal against Christians, Saul was ready to obey once he knew who his Master was. And he was ready to suffer.

God was preparing a man to go out specifically to the Gentiles. At the same time He was preparing the Church to accept Gentiles.



Question 21 What did Peter have a vision about?

You will remember from the Old Testament that there were many animals which were considered unclean by Jews because of the Laws that God had given. Take some time and look at Leviticus 11 now. This chapter contains a long list dividing the animals into those which were permissible for Jews and those which were not. For a Jew to even touch an unclean animal made him unclean for the rest of the day. These laws set the Jews apart from other nations which ate any animal, and many of these laws have been proven to be very healthy to follow. In this way God protected His people from various diseases and made it physically obvious that they were a nation set apart for Him.



Question 22 What did Peter's vision mean?

This is a dramatic turn in events. The Jews had always been the chosen people. Suddenly they are confronted with the fact that God has opened wide the doors of salvation to all men.



Exercise 8

Think about prejudice in your area. There are many different kinds of prejudice. What are some kinds that are prevalent in your area? What groups are the objects of prejudice in your city? Is there someone in your church who is the object of prejudice? Are you perpetuating that prejudice by your attitudes and actions? What can you do about it?

If Peter and Paul had not opened the doors of Christianity to Gentiles, we would not be studying this course. Prejudice is deadly to evangelization and church growth.

In chapter 12 we have the dramatic story of Peter's deliverance from prison. Think of the contrast between the man Herod and the man Peter, the two key figures of this chapter. Note that the church was "earnestly praying" for Peter—and how unbelievable the answer was! It is a dramatic story of God's miraculous power, and undoubtedly was shared over and over among the believers as a source of encouragement in the midst of persecution.

F. Acts 13-15

Now the book of Acts moves away from the activities of Jerusalem and surroundings to the missionary activities of Paul and his companions. You will also notice that this is where Saul's name actually changes to Paul. It was customary to have a given name and a later name. "Saul" was Hebrew and showed his Jewish background, whereas "Paul" was Roman. Evidently this name came into use as Paul moved actively into the Gentile world.



Question 23 Who was Paul's first companion on his journey?



Question 24 What have you already learned about Barnabas?



Question 25 Who sent these men out?



Question 26 Why did Paul and Barnabas begin to preach to the Gentiles in Pisidian Antioch?

It is interesting to note that the Jews were so jealous at the success of Paul and Barnabas that they stirred up persecution and had them kicked out of the region.



Question 27 What was the response of the disciples to this persecution?

Look carefully at the events at Iconium. How quickly people's emotions changed. It is easy to preach and witness and be a light for Christ when people are open and receptive and happy to see us. But Paul and Barnabas did not waste time in discouragement and defeat. They pressed on, and then made their way back to follow up with their new converts. This was not an evangelistic blitz! It was discipleship.

Acts 15 changes from the missionary journey to the Council at Jerusalem, but this Council was important to the mission work that Paul and Barnabas were doing.



Question 28 What was the issue at hand?



Question 29 Is this the first time this issue has come up in the church?



Question 30 What did each of these men contribute to the council's decision?

a. Peter (vv.7-11) _____

b. Paul and Barnabas (v. 12) _____

c. James (vv.13-21) _____

This was an important meeting. Without the decision of the council to reject circumcision as a prerequisite for being a Christian, legalism would have abounded and created many factions. The whole council meeting was handled wisely and orderly and is a good example for how churches should resolve problems and make decisions. There was follow up with a letter so there would be no misunderstanding. The Gentiles were left with the encouragement to live in such a way as not to bring offense to the Jewish believers, rather than a dictatorial stand of "You must not do this!"



Exercise 9

Evaluate the standards of your church. Every church has spoken and unspoken standards by which they judge "outsiders." "In order to become a member you must ...," "Did you see the skirt that girl is wearing?!" "I've heard that he goes to bars." What are the requirements for a "good" Christian in your church? The Jews tried to force the Gentiles to live according to their laws; what do you or the people in your church require of new believers and "outsiders?" Is there Biblical support for these standards? Come prepared to share your answers from your notebook at the next seminar.

This chapter ends with an unfortunate disagreement between Paul and Barnabas at the beginning of their second missionary journey.



Question 31 What was the disagreement?



Question 32 What did Barnabas decide to do?



Question 33 Who went with Paul?



Question 34 What was the purpose of their trip?

G. Acts 16—18:22

You have already plotted the second missionary journey of Paul on a map so you are familiar with the places that he went, especially as he returned to some cities again to disciple the churches. To help these places take meaning we are going to list some of them and you can fill in the important events that happened in those places.



Question 35 As you read through the scripture passage, look for the following names and record what took place there.

a. Lystra _____

b. Troas _____

c. Philippi _____

and _____

d. Thessalonica _____

e. Athens _____

f. Corinth _____

H. Acts 18:23—21:17

We now come to Paul's third missionary journey. His purposes remain the same. He wants to encourage and disciple where he has been and reach out with the Gospel to new places.



Question 36 Record the main events and ministries of Paul in these areas in which he traveled:

a. Galatia and Phrygia (18:23) _____

b. Ephesus and vicinity (18:24-19:41) _____

c. Macedonia and Greece (20:1-6) _____

d. Troas to Jerusalem (20:7—21:17) _____

I. Acts 21:18—28:31

Now we have a change in the pace of Paul's life. On his missionary journeys he was actively going out to evangelize and disciple. Now he becomes a prisoner, no longer his own master, but no less vigilant in evangelism and discipleship. Most of his letters were written from prison. He had opportunity to stand before government officials and leaders and give a clear testimony, from which he never shirked. Nevertheless for the rest of his life he was in bonds.



Question 37 Fill in the following chart showing before whom Paul had to appear and where.

Appearances of Paul on Trial					
Passage	21:40	22:30	23:31	25:13	27:1—28:31
Before whom	a)	b)	c)	d)	e)
Where	f)		g)		h)

Paul made his defense before each one of these groups. All of these events took place in a period of about 5 years, after which Paul was martyred in Rome.



Question 38 What was Paul able to say when he knew the end of his life had come? (II Tim. 4:6-8)

Conclusion

A. Holy Spirit

Throughout this whole lesson you have been marking all the instances where the Holy Spirit is mentioned.



Study Project: The Holy Spirit in Acts

Look back over all of the instances in Acts where the Holy Spirit is mentioned. List what you have learned about the Holy Spirit. Make it brief, just one thought for each chapter where the Spirit is mentioned. Be prepared to share what you have found in the next seminar.

B. A Challenge

In Acts we see the spread of the gospel from Palestine throughout the Roman world. We see different great men heading the efforts to evangelize the then known world. We find Peter preaching to thousands and opening the door of the Kingdom of Heaven to the Gentiles. Paul the persecutor of the gospel became Paul the propagator of the gospel and we watch him spread the good news

to thousands of Gentiles. We leave Paul in prison because of his witness, but not defeated. No, he is using his chains to spread the gospel into the very house of the emperor!

The last verse in Acts leaves us inspired: “Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.” He preached the Kingdom of God which Jesus preached, and he taught about the King.

We have seen Peter, Stephen, Philip, Paul and many others spread the good news of Jesus Christ to those whom God has given them. And what is our response to this?

Allow the following assignment to be a special assignment between you and God, perhaps renewing your covenant with God to be a witness for Him by simply being obedient to His promptings.



Practical Assignment: Witness by Word and Deed

This week pray that God would bring somebody across your path who needs your help. Keep in mind that there are many different ways of helping people; your aim here is primarily spiritual, but perhaps God will give you someone who also needs some other kind of help. Pray also that the Holy Spirit will give you boldness to minister to this person and eyes to see their need. Then keep your eye out for whoever it is that God wants you to minister to. After you have completed this assignment bring a written account of what happened to the final seminar.

Conclusion of Course

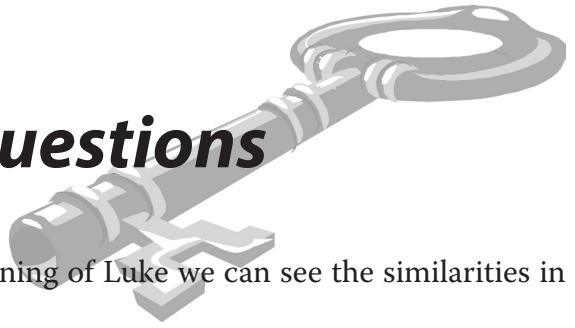
In the last 12 weeks we have covered the historical books of the New Testament. The Gospels contain all that we know about Jesus’ life here on earth. We have available to us the viewpoint of 4 different men filled by the Holy Spirit to set down the things we needed to know. We have covered the events of Christ’s life, His major teachings, His deity, and His Kingship in the Kingdom He came to proclaim.

Then we saw the history of the early church as recorded in Acts by Luke. We saw timid men who ran in fear at the arrest of Jesus redeem themselves in power and boldness. The whole message of Acts is based on the fact of the Resurrected Christ and the movement of Christianity is powered by the Holy Spirit.

These five books are the foundation of our Christian faith. In the next course we will study the rest of the New Testament. Most of the other books are letters which address various needs of this new-born church. You will see how they fit into the growing church of that time as well as their value for the church today. But without the foundation of what you have just studied it would be meaningless. Acts gives us the historical setting, but the Gospels give us Jesus.

Don’t let this course be the end of your study of the Gospels and Acts. The more you study these books the more you will find you have to learn! Let this study be the bright beginning of a deeper understanding and love for God the Father who cares for us; for our Savior and King, God’s Son; and for our Counselor and Guide, the Holy Spirit.

Answers to Questions



1. By comparing the beginning of Acts to the beginning of Luke we can see the similarities in whom they are written to.
2. Native of Antioch, Greek, educated, doctor
3. In the mid-sixties of the first century
4. Jesus died there; was resurrected there; the Holy Spirit descended there; the Christian Church was born, and Christian activities began there.
5. It became a strong church in the early days being one of the first places where the Gentiles were preached to. It is where the disciples were first called Christians. It was a sending church and became the center for evangelism reaching out to the whole Roman world.
6. Theophilus, but obviously was intended for a wider audience
7. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”
8. The Ascension of Jesus and Pentecost
9. To be witnesses.
10. 2:47—“The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”
11. Peter’s healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate.
12. Rulers, elders, teachers of the law, Annas—the high priest, Caiaphas, relatives of the high priest
13. Stephen
14. “He was full of God’s grace and power and did great wonders and miraculous signs. Those opposing him could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.”
15. The false witnesses said, “He continually speaks against the temple and the law and said that Jesus of Nazareth will destroy the temple and change the customs Moses handed down to the Jews.”
16. You may have several answers, but he was showing his respect for God, for Moses, for the Law, and pointing out the fact that neither these people nor their forefathers had obeyed the Law. Instead they had been in rebellion against God.
17. Saul in 8:1a
18. Persecution
19. Philip
20. “This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.”
21. Peter dreamt that a sheet was let down from heaven with all kinds of unclean animals in it.
22. The Jews rigorously followed the rules about clean and unclean animals. An “unclean” animal was repulsive to any law abiding Jew, just as contact with Gentiles was repulsive to them. Through the vision God was telling Peter that there was a new order (remember the Kingdom of God?) and not to reject the Gentiles, but to accept them because He had accepted them. In this way God prepared Peter to go to Cornelius’ house and minister there.
23. Barnabas

- 24.** Barnabas was a giving person and his name meant “Son of Encouragement”. “Barnabas” was actually a nickname given to Joseph of Cyprus by the apostles.
- 25.** The church at Antioch, but at the command of the Holy Spirit
- 26.** 13:44-47—The Jews rejected the gospel so Paul and Barnabas felt free to go on and give it to the Gentiles.
- 27.** They left, but they were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.
- 28.** vs. 1—unless you are circumcised, you cannot be saved
- 29.** No, it was also dealt with in Acts 10 and 11.
- 30.** a. It is through the grace of the Lord Jesus we are saved, just as they are.
 b. They told of the miraculous signs and wonders that God was doing among the Gentiles.
 c. We should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God, but give them these guidelines: abstain from meat offered to idols, sexual immorality, strangled meat and blood.
- 31.** Whether to take John Mark with them or not
- 32.** He took John Mark and sailed for Cyprus.
- 33.** Silas
- 34.** To go to Syria and Cilicia to strengthen the churches that had been planted on the first trip
- 35.** a. Timothy joined Paul.
 b. Paul had the vision of going to Macedonia.
 c. The conversion of Lydia, the business woman,
 and
 Paul and Silas’s imprisonment after delivering a girl from an evil spirit, and their subsequent miraculous release with the salvation of the jailer and his family.
 d. A riot with Jason and others being dragged before the authorities.
 e. Paul’s famous speech proclaiming to the Greeks the “Unknown God”
 f. Meets and stays with Aquila and Priscilla more than a year and a half.
- 36.** a. Strengthened the disciples there/Follow-up
 b. Apollos trained for better ministry; believers baptized with the Holy Spirit; extraordinary miracles; riot in Ephesus
 c. Encouragement and follow-up
 d. Eutychus raised from the dead by Paul; farewell at Ephesus; Agabus’ warning to Paul
- 37.** a. The mob
 b. The Council
 c. The Governors: Felix and Festus
 d. King Agrippa
 e. Emperor Caesar (awaiting trial)
 f. At Jerusalem
 g. At Caesarea
 h. To Rome
- 38.** “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith ...”

Answers to Exercises



- 1.** Luke is the author of both Luke and Acts.
- 2.** Your answer.
- 3.** Your answer.
- 4.** Your answer. You may find other objectives for the church of Jesus Christ—like equipping the saints, but if the church does not evangelize, soon the church would cease to exist.
- 5.** Your answer. Hypocrisy started very early in the church. Don't write something so that you will look good (like Ananias and Sapphira), be honest in your answer.
- 6.** Your answer.
- 7.** Your answer. 1. Philip was in communion with God 2. He was obedient, 3. He knew the Word of God, 4. He was Spirit filled.
- 8.** Your answer. Maybe you have never sincerely looked at the issue of prejudice. Think this through seriously before you answer.
- 9.** Your answer. As you write your answers, always keep in mind that we are saved "by grace." Having standards to be a leader in a church is one issue. Having standards about what people have to do before they can be saved is another.

Let's Look At Acts

Acts Portrays Jesus Christ, The Living Lord

Chapter Six from *A Look at the New Testament* by Henrietta Mears⁶

Christ had told His disciples that He would send the Spirit, and *He shall bear witness of me: . . .* This promise of Christ was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when He poured forth the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. (Acts 2:16,17,33)

This book tells of the extension of the Gospel to the Gentiles. All through the Old Testament we find God dealing with the Jew. In the New Testament we find Him working among all nations.

Power for Witnessing

(Read Acts 1; 2)

Our Lord spent a wonderful forty days with His disciples, after His resurrection. After He had spoken His last words to them (recorded in Acts 1:8), He was taken up *and a cloud received Him out of their sight*. Think of so great an event told in such a few words! The Father took His Son back to glory. There was no chariot of fire, as when Elijah was taken. No whirlwind was necessary to lift Him to His throne. (See Acts 1:9-11.) Hence, Jesus did not go away. He merely went out of sight. Henceforth He will be an unseen Presence, for He promised, *Lo, I am with you alway*.

This same Jesus . . . shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven (Acts 1:11). If this is so, we should examine how He went. Then we shall know He will come back. See what the Scriptures say. It will be:

- Personal 1 Thess. 4:16
- Visible Revelation 1:7
- Bodily Matthew 24:30
- Local Luke 24:50

⁶ Used by permission.

Next in importance to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to this earth, is the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Church was born on that great day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

The wonderful thing about Pentecost was not the mighty wind or the tongues of fire, but the disciples' being filled with the Holy Spirit, that they might be witnesses to men. If we do not have the desire to tell others of Christ, it is evident that we do not know the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Do not think that at Pentecost the Holy Spirit came into the world for the first time. All through the Old Testament we see accounts of His guiding men and giving them strength. Now the Spirit was to use a new instrument, the Church, which had been born on that day.

The theme of this first Christian sermon was that Jesus is the Messiah, as shown by His resurrection.

The real power of the Holy Spirit was shown when Peter, the humble fisherman, rose to speak, and 3,000 souls were saved! How can we account for cowardly Peter's boldness as he stood that day to preach before a multitude on the streets of Jerusalem? What was the secret of Peter's ministry? This is often asked of men. There was only one reason. Peter was filled with the Holy Ghost. Before such a man the multitudes always melt.

It is a serious thing to charge men with murder; yet Peter did just this (Acts 2:36). Will he get away with it? Will he be stoned? The last verses in chapter 2 answer the question. *Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?* (Acts 2:37).

What a Church was this First Church of Jerusalem, organized with a membership of 3,000 on the day of Pentecost! What glorious days followed, in "teaching" and "fellowship," and "signs and wonders," and, above all, salvation! *The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved* (Acts 2:47). This is the real objective of the Church. Are we seeing it today in our churches?

Witnessing in Jerusalem

(Read Acts 3:1-8:3)

Three conflicts disturbed the early Church (Acts 3— 7). The first real opposition grew out of the miracle of Peter's healing the lame man at the Gate Beautiful of the temple. Peter took advantage of the crowd which had gathered around the man, and preached his second recorded sermon. He aroused the leaders because he taught the people that this Jesus, whom they had crucified, was their long-promised Messiah. So powerful were the words of Peter and John that 5,000 men turned to Christ (Acts 4:4)! The rulers forbade the apostles to preach Jesus, but opposition only made the Church thrive (See Acts 4:18,31).

Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need (Acts 4:34,35).

Did the early Church teach Communism? Or Socialism? Never! No man was compelled to part with his personal possessions. It was not expected of him. If he brought what he had, it was a purely voluntary act. The Church became so unselfish that many sold all they had and gave it to the apostles to distribute "as each had need." But even this act of love and generosity was open to abuse and deception. Barnabas' liberality was an illustration of the spirit of love. Ananias and Sapphira were an illustration of deception in that they deceived themselves and the apostles as well. But the Holy Spirit revealed the truth about it all. They wanted glory without paying the price. They wanted honor without honesty. They were punished with instant death, for, claiming to give all to God, they had kept back part (Acts 5:4-5).

As Christians, we claim to give all to Christ. Complete surrender is the condition He sets down for discipleship. *Forsake all and follow Me*, is His condition (See Luke 14:33). Do we hold anything back from Christ? Are we hypocrites in our testimony?

The power in the apostles' story was in the fact that their lives fitted in with the life of their risen Christ. "You've got to show me," is the attitude of the world today. Those early Christians did show the world. Do you show by your life and conduct that you are a Christian?

The disciples persisted in preaching the Word (Read Acts 5:12-42). The Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection, were again stirred up by the disciples, continuing to teach the resurrection of Jesus. Although they threw the apostles into prison, God opened the prison doors and brought them forth (Acts 5:19).

Nothing stopped their mouths. See the result of this second opposition (Acts 5:41-42). Their statement: *We ought to obey God rather than men*, should be the conviction of every life. Is it yours?

This opposition was centered around Stephen. Read the experiences as recorded in Acts 6 and 7. Stephen was just a layman, but he was one of the first deacons. He is described as *a man full of faith and power* (Acts 6:8). We have a record of but one day of his life—the last. What an account it is! It is not the length of time we live that counts, but how we live. Someone has said, "A Christian is always on duty." This means that every minute of his life is important and under God's direction.

The leaders in the synagogue *were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake*. Their anger flared into murderous hatred. Stephen was the first martyr of the Christian Church. To Stephen's death we may trace, without doubt, the first impressions made by the followers of Christ on Saul.

Witnessing In Judea And Samaria

(Read Acts 8:4-12:25)

The disciples had been witnesses in Jerusalem, but Jesus had told them they must go into Judea and Samaria. How was this to be accomplished?

If you were quite sure that you would lose your life by remaining in your own home town, but would be safe in some nearby village, do you think you would go to that village? This is the very problem that faced the early Church in Jerusalem. There were religious leaders there who thought they were doing God's will when they tried to wipe out Christianity by killing the Christians. Paul said: *I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth* (Acts 26:9).

Paul really began his work of spreading the Gospel then but he didn't know it. Read Acts 8:3. He thought he was stamping out Christianity. Instead, he was spreading it. Just laugh when you see anyone opposing Christianity, Persecution always has spread Christianity like wind spreads fire.

This explains the spreading of the work into Samaria (Acts 8:1). Who was the chosen leader for Samaria (Acts 8:5)? Not Peter, but Philip, one of the deacons. Philip had settled in Samaria. He was an evangelist. Jesus said, *Ye shall be witnesses in . . . Samaria*. Philip preached Christ and his evangelistic campaign was meeting with tremendous success (See Acts 8:6-8). But God had another mission for him. He told Philip to leave his growing work and *go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert* (Acts 8:26). Philip met an Ethiopian. "By chance," you say? When you are in the will of God, things do not happen by chance. No friend crosses your path by accident. No joy or sorrow comes into your life except by God's permission.

God teaches us the importance of winning just one person to Christ. If each one kept winning one to Christ every day, and the one he won would do the same, startling things would result. All the millions in the United States could be won in a little over a month! This seems incredible, but it is true. No doubt Philip's convert, the Ethiopian, introduced the Gospel into the great continent of Africa. The Gospel was on the way to the uttermost part of the earth.

It was at Stephen's death that we have the first mention of Saul. Stephen's martyrdom seemed to have inflamed this persecutor of the Church. Saul was struggling with an aroused conscience. He knew he was in the wrong, but he wouldn't give up. That is why Jesus told him in his vision that it was hard for him to kick against the pricks (Acts 26:14).

Saul made havoc of the Church! The more moral and intelligent a man is, the more harm he can do when controlled by Satan rather than by God. It is not "bad" men who have the worst influence. No one would listen to a man sprawling in the gutter, or take seriously what he says, but everyone respects a man in authority.

The story of Saul's conversion is one of the most thrilling accounts in history. Become familiar with this great story. He was a man *breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord* (Acts 9:1, 2). Then we find him preaching *Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God* (Acts 9:20).

Every step of his three great missionary journeys Paul made known Christ's will with unmistakable clarity. There is no doubt that Paul holds the most important place of any man in the New Testament. He was converted and made an apostle by Christ Himself. It was to him that Christ gave first hand revelations of truth, and to him Christ committed the doctrine of the Church. To what people was Paul especially sent? He was the Apostle to the Gentiles, as Peter had been to the Jews.

What had Peter done since Pentecost? It is not only what a man believes but what he is doing about it, that counts. Christ had told Peter that he was to be a witness. Peter helped start the first Church, worked miracles, and baptized thousands. His work had been among the Jews.

We find Peter now in the house of Simon the tanner (Acts 10:5-6). God was going to show Peter that the Gospel was for the Gentiles as well as the Jews (Acts 10:9-16). The high wall of religious difference between Jew and Gentile must be broken down. Peter was the man God used to start leveling it. Christ was building a Church and He wanted both Jews and Gentiles to be the living stones of which it is to be formed (Eph. 2:20-22).

At Pentecost, Peter had used the "keys of the kingdom" entrusted to him, to open the door of the Gospel to the Jews. While Paul was in Tarsus, Peter in the house of Cornelius put the key into the lock of the door that had barred the Gentiles, and opened it (Acts 10:1-48). Read this account. What about race prejudice today? Do you think that what God told Peter to do was easy (Acts 10:14-16)? What is the Church doing today?

Think where we would have been today if the Gospel had not been for the Gentiles! Suppose Peter had said what so many Christians say today, "O, I am going to work among my own people. There is enough to do at home. Why go to other people?"

Do we realize that we Americans might have been pagans, living in heathen darkness and superstition, while the Chinese and Japanese would have been Christian nations if the first missionaries had gone East instead of coming West? Wouldn't you think that Americans, above every people, ought to believe in missions? Think what our condition might have been today, if missionaries had not brought Christ to us.

Witnessing In The Uttermost Part Of The Earth

(Read Acts 13-28)

The death of Stephen was only the beginning of great persecution of the Christians. How did they ever get to Antioch (Acts 11:19-21)? Someone has called Christianity in the early days, “A Tale of Two Cities”—Jerusalem and Antioch.

Up through Acts 12, we have seen the beginning of the Church, with Peter as its leader, in Jerusalem. From Acts 13 through 28, we are going to see Paul and the Church at Antioch. Antioch is the new base of operations. All the wonderful missionary journeys of Paul started from here, not from Jerusalem. It became the new center of the Church for carrying out Jesus’ commission, *unto the uttermost part of the earth*. It was at Antioch that they were first called Christians (Acts 11:26).

The first great missionary journey soon started with Paul and Barnabas going westward from Antioch (Acts 13:2-3). The greatest enterprise in the world is foreign missions, and here we see the very beginning of it. The whole idea began just the way it should, in a prayer meeting. Our first missionary society in America was born in a prayer meeting held under a haystack at Williams College.



While Paul and Barnabas were out preaching in the face of persecution and suffering, the Church Council at Jerusalem was trying to answer one of the most troublesome questions. It really was this: “Must a Gentile become a Jew and accept his laws and ceremonies before he can become a Christian?” (Acts 15:1). Paul and Barnabas had said nothing about the law of Moses. They had stated: *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*

Many today are not just clear in their knowledge of what a person must do to become a Christian. We will never merit salvation, and we will never gain it by any effort on our part, *for by grace are ye saved . . . not of works* (See Ephesians 2:4-9). The law doesn’t save anyone. It only shows how sinful we are. It is like a mirror. The mirror shows us how we look but does not change our looks.

They came to an important decision in that Church Council. They found out that God now was going to *take out of them a people for His name* (See Acts 15:14). He was going to form His Church of those He called out.

Paul and Barnabas went out on their second missionary tour to visit all the churches they had established and to see how the new Christians were getting along. After a disagreement with Barnabas about John Mark, Paul took Silas, his new found friend, and went through Syria and Cilicia. In Lystra he found Timothy whom he trained to become a preacher of this blessed Gospel (II Timothy 1:5; Acts 16:1). God often brings about these great human friendships.

The Holy Spirit was Paul's constant Guide. It was at Troas that the Holy Spirit, in a vision, directed Paul to take the Gospel for the first time into Europe (Acts 16:8-11). The starting point was Philippi in Macedonia. The ship that carried Paul from Asia to Europe, bore the seed of a new civilization and life. It carried the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you think that Christians are "called" into definite fields of service today? What about the call of the child widow of India, the starving in China, the demon-tortured in Africa? Are they not calling to Christians for relief and instruction and salvation? Paul saw a man calling him, and he answered. There are a billion and a half lost souls in the world today, calling to us. The call comes from every corner of the earth.

Paul's experiences in the greatest cities of his day were crowded with interest. He founded a church in Thessalonica, a rich busy city (Acts 17:4), at Corinth, a very wicked city (Acts 18:8), in Ephesus, the world's most cosmopolitan center outside of Rome. As he traveled, he kept writing his wonderful epistles. We read them today in the New Testament with great profit and interest.

Paul's last missionary journey must have been a heartbreaking experience. He had to say farewell at every place. He knew it was a final farewell. Read Acts 20:37, 38. They all wept and fell on Paul's neck, the Oriental expression of sorrow, knowing they would never see him again. Think of this sad experience repeated a dozen times over. Probably no man, except David, has ever inspired such intense personal love in so many hearts. Think of what the love of God was able to do in the heart of a Saul of Tarsus!

Sailing out of the harbor of Ephesus, Paul bids his friends a last farewell. He is headed for Jerusalem, and from now on he is seen as *the prisoner of the Lord*. Paul makes his last visit to Jerusalem and here one of those swiftly formed mobs, which gather so quickly in the excitable Orient, rushed against the apostle and bound him, declaring he was teaching the Jews to forsake Moses. Finding that Paul was a Roman citizen, the chief captain promised to give him a fair trial. Paul made his defense before the Roman governor, Felix, at Caesarea. After two years' imprisonment, Paul was tried a second time, before the new governor, Festus, and appealed from him to Caesar himself, the emperor in Rome (Acts 21:27-26:32).

After a most exciting voyage, with one ship wrecked in a terrific storm off the coast of Malta, Paul arrived in Rome and was kept a prisoner for another two years, although in his own hired house. Even in prison the great preacher and evangelist led the servants in Nero's own palace to Christ. Service for the Master can brighten life's darkest hours. When we seek to lift other's burdens, we lighten our own (See Acts 27:1-28:24).

During his imprisonment, Paul wrote many of his epistles. It was while he was in a dungeon in Rome, expecting at any hour to be beheaded, that he wrote his second epistle to Timothy and said, *I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:...* (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Finally the beloved apostle was condemned and beheaded. His heroic soul was released and the body buried in the catacombs of Rome.

Paul changed Christianity from its Jewish tribal confines to a world-wide influence. He tried to break down the barriers between Jew and Gentile, bond and free.

Are you impressed, student, in the study of the life of this man, by the marvelous things God can do with a life wholly surrendered and Spirit filled?

This is the only unfinished book in the Bible. Notice how abruptly it closes! How else would it close? How could there be a complete account of a Person's life work as long as He lives? Our risen and ascended Lord still lives. From the center, Christ, the lines are seen proceeding in every direction, but *the uttermost part of the earth* is not yet reached. The book marks only the beginning. The Gospel of Christ moves on! You are still living the Acts.

Conclusion

Person of the Book: the Lord Jesus Christ.

Power of the Book: the Holy Spirit.

Preachers of the Book: Peter and Paul.

Places of the Book: Jerusalem and Antioch.

Program of the Book: Missions.

