

From the Garden to Glory

Acts

Author: Luke

Written to: Theophilus, "Lover of God", thought to be Luke's former master who freed the physician from his duties after both became Christians, that he might travel with the Apostle Paul and tend to Paul's many infirmities.

Timeline: 30 - 63 A.D.

Theme: History and Life of the Early Church

Purpose of writing: A continuation of the Gospel According to Luke. It gives an account of the work of the Holy Spirit forming the Church, empowering the Church and expanding her outreach.

Introduction:

The book of Acts is not a record of the acts of the apostles as most Bibles title this book. It is a record of the acts or work of the Holy Spirit through the apostles.

The book of Acts is an important transitional link between Judaism and Christianity, between Law and Grace. It shows that salvation comes to this world through Christ alone (Acts 4:12). It shows how God can reveal the truth to a person, even one who blasphemes His name, bringing salvation to that person (Acts 8-9). Acts testifies of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of simple men and women so that they can be a witness of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8) and can "turn the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). Bill MacDonald says Acts, "...is a bridge between the life of Christ and the Christ-life taught in the Epistles."

As we begin our study of the book of Acts consider the following questions and write your responses:

1. As you read in the Introduction, the book of Acts is not supremely about the acts of the apostles but rather about the acts of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is mentioned in Acts about seventy times. What is the Holy Spirit doing in *your* life today?
2. Look at Acts 1:1. The name Theophilus means *lover of God*. How does this meaning characterize your relationship with God? How could you grow in the area of friendship with Him?
3. The word *witness* is used over thirty times in the book of Acts. Look up this word in a dictionary and write the definition. Read Acts 1:8. How has the Holy Spirit empowered *you* to be a witness of Jesus Christ?

First Church in Jerusalem

Read Acts 1:1-4:37

1. Read Acts 2:36-39. When has the awareness of your sin caused you to be *cut to the heart*? How did you respond?
2. Acts 2:42 is a beautiful description of the early church. How do you *continue steadfastly* in each of the following areas?
 - the apostles' doctrine
 - fellowship
 - breaking of bread
 - prayers

3. Peter and John were forbidden to speak of Jesus or to teach in His name. What was their response in 4:19-20? When have you been called to disobey man in order to obey God? What was the result?

Witnessing in Jerusalem

Read Acts 5:1-8:3

1. Look at 5:1-11. Ananias and Sapphira were hypocrites. Look up the word *hypocrite* in a dictionary and write the definition. The word originally came from Greek (*hupokrites*) and it meant *one who is wearing a mask*. *Hupokrites* were those who had two faces: one for the stage and one for the street. Why is a hypocrite so dangerous in the body of Christ? There are times when we are called upon to teach biblical truths in areas where we are still growing personally. How does this differ from hypocrisy?
2. It is important for those who serve in the body of Christ to be men and women of godly character. As you look at 6:3 make a note of how you are fulfilling these requirements and/or how you could grow in these areas.
 - those who serve are to be of good reputation
 - those who serve are to be full of the Holy Spirit
 - those who serve are to be full of wisdom
3. The seventh chapter of Acts focuses on Stephen, the first recorded Christian martyr. Stephen was a witness for Christ in the midst of suffering. When has the Lord called you to be a witness for Him in the midst of suffering? What happened?

Witnessing in Judea and Samaria

Read Acts 8:4-12:25

1. Look at 8:1-4. The persecution of the church only served to expand the preaching of the Word of God. Read Romans 8:28. When have you seen difficulty or persecution used for good?
2. Acts 9:1-31 describes the conversion and early ministry years of Saul, later known as the Apostle Paul. Briefly describe your conversion experience.
3. Read 10:1-11:18. During this time Jews would not eat or lodge with Gentiles. God was breaking down the walls of prejudice. Look up the word *prejudice* in a dictionary and write the definition. Ask the Lord to search your heart. Are you harboring prejudice against any person or group of people? Repent of anything He reveals.

Paul Establishes the Churches ~ First Missionary Journey

Read Acts 13:1-15:35

1. The Lord initiated what is often referred to as the first missionary journey in Acts 13. What did the Holy Spirit say in 13:2? Consider the meaning of these men's names. Why are the qualities described by their names important for those who minister for the Lord?
 - Barnabas means *son of consolation* or *son of encouragement*
 - Paul's name means *little*

2. Read 13:4. The expansion of the Church was not directed by men but rather it was guided by the Holy Spirit. Why is it important that He be the one to guide ministries? What are the potential dangers if men do so? How do you allow the Holy Spirit to guide your ministry?
3. Look at 14:8-18, concentrating on verse 14. What did Paul and Barnabas do when they were confronted by the worship of the people? (Note: torn clothes were an outward sign of deep inner grief.) How do you remain wise and humble when people attempt to praise you rather than praising the Lord?

Paul Revisits the Churches ~ Second Missionary Journey

Read Acts 15:36-18:21

1. Make a note of what you learn about Lydia in 16:14-15. Lydia ministered hospitality. Define hospitality. How do *you* minister hospitality to those around you.
2. Read 16:16-25, concentrating on verses 22-25. What were Paul and Silas doing in verse 25? How do you usually respond when you are treated unfairly? What can you learn from their example?
3. As a Christian we are often encouraged to *be a Berean*. This exhortation is based on 17:10-11. What does it mean for *you* to be a *Berean*? Be specific.

Paul Encourages the Churches ~ Third Missionary Journey

Read Acts 18:22-25:9

1. Read 20:7-12. How did Paul respond in verse 10? What can you do to *embrace* those who are physically or spiritually sleepy?
2. Look at 23:5, Romans 13:1-2 and 1 Peter 2:17. Christians are not to speak evil of their rulers but rather to honor them and be subject to them. Consider your attitude and speech toward your leaders in the church, in government, in the work force, etc. How obedient are you to this command? Ask the Lord to search your heart for any cynicism or bitterness. Confess anything that He reveals and repent.
3. Paul set forth his defense before Felix in 24:10-21. Look at what he said in verse 16. How do you *strive to have a conscience without offense before God and men?* Be specific.

Paul Sent to Rome

Read Acts 25:10-28:31

1. Read 25:10-27. Paul was not getting fair treatment from Festus so he appealed to Caesar. Festus was concerned, however, that if he sent Paul to Caesar without any charges he would look like a poor judge. Festus hoped that Agrippa would find some fault with which Paul could be charged. What do you learn about Festus' character from this section of Scripture? How can you avoid following his example?
2. Look at the question that Paul posed in 26:8. Paul's point was that God is God; He can do *anything*. Why should the fact that He raises the dead seem incredible!! Sometimes our view of God is too small

and we fail to realize that His strength, power and heart are sufficient to do anything. Is there an area of your life where you are feeling overwhelmed and acting as if your God is too small? Read Philippians 4:6-7, 19. Rest in the sufficiency of the Lord!!

3. Paul's voyage to Rome begins in chapter 27. The ship on which he was traveling was caught in a tempest. Paul's courage and faith in the Lord gave all of the ship's passengers hope (verse 36). When have you been able to encourage others in the midst of a storm? How did you do this?

Summary

As you conclude your study of the book of Acts consider the following questions and write your answers:

1. What is the most significant thing that you have learned from your study about the Lord, His character, or His attributes? How does this encourage you? Take a few moments to thank and praise the Lord for the things that you learned about Him.

2. What is the most important lesson or new insight that you have learned from your study of this book? How can you apply this lesson in your life this week?