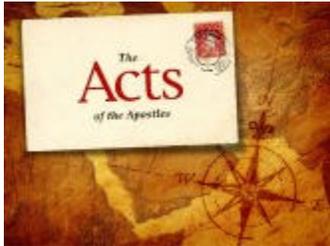


Bible Study Guide - Acts

The Rise and Expansion of the First Century Church



The book of Acts was written by Luke, a physician who became a close associate of the Apostle Paul. Luke also wrote the book of Luke, and the two books could be read consecutively (Luke then Acts), without any break in the action.

Whereas the book of Luke captures the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, the book of Acts captures the rise and expansion of the first-century church. It includes incredible miracles, shocking events, and a widespread desire to follow Jesus, the man whom the Jews had crucified but who came back from the dead.

Just before the ascension of Jesus into heaven, He commissioned His disciples to *"go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you."* (Matthew 28:19) This was a tall order for such a diverse group of men. Jesus had promised that a Helper was to come, and with Him would come power and boldness, the two things that were needed the most in order to fulfill the Great Commission.

The initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost. It was His power that enabled the disciples to move the Gospel over such a large geographical area in such a short time. This amazing growth of the Church is recorded in the book of Acts.

Chapters 1 through 12 record events in Peter's life as an apostle, including such things as the conversion of 3,000 at a time, the healing of a lame man (3:1-10), his confrontation with Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11), and the household of Cornelius (chapter 10).

The primary purpose of the apostolic ministry of Peter was to reach the Jews. Unfortunately the impact he made in the Judean community eventually landed him in prison. But God's message of redemption would not be stopped, and in the middle of the night an angel escorted him out of the prison and he was a free man. (Chapter 12)

Chapters 13 through 28 focus on the conversion and ministry of the Apostle Paul, who was referred to as Saul prior to his conversion. As a Jew and a Pharisee, Paul knew the

law and vehemently opposed the rising Christian belief. In his zeal he was driven to persecute, or even execute those who chose to follow the teachings of Jesus.

But God's intention was for Saul to reach the Gentiles and bring them to Christ. So while on the road to Damascus, Saul experienced a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ. From that point on he was referred to as Paul, and he preached the message of the gospel, wrote letters to the churches and brought thousands into fellowship with God.

At the point of Paul's arrest, he continued to write letters to the churches that were scattered throughout the entire known world. While he was no longer able to move about and preach freely, his letters circulated among the churches, bringing correction, hope, and renewed faith for the first-century believers and beyond. These letters, called epistles, make up nearly two-thirds of the New Testament.

In the next book of the New Testament, Paul writes to the believers who were part of the leading civilization of that time. In his letter to the Romans, he provides practical and spiritual instructions for them in both faith and doctrine, teachings that are still very relevant to the Church today.

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