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Acts Study Guide

Lesson 1: Waiting for the Holy Spirit – Acts 1

Objectives of this study (Acts 1-14):

1. Be able to state the main theme of each of the first fourteen chapters of Acts.
2. Understand the role of the apostles in the beginning days of the kingdom and explain the gradual broadening of the sphere of influence to others.
3. Examine and understand the role of the Holy Spirit: the baptism with the Spirit, the miracles worked through the Spirit's power and the transmission of spiritual gifts.
4. Be aware of the gradual inclusion of the Gentiles in the kingdom and the problems this created.
5. Appreciate the high degree of fellowship and camaraderie among early Christians.

Overview of Acts 1:

1. Luke begins his "Volume Two" of the life and work of Christ by summarizing the period between His resurrection and ascension. Jesus displayed Himself in unmistakable form to the apostles, men who knew Him intimately and could be certain of His identity.
2. Jesus accompanies the apostles to the Mount of Olives. His comments are filled with anticipation, urging them to wait in Jerusalem for developments that were imminent. Jesus repeats His commission to send them out as witnesses, and He then ascends into heaven.
3. As the apostles continue their gaze in amazement, uncertainty and who knows what other emotions sweeping over their souls, two angels gently bring them back to reality with the promise of Jesus' eventual return. The apostles return to the other disciples and engage in prayer and reflection.
4. In the interim, Peter takes the lead in determining a replacement for Judas, who has committed suicide.

1. Acts 1:1-3 – A Forty-Day Tutorial

- A. Jesus "*presented Himself alive*" (1:3) after His crucifixion, even as He promised would happen before the fact.
- B. This presentation was not merely fleeting or fragmentary but varied manifestations, "*many infallible proofs*," that were designed to instill confidence that Jesus

truly had been raised.

- C. Jesus did in this period what He had done previously: He taught the disciples “*things pertaining to the kingdom of God*” which was shortly to come into existence.

2. Acts 1:4-8 – “Not Many Days From Now”

- A. Jesus says several things before His ascension that suggest something imminent is to happen. Can you list them?

1. 1:4 _____.

2. 1:4 _____.

3. 1:5 _____.

- B. Jesus indicates that something superior to John’s baptism was to unfold, and crucial to these events was the Holy Spirit. How is the coming influence of the Spirit upon them described?

1. 1:5 _____.

2. 1:8 _____.

- C. While the apostles had wanted power to rule with Jesus at His right hand, Jesus tells them they will be empowered for something other than warfare. They will be His *witnesses*, not His *warriors* (in a carnal sense).

3. Acts 1:9-14 – The “Upper Room”

- A. An exclamation point is put upon the words of Jesus as He rises into the heavens in full view of His “witnesses.” Whatever the apostles were expecting Jesus to do now that He was raised, whatever misconceptions of the kingdom may have been lingering, Jesus dispels by departing the earth for heaven.
- B. To further instruct and convict them, two angels appear. In gentle rebuke, they tell the apostles that it is fruitless to stare into the sky in anticipation of some grand further development. He will return in like manner as He departed – *after* going to prepare a place for them (cf. Jn 14:2-3).
- C. As Jesus commanded, the apostles return to Jerusalem and to the “entourage” that had lately been with Jesus – the women, Mary and Jesus’ brothers. The events that will transpire and their relation to the “upper room” have been greatly distorted and misapplied by those who wish to expand the Holy Spirit’s influence. As we study pay close attention to what is said about the “upper room.”

4. Acts 1:15-26 – Judas Is Replaced

- A. Peter takes the lead in initiating proceedings to replace Judas. Whether this is a result of instructions given by the Lord (cf. 1:3), or whether Peter acted by some other direction, it does appear that the selection is legitimate and endorsed by God.
- B. Note that there is a definite conception of the “office” of apostleship:
1. *“He was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry”* – 1:17.
 2. *“Let another take his office”* (1:20)(quoting Ps 109:8).
 3. Specific criteria are proposed that certainly rule out anyone presently living as an apostle – 1:21-22. (Only two out of 120 were deemed qualified.)
 4. The replacement was *“to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell”* (1:25).
- C. The selection of Matthias makes ready the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Questions:

1. What do you make of the apostles’ question in Ac 1:6?
2. Can you tie Acts 1:8 to the format of the book of Acts?
3. What passage(s) can you cite indicating that the coming of the Holy Spirit was *“the Promise of the Father”*?
4. What instruction or command was given to the apostles that would enable them to manipulate or influence the coming of the Holy Spirit?
5. Is there any evidence that would reasonably lead one to the conclusion that the promise of the baptism with the Holy Spirit applied to anyone other than the apostles?
6. When did two angels in shining garments help other of Jesus’ disciples understand the significance of what they saw?
7. From where did Jesus ascend to heaven?
8. What did the apostles do with the others in the “upper room”? What do you think about the intensity of these activities given the events that have transpired?
9. What bearing would Acts 6:2 have on the legitimacy of Matthias’ appointment?
10. What observations can you make about inspiration of the Scriptures from Acts 1:16?

Acts Study Guide

Lesson 2: The Coming of the Holy Spirit – Acts 2

1. The Phenomenon of Baptism with the Spirit – 2:1-13

A. Who are “they” (2:1)? Advocates of modern charismatic “tongue-speaking” (gibberish) reach all the way back to the 120 disciples in 1:15. But is this warranted?

1. Note that 1:15-26 is merely parenthetical to Luke’s main flow of thought: his emphasis is *entirely* on the apostles and the events transpiring relative to them (as they had been chosen, taught, commissioned and now promised that the coming of the Spirit is imminent).
2. Review the pronouns and references in Acts 1 which hearken back to “the apostles” in 1:2: “to whom” (1:3), “witnesses” (1:8), “men of Galilee” (1:11), “the eleven apostles” 1:26 (which is the immediate antecedent of “they” in 2:1.)
3. As we shall see, this same emphasis upon the apostles continues throughout chapter 2 and well into the earlier chapters of Acts as Luke unfolds his narrative of the fledgling kingdom.

B. Note the sensory evidence of what transpires:

1. Audible #1: There was no wind but the *sound* as of a rushing, mighty wind, a roar or a whoosh but no apparent earthly cause for it. But the noise had a location: “*it filled the whole house where they were sitting*” (2:2).
2. Visual #1: The divided tongues were “as of fire,” resembling those of flames. But this, too, was very specific in its manifestation: “*one sat upon each of them.*” Again, what is the antecedent noun of “them”?
3. Audible #2: They “*began to speak with other tongues ...*” (2:4).
4. Visual #2: The crowd that had gathered marveled: “*Look, are not all these who speak Galileans?*” (2:7). What made this event so arresting was that a group of men from a particular district who spoke with a specific dialect were now speaking a multitude of dialects from across the Empire.

C. Thus the miracle was not only the manifestation of the humanly impossible; it also signified the universal nature of what was beginning that day: a singular kingdom for all cultures and peoples for all time.

2. Peter’s Explanation of the Present Events – Acts 2:14-40

A. The prophecy of Joel fulfilled – 2:16-21. Many hundreds of years earlier Joel had

foreseen the time when God would inaugurate a final dispensation with mankind (the “*last days*” – 2:17). In this era God would distribute the miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit globally (“*all flesh*” – 2:17), not merely upon the fleshly descendants of Abraham. The end result: salvation will be made available to all who seek God and desire fellowship with Him (2:21).

B. The testimony of Christ – 2:22-24. Peter now boldly gives the testimony he was so afraid to give just two months earlier. List the major points covered by Peter:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

C. Messianic prophecy fulfilled – 2:25-35. David is cited twice (Ps 16:8-11; Ps 110:1) to indicate that the Messiah would not remain dead but would be resurrected.

1. Jesus would rise to _____.
2. Jesus was exalted to _____.
3. Jesus received the promise _____.
4. As a result Jesus has _____.

3. The Conviction of the Audience – Acts 2:36-40

A. The dynamics of this occasion are most interesting. Though Jews from all parts of the Empire are present, there is a sufficient core of scribes, Pharisees and priests (and perhaps regular inhabitants of Jerusalem who believed in Jesus but knuckled under to their leaders) for Peter to refer to Jesus as the one “*whom you crucified*” (2:36). He boldly declares Jesus to be “*both Lord and Christ.*”

B. All of the elements for true conviction are now in place. It took more than just miracle-working to bring the Jews around. This Jesus had done abundantly. It is not until the full impact of His *death* and *resurrection* dawns upon them that they are brought to ask: “*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*” They now realize their guilt and condemnation and beseech the apostles for a solution, if one is available.

C. Peter is succinct and direct in reply. Yes, there *is* a solution; they are not unalterably subject to the wrath of God for this breach of His trust.

1. They must repent of their sins.
2. They must, “*every one of you*,” be baptized for the remission of those sins. (Did John not wonderfully prepare the people for Peter’s message? cf. Lk 3:3)
3. In so doing they would receive “*the gift of the Holy Spirit*.” Much debate still continues as to the meaning of this phrase. But *contextually*, what would be the sense of this phrase to these people? Previously, Peter had mentioned the salvation that would come in connection with the pouring out of the Spirit (2:21). It is this very need that the guilty audience has expressed. God has promised this forgiveness to “whoever” (2:21) calls on the name of the Lord, even “*to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call*” (2:39).

4. The Church Takes Root – Acts 2:41-47

- A. There is an instant bonding and camaraderie between these newly committed believers in Jesus. One can only imagine the life-change that takes place as these Jews abandon social, political, family and generational ties for an uncertain future.
- B. Note the continued focus upon *the apostles* (not the previously mentioned 120) – Ac 2:42-43.

Questions:

1. What was the general content of what was being spoken in tongues?
2. Is there anything in the text that suggests the apostles were still in the upper room?
3. What two classes of people were in the audience (cf. 2:5, 13)?
4. Who did Peter stand up with?
5. What kind of language is Acts 2:19-20? What does it generally signify?
6. What does Peter call himself and those with him (Acts 2:32)?
7. What was the nature of Peter’s further exhortations on Pentecost?
8. What relationship did these new converts to Jesus sustain to the apostles?
9. What relationship did they sustain to each other?
10. Describe the activities of their new spiritual lives. How might we fall short of this pattern in our own era?

Acts Study Guide

Lesson 3: Peter's Second Sermon – Acts 3

1. Healing the Lame Man – Acts 3:1-10

- A. How it must have galled the Jewish leaders that this heretical “faction” was using the temple to advance their doctrine (Ac 2:46). And Peter and John present themselves in the temple for the mid-afternoon prayers (3:1).
- B. A man well known in the area for his crippled condition and his daily appearance in the temple is healed by Peter. The effect is instantaneous, and the man is overcome with ecstasy by his new lease on life. This action adds to the excitement and buzz surrounding the fledgling movement.

2. Peter's Second Sermon – Acts 3:11-26

- A. The commotion of the healing draws a crowd to Solomon's porch, a colonnaded area of the temple that provided shelter for gatherings. Note Luke's descriptive terms: wonder and amazement (3:10); amazed (3:11); marvel (3:12).
- B. Peter's address can be broadly divided into three sections:
 - 1. 3:12-16 – **Condemnation** for the rejection and death of Jesus.
 - a. What does Peter immediately disavow concerning the miracle?
 - b. How does Peter tie in ancient Jewish history with recent events?
 - c. What makes their rejection of Jesus so heinous?
 - d. What role do the apostles play in the aftermath of His death?
 - e. To whom does Peter attribute the healing of the lame man?
 - 2. 3:17-20 – **Conciliation** toward the rebellious Jews.
 - a. To what does Peter attribute their rejection of Jesus?
 - b. What had God “fulfilled” in the death of Jesus?

c. What does Peter urge these people to do to repair the damage?

3. 3:21-25 – **Context** of history. Peter emphasizes that the events which have transpired are not innovative, novel or dishonoring of Judaism. As he did in his first sermon on Pentecost, Peter strongly ties the present issues to the ancient prophecies. The events fulfill longstanding declarations of what would occur.

a. Cite the verses where Peter mentions the prophets.

b. When had these prophecies begun?

c. What is the nature of Moses' prophecy? How long did it take for his words to come true?

d. What covenant does Peter mention with the Jews' ancestry?

C. Peter's conclusion – Acts 3:26:

1. The Jews – “*to you first*”: The privilege and reward of being God's covenant people by virtue of connection to Abraham was that salvation is first offered to them.
2. God – The true force behind these events which the Jews had been wrestling with since the prophet John came on the scene.
3. Having raised up His Servant Jesus – The resurrection always figures prominently in the preaching of the apostles. This reference may also be designed to bring to mind the “Servant” prophecies of Isaiah.
4. Send Him to bless you – The incarnation of Jesus is the ultimate expression of God's love and concern for mankind. God had every right to destroy man in his rebellion, but He sent His Son to *bless mankind!*
5. In turning away every one of you from your iniquities – The objective: God wished to create a spiritual family from among men who would choose Him over sin, who would repent and renounce the rule of sin in their lives and strive for purity and godliness. *Forgiveness* is the main objective in all that God has done through Christ.

Acts Study Guide

Lesson 4: The Arrest of Peter and John – Acts 4

1. The Arrest and Inquisition – Acts 4:1-22

A. The arrest – 4:1-4.

1. The temple was the domain of the priesthood; they controlled the activities that transpired and had a police force to insure compliance. How incensed they must have been to see “unauthorized” commoners preaching about resurrection – a theological concept they denied – but especially the resurrection of the one they had murdered!
2. Yet, in spite of the intimidation, the influence of the gospel continues to grow. This, also, is very troubling to the Jewish leaders.

B. Peter’s bold declaration – 4:5-12.

1. After a night in jail, Peter and John (and the healed man) are brought before the Sanhedrin. What an intimidating situation, especially for Peter who has so recently wilted under similar but less pressurized circumstances.
2. Peter is asked a rather open-ended question which allows him latitude to preach about Jesus (4:7).

3. Peter makes several points in his short address. List the main thoughts:

- a. _____.
- b. _____.
- c. _____.
- d. _____.
- e. _____.
- f. _____.

C. The threat – 4:13-22.

1. The embarrassed Sanhedrin dismisses the accused so they can settle on a course of action. However, the course they choose is always ineffective, for men who act out of deep conviction cannot be effectively threatened or intimidated.

2. Peter and John stand their ground and refuse to submit to civil powers that are in rebellion to God. They are bound by their conscience to “*speak the things which we have seen and heard*” (4:20), fulfilling their very purpose as witnesses.

2. The “Debriefing” and Prayer for Boldness – Acts 4:23-31

- A. In their supplication to God to assist them amid growing persecution, the apostles indicate a broader insight into the situation than they had previously shown.
 1. They acknowledge God’s creative power and recognize that the struggle is actually between the Creator and the rulers of the earth – 4:24-27.
 2. They further admit the providence of God in the unfolding affairs – 4:28.
 3. They pray for courage to “hold up their end of the bargain” – 4:29-30.
- B. God gives them miraculous confirmation of their requests – 4:31.

3. Unity Among the Early Disciples – Ac 4:32-37

- A. The unique circumstances of this newly forming congregation create some logistical problems, specifically the adequate material support of all. But these are overcome by a commonness of spirit that results in the needs of life being supplied.
- B. Consistent with Luke’s literary style, he introduces a character (Barnabas) whom he will consider in more detail later. Pay special attention to this technique.
- C. Note the emphasis upon the leadership and focus of the apostles (4:33).

Questions:

1. What positive result came from the preaching of Peter in chapter 3?
2. To whom had miraculous powers been previously attributed by the Jews (Lk 11:15)?
3. What was the real force behind Peter’s words (Ac 4:8)? Where was this promised?
4. Where else in the NT is Ps 118:22 cited?
5. How did the Sanhedrin view Peter and John? What did they realize about them?
6. What did Peter and John ask the Sanhedrin to judge for themselves?
7. What kept the Sanhedrin from punishing Peter and John more severely?
8. What might have made material needs among these saints so acute?

Acts Study Guide

Lesson 5: Trials Within and Without – Acts 5

1. Acts 5:1-16 – An Act of Heavenly Discipline

A. One hallmark of the divine origin of the Scriptures is the inclusion of details which are uncomplimentary. We see the warts and weaknesses of even the greatest heroes. Though there was a strong spirit of camaraderie and selflessness among the early disciples, there was also a spirit of competition.

B. Describe the actions of Ananias and Sapphira relative to:

1. Satan –
2. The Holy Spirit –
3. Barnabas –
4. Other brethren –
5. Each other –

C. People may reason that they aren't so bad because they have not robbed, raped or killed, but consider how seriously God takes hypocrisy and the attempt to deceive!

2. Acts 5:17-32 – Apostles On Trial Again

A. The Jewish leaders are growingly incensed that their orders are being defied and the new movement is gaining ground – and this right under their noses in the temple!

1. The apostles are arrested, only to be let out of jail by an angel – 5:17-21.
2. Upon receiving this shocking news, the priests have the apostles brought before them again – but very gently, fearing a backlash by the people – 5:22-26.
3. The high priest, missing the great truths staring him in the face, blusters about the apostles' defiance and their intimations of the Sanhedrin's guilt in the death of Jesus – 5:27-28.

B. Peter (again) takes the lead in responding, with the assent of all the apostles.

1. Yes, they had defied the edict of the Sanhedrin because they have a greater obligation to obey God – 5:29.
2. Yes, the blood of Jesus rightly belonged upon the hands of the Jewish leaders because: a) They murdered Jesus; b) God had raised Him up to be a Prince and Savior (and they have been unable to disprove it); c) Both the apostles and the Holy Spirit were bearing witness to these truths.
3. *The blood of Jesus **belongs** on the hands of the Jews*, but there is still the opportunity of forgiveness – if they will lay their envy and stubbornness aside.

3. Turning Up the Heat on the Apostles – 5:33-42

- A. The Sanhedrin is enraged at the *justified* defiance of the apostles. They begin to openly discuss their murderous intentions until Gamaliel intervenes.
- B. Men differ on whether Gamaliel's advice is sound (though it does work to the benefit of the apostles). Consider:
1. His recommendation ignores the facts of the case; it is totally speculative.
 2. If the facts warrant that Christianity is apostate Judaism, then the Council was *obligated* to oppose it, not leave it alone.
 3. In spite of the demise of Theudas and Judas, false notions are not immediately overthrown by God. Witness Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.
- C. Note the resolve and fortitude of the apostles after being beaten by the Council.

Questions:

1. What reaction did the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira have upon the church?
2. What effect did this discipline have upon outsiders becoming Christians?
3. At this early stage, who is working miracles in the church?
4. What does this passage say about the Jews' responsibility for Jesus' death?
5. How does the second charge (5:28) fulfill the instructions of Jesus to the apostles?
6. What is the implication of Peter's assertion about the Holy Spirit in Acts 5:32?
7. Which of the two episodes in Acts 5 seems to be the greater threat against the church?

Acts Study Guide

Lesson 6: The Martyrdom of Stephen – Acts 6-7

1. A Second Major Internal Threat – Acts 6:1-7

A. *The choice:* The explosive growth of the church gives occasion for internal discord: the charge of discrimination by Hebrew (orthodox Jews) brethren against the Hellenists (Jews influenced by the Greek culture) relative to the care of their widows.

1. Though volatile and threatening, the apostles did not want the dispute to distract them from spiritual matters, so they sought for spiritual men to handle it.

2. Describe the kind of work the apostles were focused on:

3. Direction is given for the “multitude of the disciples” to choose their own leaders in dealing with this matter (6:2, 5). What kind of men were they to look for?

B. *The appointment:* The apostles are presented with the seven chosen men, and they appoint them to the task through prayer and laying on of hands.

1. What purpose would be served by such a public appointment?

2. Consistent with Luke’s literary style, he introduces a matter that will be more fully developed later. He mentions the laying on of the apostles’ hands, then with no further elucidation tells of miracles being worked by two of the objects of this blessing: first Stephen (6:8), then Philip (8:6-7). The significant connection between these two items will be explained in Acts 8.

C. Who are these seven men? They are not specifically called “deacons” (a transliteration of the Greek *diakonos*), though the verb form is found in 6:2 (“serve tables” = *diakonein trapezais*). Note that they were to be “*over this business*” (6:3); that is, the apostles delegated the responsibility of effectively handling the matter to them.

2. Another Major External Threat Arises from Success – Acts 6:8-15

A. Stephen represents the gradual broadening of the apostles’ influence to others. Until now the focus has been upon the “apostles’ doctrine,” the apostles’ teaching, the miracles worked by the apostles, the decisions of the apostles. But Stephen is not only a responsible and capable man in the matter of the widows’ distribution; he is also a man of great teaching and debating ability – 6:8-10.

B. Similar to the trial of Jesus, Stephen is brought before the Sanhedrin and saddled with charges from false witnesses (6:11-15). Note, as in the case of Jesus (Mt 26:61), the Jews are sensitive to any suggestion of the temple being threatened.

3. Stephen's Defense and Death – Acts 7:1-60

A. It can be difficult to precisely analyze the specific purpose of Stephen's references to Old Testament history, for it appears that the situation rapidly deteriorates and results in his death before he finishes. Consider the following suggestions:

1. 7:1-8 – Stephen reminds them that Abraham received great blessings from God while yet uncircumcised and living in a far away land. The Jews had become so proud of their “property” and saw Palestine, the temple, etc. as the be-all and end-all of relationship with God. But God desired for Israel to “*serve Me in this place.*” Were they, in fact, now doing so? And what if Israel has itself become the oppressors of the people of God (7:7)? What will God do to them? Stephen also emphasizes the working of God through these early developments of the Abrahamic program. Is He now working in a way they refuse to acknowledge?
2. 7:9-16 – The OT tutorial now moves on to the period of Egyptian bondage and the blessing that came to Israel via Joseph's position. One possible parallel is that Stephen is subtly tying the jealousy and obstinacy of Joseph's brothers to the behavior of the Jewish leadership toward Jesus. In both cases, the one formerly despised and forsaken is the very one through whom deliverance comes.
3. 7:17-36 – Stephen reviews the details of Moses' rise to leadership as Israel's deliverer. He emphasizes the efforts of Moses to assert himself and secure the freedom of his people by his own initiative and efforts. But this had resulted in disaster, and Moses needed to learn the lessons of humility and submission to the will of God. He was not sufficient by his own power to accomplish the purposes of God. It seems that the theme of stubbornness and rebellion is developing in Stephen's address – and perhaps the Sanhedrin is beginning to catch on.
4. 7:37-43 – Stephen now takes a more pointed step in his presentation. He documents Israel's rebellion against Moses and God. In spite of the fact that Moses had direct interaction with the Angel of God on Mt. Sinai, that Moses had received “living oracles” from heaven, that God had appointed him His designated leader and given him unmistakable credentials, the people rejected him and appealed to the weaker Aaron to lead them back into their former state of captivity. *Incredible!*
5. 7:44-50 – Though Stephen follows the OT history of the tabernacle and temple, he is also indicating that the legitimacy of each depended upon the instructions of God. The tabernacle had no fixed location for years as Israel carried it about in the wilderness. Finally, God instructed that a permanent house be established by Solomon in Canaan. But even so, argues Stephen, one should not conclude that God is *dependent* upon such a physical structure. God has shown that His representative place of presence among men has changed from time to time, and so it has changed again. Apparently, however, Stephen does not get the chance to finish this thought.

B. For reasons not quite clear from Luke's narrative, Stephen's address takes a sharp turn toward harsh rebuke – 7:51-53.

1. What terminology does Stephen use to describe these Jewish leaders?
2. How does he describe their behavior relative to their ancestors?
3. How does he describe them relative to the Holy Spirit, Jesus and angels?

C. For the Sanhedrin, a body of men who have been boiling and seething ever since the resurrection, who are helplessly watching gradual encroachments upon their territory, who have lost many of their own priests to this new movement, who have seen commoners openly resist their authority and defy their orders, Stephen's remarks are the last straw.

1. They rush upon the accused with murderous rage, losing the control that had been maintained by fear of public opinion in the case of Jesus.
2. Stephen is given a vision of the exalted Lord, perhaps as a final testimony to these rebellious Jews before his execution, and perhaps to encourage him during the violent end of his life.
3. Again, note Luke's literary device of introducing a character who will be later developed: *"And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul"* (7:58).

Questions:

1. What similarity is there between Acts 6:1-7 and Num 11?
2. What effects follow the wise handling of this matter (Ac 6:7)?
3. How would prophecy have been violated if the Sanhedrin had done to Jesus what they did to Stephen?
4. What connection might one make between Ac 7:48-50 and Ac 17:24? (Cf. Ac 7:58).
5. Considering the terms "filled" or "full" as found in Acts 2:2, 4; 3:10; 4:8, 31; 5:3, 17, 28; 6:3, 5, 8 and 7:55, what observations would you make concerning their use? You may also wish to check a Greek dictionary such as Vine or Thayer.

Acts Study Guide

Lesson 7: The Work of Philip – Acts 8

1. The Gospel Spreads to Samaria – Acts 8:1-25

- A. Chapter eight represents a major turning point in the early history of the church. Not satisfied with the blood of Stephen, Saul of Tarsus, with the approval of the chief priests, begins a campaign of terror against the brethren – 8:1-3. God, however, uses the persecution to further His cause.
- B. Philip, one of the servants of high character and strong faith chosen to oversee care for the widows, becomes the focus of the early expansion as he preaches in Samaria. However, it is clear from Ac 8:1, 4 that many others did work similar to Philip.
 - 1. Like Stephen, another of the seven chosen servants, Philip displays miracle-working ability. Luke simply acknowledges this without a detailed explanation, which he will supply shortly (8:14-19).
 - 2. Describe the effects of Philip's miracles:
 - 3. What synonymous terms describe Philip's preaching? What are the effects of this preaching?
- C. Simon's greed and the explanation of the transmission of spiritual gifts – 8:14-24.
 - 1. Simon was duly impressed by the power of Philip to perform *legitimate* miracles, but he is overwhelmed by his past conditioning and inclinations when he understands the source of *conferring* this power upon others in Peter and John.
 - 2. The principle expressed here by Luke is of crucial importance in responding to those who insist that such miraculous powers are present today. Obviously, the possession of such power, if it currently exists, would be of tremendous importance and influence. *If it did exist today*, we should be the first to recognize and acknowledge it.
 - 3. But this is the only passage that *expressly* connects the necessity of an apostle's personal touch (in conjunction with his will) with the reception of such gifts (one might also compare 2 Tim 1:6). In the absence of other references about methods of transmission (prayer, direct endowment from heaven), we are forced by respect for the revelation of God to "remain silent where the Bible is silent."
 - 4. Certainly, no one doubts the *ability* of God to confer spiritual gifts in any way He so chooses, even as He has the power to forgive sins on other conditions besides

immersion in water. *But the issue lies in what is stated in the Scriptures, and consequently what is omitted by such positive precepts.* If the Scriptures indicated another viable method of transmission of these gifts that could be fulfilled in the present day, then we would conclude *from revelation*, not from the practice itself, that the power of God was operative today.

2. An International Seed Is Planted – Acts 8:26-40

A. From Samaria, Philip is now directed to a Jewish proselyte, an Ethiopian man who is returning home from worshiping in Jerusalem. The spiritual interest of this man is demonstrated by his reading of the Scriptures as he bumps along in his chariot.

1. Describe the spiritual dimension of the treasurer from his interaction with Philip.

2. What miracle does Philip work to persuade the treasurer to listen?

B. The treasurer is already reading a Messianic passage, Isaiah 53. This gives Philip a starting place in presenting the concept that the Messiah has indeed come (8:35).

C. Acts 8:35-36 would seem to present a “necessary implication.” Since Philip “*preached Jesus*,” and in response the treasurer asked about the possibility of being baptized, it would follow that Philip had spoken of the necessity of immersion as a part of preaching Jesus (see the similar conclusion from Philip’s preaching in Samaria – 8:5, 12-13).

D. Thus we see by persecution and other means that Jesus is directing the growth of His kingdom. As faithful men and women respond in humble submission, even in the face of dire suffering, the Lord is able to use them to achieve His goal of offering salvation to the whole world. May we be as courageous and diligent in our day as Philip and others were in theirs.

Questions:

1. Specifically, who was/was not scattered from Jerusalem by the persecution?
2. What did those who were scattered do?
3. What terminology describes the influence of the Holy Spirit coming upon Samaritans?
4. What supernatural agencies are involved in Philip’s teaching the Ethiopian treasurer?
5. How has it been demonstrated so far in Acts that men and women become Christians? What is the process? What principles are operative in this transition?

Acts Study Guide

Lesson 8: The Conversion of the Arch Enemy – Acts 9

1. The Conversion of Saul (Paul) – Acts 9:1-19

A. In laying the groundwork for the ultimate direction of his narrative, Luke now includes his account of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus (“Paul” from hereon). The importance of this event is documented by the significant role Paul has in establishing churches across the Empire, writing the majority of NT epistles and even by the repeated accounts of his conversion in Acts 22:3-21 and 26:12-18.

1. Paul is still intensely zealous in persecuting Christianity and is not content with the dispersion of disciples from Jerusalem. He embarks upon a program to hunt them down wherever they may be (9:1-3).
2. Has any human undergone a greater shock to their consciousness than did Paul when Jesus identified Himself to him (9:4-9)? Paul had much to meditate upon during the three days in Damascus until Ananias came to him.

B. How much time has elapsed since the scattering is difficult to determine, but secular history places Aretas in control of Damascus not earlier than AD 37. With the three-year span mentioned in Gal 1:18, together with some other chronological information, it is likely that Saul’s conversion occurs between AD 34-36. In this relatively short time since Pentecost, note that a strong disciple such as Ananias dwells in a foreign city and exercises considerable influence (Ac 9:10-16; 22:12).

1. Though reluctant (perhaps out of fear, and perhaps somewhat in the spirit of Jonah?!), Ananias complies with the Lord’s command to locate Paul, baptize him and clarify his mission to the Gentiles (cf. Ac 22:14-16).
2. Paul’s conversion, though accompanied by certain miraculous activities, presents some interesting principles for consideration:
 - a. What evidence indicates that Paul was saved merely through excruciating guilt and unremitting prayer for three days?
 - b. To the contrary, what states that he was **not** saved until Ananias’ visit?
 - c. What is the **first** thing that Paul did once Ananias restored his sight?
3. Since Ananias was not an apostle, and therefore could not convey miraculous gifts to anyone, how would you explain the phrase “*has sent me that you may ... be filled with the Holy Spirit*” (9:17)?

2. Paul's Post-Conversion Activities – Acts 9:20-30

- A. This period is crucial as Paul's detractors will later accuse him of "hijacking" the apostleship from Peter. He will be portrayed as an interloper, a "Johnny-come-lately" who plagiarizes from the others and mixes in his own pro-Gentile slant.
1. But Paul "*immediately ... preached the Christ in the synagogues*" (9:20). It is not stated whether this was the result of a special endowment of the Holy Spirit or merely the fresh perspectives that had been brought to the OT prophets by the reality that Jesus was the Messiah. It is stated that "*Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews ...*" (9:22).
 2. In any case, note the effect upon the Jews in Damascus (9:21):
- B. Perhaps the phrase "*after many days were past*" (9:23) encompasses the three years Paul says he spent in Arabia *before* going to Jerusalem for the first time (cf. Gal 1:17-18). Nevertheless, the hunter becomes the hunted and the disciples he once tried to imprison help him escape from Damascus (9:24-25).
- C. What thoughts must have coursed through Paul's mind as he neared Jerusalem (9:26-30)! How he would look anew upon the hill of Calvary. How he would shudder at the memory of Stephen's murder and his role in it. And how apprehensive he must have been as he contemplated engaging his former Jewish allies in debate, knowing they would respond to him the way he himself responded to Stephen.
1. Explain how the brethren in Jerusalem reacted to Paul's desire for fellowship.
 2. Who interceded for Paul and encouraged his acceptance?
 3. How does the Jewish community react to Paul's preaching? Is fleeing always a mark of cowardice? Where does Paul go and why?

3. A Season of Peace and Prosperity – Acts 9:31-43

- A. Reese, in his commentary *New Testament History – Acts*, attributes this period of prosperity to the Jews' distraction with the emperor Caligula, who commanded the governor of Syria to set up a statue of himself in the temple at Jerusalem. Thus preoccupied with the threat of Roman defilement, the Jews overlooked the activities of the Christians.
- B. Luke now returns to Peter and tells of his role in the broadening of the kingdom to the Gentiles. In the meantime, Peter is fulfilling the command of Jesus to preach throughout Palestine first, and a brief account of his work in Lydda, Sharon and Joppa is given.

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Lesson 9: The First Gentile Convert – Acts 10

Introduction: The groundwork for the expansion of the kingdom to the Gentiles has been laid by Paul's conversion and commission as an apostle. Before he can commence this great undertaking, however, another piece of the puzzle must be added. Peter is again given the "keys of the kingdom" and opens the door to all Gentiles via Cornelius.

1. Preparing for the Crucial Meeting – Acts 10:1-23

A. The preparation of Cornelius – 10:1-8.

1. Describe the character and religious inclinations of Cornelius.
2. Did God "hear" Cornelius' prayer? Explain your answer in view of Jn 9:31 and 1 Pet 3:12.
3. What did the angel tell Cornelius would be revealed to him by Simon Peter?

B. The preparation of Peter – 10:9-16.

1. Describe the contents of the sheet which Peter saw descending from heaven.
2. What command did Peter hear regarding these animals?
3. How does he respond to the command?

C. The messengers arrive in Joppa – 10:17-23.

1. Peter needs more information in order to make sense of what he saw in the trance. It is not unusual for God to disseminate truth in small doses, allowing men to ponder and gradually draw conclusions as they are able.
2. As the messengers arrive from Cornelius, Peter is given a further nudge by the direct revelation of the Holy Spirit – 10:19-20.
3. What knowledge do the messengers share with Peter that would further convince him that something significant is unfolding?

2. The Arrival and Address – Acts 10:24-43

- A. The meeting – 10:24-29. Cornelius, in great anticipation of his guest's arrival, gathers his relatives and friends to hear his message.
 - 1. So overwhelmed is he that he bows before Peter as he enters.
 - 2. The dawn is beginning to break upon Peter's understanding, for he acknowledges that *"God has shown me that I should not call **any man** common or unclean."*
- B. Peter asks for Cornelius to clarify his motive in sending for him – 10:30-33.
- C. Peter's address to this devout, Gentile audience – 10:34-43.
 - 1. Peter now seems to grasp the full significance of what he had said in his very first sermon on Pentecost (10:34-35; cf. Ac 2:39).
 - 2. He gives a very brief synopsis of Jesus' life – 10:36-40. List the major points:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.
 - 3. The role and message of the apostles – 10:41-43. List the major points:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.

3. The Manifestation of the Holy Spirit – Acts 10:44-48

- A. The fuller significance of this event, as Peter later explains back in Jerusalem, will be explored in the next lesson. For now, note that it is the *fourth* direct act of intervention from heaven: 1) the angel speaks to Cornelius, 2) Peter's trance/vision, 3) the Spirit's directive to Peter, and 4) the pouring out of the Spirit.

- B. When the Holy Spirit first was manifested in this way on the day of Pentecost, the unbelievers were amazed. Who is now “astonished” by such an event?
- C. What is Peter’s conclusion to the Spirit coming upon the Gentiles? What terminology is used relative to baptism as directed by Peter?
- D. Is there any evidence for/against the conclusion in the text that Cornelius and his household were saved *before* being baptized? Who else had experienced divine intervention before being baptized?

Questions:

1. By what method of reasoning does Peter arrive at the conclusion that God had shown him not to call a man common or unclean? Were there any men in the sheet?!
2. How does Peter respond to Cornelius’ bowing to him?
3. Compare/contrast Cornelius’ response to the events that transpire regarding his spiritual status and Paul’s response in Acts 9.
4. How does Peter describe an acceptable response to God in Acts 10:35?
5. To what great future event does Peter appeal in Acts 10:42? Find another place in Acts where an apostle warns Gentiles of this coming day.

Acts Study Guide

Lesson 10: Peter's Defense and the Church in Antioch – Acts 11

Introduction: The reaction to Peter's trip to Caesarea by those in Jerusalem gives some perspective on the depth of prejudice between Jew and Gentile. It took divine intervention to persuade Peter to go, and it will take a clear and orderly explanation of the events to convince the other Jewish believers to accept what has occurred.

1. Peter's Defense – Acts 11:1-18

- A. News travels fast, even in the pre-satellite/cell phone days. The other apostles and brethren in Judea are alarmed at the news of Peter's actions, and they call upon him to explain himself upon his return – 11:1-3.
- B. Even as Peter had been persuaded by divine instruction in the matter, so he recounts the events in the hope that their minds, too, might be changed – 11:4-17.
 - 1. The six witnesses who accompanied Peter to Caesarea are there – 11:12.
 - 2. Peter recalls the divine intervention on both his and Cornelius' behalf – 11:5-14.
 - 3. The clincher, however, is the coming of the Holy Spirit upon uncircumcised believers – 11:15-17. Note carefully the terminology involved:
 - a. The Holy Spirit "fell upon them" – 11:15. No imposition of apostles' hands as in the case of the seven servants (ch 6) or the Samaritans (ch 8). This was a unique event.
 - b. Peter equates it with "as upon us at the beginning" – 11:15. Again, he goes all the way back to Pentecost, a number of years earlier, to find a precedent. Obviously, the action that happened at Cornelius' house was not commonplace; it did not accompany "normal" conversion.
 - c. The event causes Peter to remember the Lord's instructions about being "baptized with the Holy Spirit" – 11:16. This happened "at the beginning."
 - d. Peter styles the Spirit's influence upon Cornelius as "the same gift" that was given to the apostles by virtue of their belief in Christ.
 - e. The logical conclusion: "*Who was I that I could withstand God?*" – 11:17. Indeed, through this process God gradually revealed to Peter the truth about His acceptance of the Gentiles. Peter properly evaluated the evidence.
- C. Peter's testimony is convincing, and thus we see the convicting and educating power of truth upon good hearts – 11:18.

2. The Beginning of the Church in Antioch – Acts 11:19-26

Note: The chapter division surely would have been better placed here, for Luke now recounts a major phase of early kingdom development. As Jerusalem became the center of activity in the early stage of preaching among the Jews, so Antioch becomes a focal point of preaching among the Gentiles.

- A. The seed planted – 11:19-21. Luke returns to the story line begun in chapter 8. The scattered disciples, not merely the apostles, took the gospel with them in their flight from Judea. Initially preaching was limited to the Jews, but the conversion of Cornelius opens the door to Gentiles as well. (**Note:** In older manuscripts the term “Hellenists” (11:20) is from the Gk. *hellenas*, whereas the term “Hellenists” in 6:1 is *hellenistas*. The difference is that 6:1 refers to Greek-influenced Jews and 11:20 refers to pure Gentiles. The intervening chapters make it clear that there was no conversion of Gentiles until Cornelius.)
- B. The seed watered – 11:22-26a. Barnabas, introduced in Ac 4:36 and 9:27, now resurfaces as a major character in the expansion of the kingdom. The apostles have confidence in him to see about the events they heard are transpiring in Antioch. Paul, who has also been out of the picture since 9:30, reappears to work closely with Barnabas in teaching in this new and different kind of congregation: a mix of Jews and Gentiles.
- C. A change of designation – 11:26b. Believers, mostly referred to thus far by Luke as disciples, brethren or the church, are now styled “Christians.” The new, ethnically diverse makeup of the Antioch church calls for a new designation.

3. Gentile → Jew Benevolence – Acts 11:27-30

In anticipation of broader issues to come, Luke includes an episode of Gentiles sending financial assistance to Jews in Judea. A famine in the reign of Claudius (AD 41-54) creates a hardship upon the brethren, and the church at Antioch responds with sympathy and magnanimity. Note that the first elders are mentioned by Luke.

Questions:

- 1. Compare Acts 11:18 and Acts 5:31. How is repentance “given” by God?
- 2. How did God grant repentance to the “Gentiles” when only Cornelius and his associates became Christians?
- 3. Describe the growth of the gospel in Antioch.
- 4. Put together a character sketch of Barnabas from what is said about him thus far.
- 5. Do you think Acts 11:29 is a “church contribution”? Explain.

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Lesson 11: Herod's Persecution – Acts 12

Introduction: Herod Agrippa 1 gradually broadened his kingdom by edicts from the Roman Emperors Caligula (AD 37-41) and Claudius (AD 41-54). In order to solidify his support from the Jews, he turns to the persecution of Christianity. Thus, difficulty comes to the brethren in Judea on two fronts: the natural catastrophe of famine and the civil persecution by Herod.

1. James' Death and Peter's Arrest – Acts 12:1-4

- A. It is interesting to note the peculiarities of inspiration. The death of Stephen is given much space while one of Jesus' closest associates and the first apostle to die, James, is given 11 words. This is not the exalted position that James once coveted.
- B. Some speculate that this renewed persecution, much to the Jews' liking, is consequent upon the inclusion of the Gentiles. This would have further enraged the Jewish leadership, especially if such Gentile believers gradually began to infiltrate Jerusalem (cf. the charge against Paul in Acts 21:28-31). If this is accurate, it is not surprising that Peter is Herod's next target.
- C. For maximum political effect, Herod engineers Peter's arrest and planned execution at Passover. This would ensure broad publicity and favor among orthodox Jews.

2. Peter's Release – Acts 12:5-19

- A. It was undoubtedly reported to Herod by the Jews that his prize prisoner had once before been imprisoned and had escaped under highly unusual circumstances. Thus Herod devotes 16 guards to guarantee Peter's incarceration.
- B. Opposite this flexing of military muscle, "*constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church*" (12:5; cf. 12:12). As a result, an angel comes to liberate Peter.
 - 1. Peter, himself, seems slow to grasp what is happening to him. At first he thinks the events are a vision (12:9). Not until he is outside the prison, "*when Peter had come to himself*" (12:11), does he understand that his freedom is real.
 - 2. Further, the disciples, who are gathered praying, are shocked by such a sudden and clear answer to their prayers (12:15-17).
- C. Peter escapes to an undisclosed location, making it impossible for Herod to find him. One would like to have witnessed the consternation, anger and frustration of this pompous, carnal man as he realized that his political insurance had inexplicably disappeared from the midst of sixteen soldiers. They are summarily executed for their "dereliction of duty."

3. Herod's Demise – Acts 12:20-24

- A. Herod's horrendous death is consistent with Old Testament accounts of God's immediate judgment against some rebellious civil rulers, false prophets and other enemies. Josephus sustains Luke's account and says that Herod was stricken even while speaking to the crowd.
- B. Note the contrasting actions of angels: toward those who are in fellowship with God they are benevolent; toward those who rebel against God they are frighteningly destructive.
- C. But in spite of such persecution and threat, "*the word of God grew and multiplied*" (12:24). Note other such assessments of the growth of the kingdom and give the context of each:
 - 1. Acts 9:31 –
 - 2. Acts 6:7 –
 - 3. Acts 5:14 –
 - 4. Acts 4:4 –

Questions

- 1. What was Peter doing the night before his death? How might this be explained?
- 2. What lessons for us today grow out of this story?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.

Acts Study Guide

Lesson 12: Paul's First Journey (1) – Acts 13

Introduction: Some time after Paul has been converted, perhaps 10-12 years, the Holy Spirit is finally ready to send him abroad. These last two lessons in this segment of study center upon the first journey among the Gentiles.

1. From Antioch to Cyprus – Acts 13:1-12

A. The commission of Paul and Barnabas – 12:25-13:3.

1. True to Luke's writing style, he first introduces John Mark in 12:12 and now weaves him into the narrative. "Recruiting" of men to serve in the gospel alongside those of greater maturity, apprenticeship if you will, is common in Acts and the epistles. Jesus, Himself, used such "on the job training" with the apostles.
2. What a rich congregation Antioch was with teachers such as these. But the Holy Spirit assigns two of their most prominent leaders to travel abroad. This is a trip of probably three years in duration.

B. Confrontation with Elymas – 13:4-12.

1. The story of gospel preaching never changes: it is the search for opportunity amid a sea of obstacles. The opportunity: an audience with the proconsul of the island, Sergius Paulus. The obstacle: a Jewish sorcerer, Elymas.
2. Sergius Paulus wishes to hear what Paul and Barnabas have to say, but Elymas is shrewd enough to realize that if he is converted, his influence will be negated. So, *"he withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith"* (13:8).
3. With strenuous rebuke, Paul by the hand of the Lord strikes Elymas blind. Certainly Paul knows firsthand the blinding power of God, and such an act is symbolic of the moral and spiritual blindness that Elymas is choosing by opposing the truth of God.

2. In the Synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia – Acts 13:13-41

- A. The defection of Mark – 13:13. Again, note Luke's literary technique. He passes by this event with no explanation, but he will later refer to its deeper implications.
- B. Paul's address in the synagogue – 13:16-41. A tactical pattern emerges in Cyprus (13:5) and Antioch (13:14) that will be followed by Paul in his evangelistic endeavors. Preaching first in the synagogues of the Jews is both practical and doctrinal: these are the people God promised would hear the gospel first, and they are the ones who have the history and Scriptural foundation to appreciate the message.

1. *Historical review*: Paul begins with a review of Jewish history, establishing the point that God created a special nation for the purpose of bringing His Savior into the world (Ac 13:16-22). What span of history is covered in ...
 - a. Ac 13:17-19 –
 - b. Ac 13:20-22 –
2. *The Messiah has come*: Paul's main point is that all Old Testament history and prophecy has reached its fulfillment in Jesus Christ (Ac 13:23-39).
 - a. What is David's role in this saving work of God (13:23)?
 - b. What purpose did the prophet John serve (13:24-25)?
 - c. How does Paul explain the Jews' rejection and murder of their Savior (13:26-29)? Where earlier in Acts has responsibility for this been laid at their feet?
 - d. What is the main theme of 13:30-37?
 - e. What does Paul do to substantiate the resurrection of Jesus?
 - f. How does Paul contrast David and Jesus?
3. *Driving the point home*: Now that Paul has laid the historical foundation and expounded upon its fulfillment in Christ, he establishes the significance of what is being offered by God and warns his Jewish brethren of rejecting it – 13:38-41.
 - a. The inspired heart of the gospel is that the promise of God made so long ago and toward which He has been working is *forgiveness of sins* – 13:38-39 (cf. Ac 3:19, 26; 10:43). Even to Jews who are familiar with their history and the law, forgiveness is not what they have been looking for or perceived themselves to be in need of.
 - b. Perhaps Paul, like Stephen in Ac 7, perceived by body language and facial expression that his message was not being charitably received. Or perhaps he, as a Jew – one who himself had been resistant to the very message he was now preaching – could accurately anticipate the normal reaction of most Jews. At any rate, Paul warns them of the consequences of turning away from the truth he is proclaiming.

3. The Reaction to and Aftermath of the Sermon – Acts 13:42-52

A. Another pattern that begins to develop is the resistance of the Jews corporately to the gospel and the agreeableness of the Gentiles. This is reflected in Paul's comments in Rom 9-11. In Antioch, the Gentiles are thrilled by the message that they, too, are acceptable to God. The Jews, on the other hand, are envious.

1. What is the first tactic used by the Jews to oppose the gospel (Ac 13:45)?
2. What do they do after Paul withdraws from the synagogue and teaches among the Gentiles (Ac 13:50)?

B. In response to the rejection of the Jews, Paul indicates that he and Barnabas had fulfilled their obligations to them and pronounced condemnation upon them: *"you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life"* (13:46).

C. Paul and Barnabas are finally driven from the city. But persecution, as in the case in Jerusalem following the stoning of Stephen, often becomes the catalyst for the spread of the gospel.

Special Note: Calvinists use Acts 13:48 to substantiate the doctrine of limited atonement: that God arbitrarily elects some to be saved and other to be irrevocably lost. But the word "appointed" carries the idea of order or arrangement, not unilateral decree. Simply, the hearts of the Jews were not disposed to recognize and accept the truths of the gospel because they were motivated carnally (i.e., envy, 13:45). Thus, said Paul, you *"judge yourselves unworthy ..."* (13:46). The Gentiles, on the other hand, had their hearts so attuned to spiritual things that when they heard, they appreciated and responded to the truth. In this sense they were "appointed to eternal life."

Questions:

1. How does Sergius Paulus react to the blinding of Elymas and the teaching of Paul?
2. What is the primary condition of receiving forgiveness as stated in Acts 13:39? To whom does this promise apply?
3. From what parts of the Old Testament does Paul quote to substantiate his arguments?
4. What does Paul remember about this situation later in life (cf. 2 Tim 3:10-11)?
5. What reaction does the acceptance of the gospel create in saved people (Ac 13:52)?

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Lesson 13: Paul's First Journey (2) – Acts 14

1. At Iconium – Acts 14:1-6

- A. Describe the work of Paul and Barnabas in Iconium.
- B. Describe the positive reaction to the gospel in Iconium.
- C. What negative reaction occurred? How did Paul and Barnabas handle it?

2. At Lystra – Acts 14:6-20

- A. The healing of the lame man – 14:8-13. This event was so impressive that the townsfolk believed the gods of Greek and Roman mythology had come. In their euphoria, they prepare sacrifices for Paul and Barnabas.
- B. The two preachers are mortified by the Lystrans' misguided zeal and only with great difficulty halt the proceedings – 14:14-18. Paul takes the opportunity to preach to them about the proper object of worship – God. Note how differently a Gentile audience with no knowledge of Scripture is appealed to than a Jewish one.
- C. Outline Paul's brief address to the Lystrans:
 - 1. 14:15 (three points):
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - 2. 14:16 (one point):
 - 3. 14:17 (two points)
 - a.
 - b.

D. The Jewish persecution – 14:19-20. When the Jews of Antioch and Iconium heard of Paul and Barnabas' success in Derbe and Lystra, they made it their aim to rid the entire region of their influence – permanently.

1. It is shocking to see how swiftly the inhabitants of Lystra turn on Paul.
2. But those whose values, worldview and deepest religious beliefs are founded upon the shifting sands of human philosophy, fiction and myth should be expected to be likewise fickle and unstable.
3. Commentators differ as to whether Paul actually died and was raised, but there appears to be no definitive language one way or the other. Nevertheless, it was an act of viciousness and brutality, though probably done with a clear conscience (as Paul later testifies of himself in his persecutions) as they fancied themselves to be defending Judaism. Paul recovers and travels with Barnabas to Derbe.

3. The Return Trip – Acts 14:21-28

A. Luke now returns to a subject previously mentioned in passing: the presence of elders in a local church (cf. Ac 11:30). As Paul and Barnabas begin their return trip to Syrian Antioch, they revisit the churches that have been started and appoint elders.

1. There would be great danger in leaving such new Christians in a highly volatile environment without leadership and oversight. On the other hand, one wonders how spiritually mature men could be found among such infantile churches. In the absence of a divine explanation we may only conjecture.
2. First, note that Paul and Barnabas appear to be in these cities longer than the simple narrative suggests. For example, what might be the time frame of Ac 14:21? Or 14:7? Or 14:3?
3. Secondly, while it is improbable that Gentiles steeped in fables and myths could mature spiritually in a short time, it is likely that a Jew would experience accelerated growth resulting from his knowledge of the Old Testament. There might be several other factors that would differentiate our own cultural framework – which makes it difficult to envision appointing elders so quickly – from that of the first century.

B. More preaching and teaching is done during their return travel, and having gathered the brethren in Antioch they reported on the events that have transpired – 14:27. What stories they had to tell!

Conclusion: We marvel in this first section of Acts of the growth of the kingdom amid such severe trials. The gospel has met with religious persecution (Jews), civil persecution (Herod Agrippa 1), defamation (Elymas), physical violence (imprisonment, beat-

ings, murder), abandonment (Mark), prejudice (the Jews' skepticism of Cornelius), famine, internal strife – even the punishment of God, Himself (Ananias and Sapphira). But Paul, Barnabas, Peter, Philip, Stephen and others demonstrate the resilience and strength of spiritually convicted men. The servants of God through faith, purity and love are able to withstand and overcome the carnal weapons of man. What inspiration to us all to strive more diligently, to live with more focus, to prioritize our lives according to spiritual realities as we study the history of the early church.

Questions:

1. How would you answer someone who said there could be apostles today because Barnabas, not one of the twelve, is called an apostle in Acts 14:4, 14?
2. What pattern do you see in the following verses: Acts 14:3; 8:5-6; 4:29-30; 2:42-43?
3. What future assistant of Paul was from the region of Derbe and Lystra?
4. Comment on the zealousness of opposition to the gospel demonstrated by the Jews of Antioch and Iconium.
5. What did Paul understand about the price to be paid in participating in the kingdom of God?
6. What event, principle or person impresses you in this first half of Acts?