

WHAT KIND OF CHURCH?

**Acts 1 - 8
8 Studies**

Welcome to Acts, “What Kind of Church”

The early chapters of Acts capture the life of the church in its infancy. In its first days, weeks, months and years, the Church of Christ takes its first steps in being Christ’s witnesses “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). As God’s people learn what obedience to the Great Commission looks like, they also must deal with appointing leaders, facing opposition, overcoming division, and learning what it means for Gentiles to come to Christ alongside Jews.

The continuing story of Jesus (as Luke describes Acts in his introduction) is of benefit to the church today, not because it prescribes every detail of what church life should look like, but particularly because it shows us how God drove the spread of the gospel of Jesus in fulfillment of his Old Testament promises, and how he protected and preserved the church as it grew. The Christian person who wants to learn to trust in God’s promises, to faithfully proclaim the good news of Jesus, to depend on God’s provision, and to endure suffering and opposition well will be richly encouraged by studying this part of God’s Word.

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Acts 1

Committed to Witness

- 1.** Have you ever had to provide eye-witness testimony about some event?
- 2.** Who first told you about Jesus?
What aspects of his life and ministry did they explain?
- 3.** How are you at passing on a message to someone else?
Are you likely to remember all the salient details?
Do you tend to leave bits out?

Read Acts 1:1 - 11

- 4.** Make a note of what stands out for you as you read this chapter; themes, repeated words, key ideas, etc.

Read Luke 1:1 - 4

- 5.** What seems to be Luke's purpose in writing his second volume, the book of Acts?
- 6.** Why is the Holy Spirit essential for the work with which the disciples are being entrusted?

7. What is the task Jesus gives the disciples?

8. Acts 1:8 is often called the “programmatically” verse of the book, it lays out the program for what follows. If you didn’t (or don’t!) know any of the rest of the book, how might you expect 1:8 to be accomplished?

9. How is Jesus’ promised return an encouragement for the mission he gives his disciples?

10. What implication is there about the necessary condition for Jesus’ return?

Acts 8:5 & Acts 11:19 - 21

Notice that those who act in fulfillment of the promised expansion of the gospel in Acts 1:8, are not among the apostles to whom that command was originally given!

11. What does the fact that “regular” Christians, not just the apostles, fulfil the promise of 1:8 indicate about the role of everyday Christians today?

Read Acts 1:12 - 26

- 12.** Why do the disciples believe someone must be appointed to replace Judas?

- 13.** This is the last time in the story of the Bible that God's people cast lots to make a decision. Considering Jesus' promise in this chapter, why is this significant?

- 14.** How do these events influence the way Christian people make decisions today?

- 15.** In Luke's gospel account, it is Jesus whom the Holy Spirit comes upon most prominently, (Luke 3:22, 4:18, etc). How is Luke's account here an encouragement to Christians as they begin their ministry without Jesus' physically present as they have known him to be?

Acts 2 Committed to Jesus

- 1.** What words or phrases can you say in another language?
- 2.** If asked to speak in public, do you step up confidently, or try and persuade someone else to take your place?
- 3.** What aspects of talking about Jesus do you find hard? Which bits do you find easier?

Read Acts 2:1 - 47

- 4.** Briefly outline the events of this chapter.
- 5.** Find a map in the back of your Bible or on the Internet, and make a note of the geographic regions represented by the people who hear the gospel.
- 6.** Why is the pouring out of the Spirit in this particular way, unique and unrepeated?

- 7.** If Joel's prophecy speaks of "the last days" (v 17), what does that mean for the days in which we live?

- 8.** How does Peter explain what the people in Jerusalem have witnessed?

- 9.** What's significant about the way the events of the cross are described by Peter in verses 22 - 24?

Notice that Peter doesn't feel the need to convince those in Jerusalem that Jesus' tomb was empty. They were already aware of it!

- 10.** From Peter's speech to the crowd, who is Jesus?

- 11.** Why reasons are given as to why it was "impossible for death to keep its hold on him" (v 24)?

- 12.** How are God's sovereignty and human responsibility shown to intersect in Peter's speech?

- 13.** In what ways does the giving of the Spirit prove Jesus to be the eternal king from David's line?

- 14.** What kind of response is there to the announcement of the good news of Jesus?

- 15.** Shaped by Peter's speech, how should we call on people to consider the claims of Christ?

- 16.** How is the promise of Acts 1:8 being fulfilled?

- 17.** Do you see the same kind of responses to the gospel of Jesus today as we observe in this section?

- 18.** John Calvin, the church Reformer wrote, "*That repentance not only always follows faith, but is produced by it, ought to be without controversy*" (*Institutes* III.iii:1). How does your faith in Jesus produce repentance?

Acts 3

The Sign and Sermon

- 1.** If you could perform any one of the miracles that Jesus did during his earthly ministry what would it be?
- 2.** When you're excluded, how do you feel and respond?
- 3.** Have you ever seen someone miraculously healed?
How did you feel?
How did you respond?

Read Acts 3

- 4.** What details does Luke record for us about this miraculous healing?
- 5.** What is the significance of Peter being able to perform the kind of miracle that Jesus had performed?
- 6.** Remember from 2:44 - 45 that Peter and John did have access to money "to give to anyone who had need." How should we think about giving to those in need, seeking healing, and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus?

- 7.** Solomon's Colonnade was thought by the Jews to be the remaining part of the original temple built by King Solomon (Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*. 20:9, 7). Why might Luke record this detail as the setting for what happens in this chapter?

- 8.** It seems that in the first century, blind and paralysed people were prohibited from entering the temple (see Matthew 21:14 - 15), probably because their disability was seen as ritual impurity or caused by their sin. What is the significance that this man can now enter the temple with Peter and John?

- 9.** Which of the elements of Peter's speech to the crowd in Solomon's Colonnade, apply to all people, even today?

- 10.** What response does Peter call for from those who witnessed the healing?

- 11.** Make a list of the various things Peter says about Jesus in verses 11 - 23.
Why does he say so much?

- 12.** How does this healing contribute to the ongoing ministry of the gospel?

- 13.** How do these kinds of healing miracles give people a taste of the Kingdom of God?

- 14.** In what ways are these *only* a taste of the Kingdom of God?

- 15.** What work of God for you gets you closest to “walking and jumping, and praising God”?

- 16.** What is the offer for people today contained in this episode?

- 17.** How is the promise of Acts 1:8 being fulfilled?

Acts 4:1-31 & 5:17-42 Committed to Standing Firm

- 1.** What does your name mean?
Do you ever wish you were given a different name?

- 2.** What aspects of the Christian message does our society like to hear?
What aspects of the message does society try to silence or exclude?

- 3.** What do you know of the suffering of Christian people in other parts of the world?

Read Acts 4:1-31 & 5:17-42

- 4.** Why is the fact that “these men had been with Jesus” (4:13) a pertinent observation about Peter and John?

- 5.** Describe the content of the believers’ prayer in 4:23 - 30?

- 6.** What do you notice about the aftermath of the believers’ prayer?

- 7.** What elements of this prayer could you incorporate into your prayers?

- 8.** Why do you think that Acts so frequently points out the parallel aspects of God's sovereignty and human responsibility?

- 9.** How has the Holy Spirit changed Peter since he denied Jesus three times (Luke 22:54 - 52)?

- 10.** What do you think of Gamaliel's response in 5:33 - 39?

- 11.** What might the same kind of courage displayed by Peter and the others in these episodes look like displayed in your life?

- 12.** Why does our society try to silence or exclude some elements of the gospel message?

- 13.** What do we need to consider as we work out how to “obey God rather than human beings” (5:29)?

- 14.** How would you need to think differently about suffering, in order to rejoice that you had “been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name” (5:41)?

- 15.** How is Jesus’ instruction in Acts 1:8 being fulfilled?

- 16.** Should we expect miraculous intervention when we face opposition and hostility for our faith?

- 17.** How do these episodes encourage you to keep speaking about Jesus regardless of the opposition?

Acts 4:32 – 5:1

Committed to Integrity

- 1.** What's the biggest lie you've ever been told?
What's the biggest lie you've ever told someone else?
Have you yet been found out?
- 2.** What do you imagine to be the worst possible way to die?
- 3.** Why do you think Christian people often seem to consider sin not very serious?

Read Acts 4:32 – 5:11

- 4.** What differences do you notice between the approach of Barnabas and that of Ananias and Sapphira?
- 5.** Why does Luke present the cases of both Barnabas and Ananias & Sapphira?
- 6.** What does Ananias' sin indicate about him and his thinking/priorities/trust?

- 7.** Why do you think Luke doesn't answer lots of the questions we have regarding the details of this episode?

- 8.** What aspects of Ananais' sin is common to all sin?

- 9.** Is it wrong for Christian people to own property or possessions?

- 10.** What do we learn about money and possessions through this episode?

- 11.** Do Christians ever attempt to lie to God today?
What does this look like?

- 12.** What seems to be the primary lesson to learn from this episode?

- 13.** In verse 11 Luke calls the community of God's people "the church" for the first time. What do you think is the significance of the designation in this unfortunate context?
- 14.** What does this episode contribute to our understanding of God's church?
- 15.** How does this incident help us come to a right understanding of sin?
- 16.** What sin or untruths need to be eliminated from the church today?

Acts 6:1 - 7

Committed to Ministry

1. If you could choose your ideal job, what would it be?

2. What divisions have you seen arise within a church community?

Read Acts 6:1 - 7

3. How do you think the criteria for appointing the seven men (verse 3) could be observed?

4. Why would it be wrong for the Apostles to become involved in the distribution of food?

5. In verse 2, the same word meaning “ministry” is applied to both the daily food distribution and to preaching and teaching. What does this mean for our understanding of these different ministry roles?

6. How does this episode focus our understanding of the role of the Apostles?

- 7.** The names listed are unlikely to be the names of Hebraic Jews, suggesting that the men nominated are all from the Hellenistic members of the church. Would this have been your solution if you were tasked with solving the problem?

- 8.** Why is disunity such a serious problem for the church?

- 9.** How does this episode help us think about the challenges of prioritising ministry tasks?

- 10.** What are some of the things that make it difficult to maintain an appropriate focus on ministry tasks?

- 11.** Is it wrong for pastors and other leaders in the church to be involved in practical, physical tasks?

- 12.** What should we consider when deciding which ministry tasks to commit our time to?

- 13.** What do we learn from the fact that two of these seven are engaged in the public proclamation of the gospel in the following chapters (Acts 6:6 - 10, 8:4 - 8)?
- 14.** Why do you think Luke repeatedly uses a phrase like verse 7, “so the word of God spread” (ie 12:24, 19:20, etc)?
- 15.** Why is the term “obedient to the faith” (v 7) an appropriate expression for those who came to trust in Jesus?

Acts 6:8 – 8:1

Committed to Mission

1. What would be some “famous last words” that could adequately sum up your approach to life?

2. How do you want to react when people speak falsely about you?

Read Acts 6:8 – 8:1

3. What is the outcome of the Holy Spirit’s presence with Stephen?

4. Stephen is the first person outside of the Apostles who is described as performing “great wonders and signs” (6:8). When then does Luke devote such a significant amount of space not to Stephen’s miracles, but to recounting his words?

5. How does Stephen’s speech show that the charge of speaking “blasphemous words against Moses and against God” (v 11) is false?

- 6.** Why is Stephen's defence to the charges against him a very long recounting of Israel's history?

- 7.** What does Stephen say to correct the leaders' understanding of the Promised Land?

- 8.** In what ways had Old Covenant Israel rebelled against God?

- 9.** Contrary to the accusations against him, what evidence is there of Stephen's high view of Moses and the law?

- 10.** How does Stephen demonstrate that his hearers had not followed the law God gave to his people?

- 11.** What does the account of Abraham teach about the blessing of being in relationship with God?

- 12.** Why does Stephen quote from Isaiah 66 in Acts 7:49 - 50?

- 13.** What have the people of Israel misunderstood about the temple?

- 14.** What are the warnings from Israel's history that people in Stephen's day - and in ours - need to hear?

- 15.** Since having the land, the law, and the temple are not the signs of God's blessing and relationship that the people thought they were, how can we be sure we're in a right relationship with God?

- 16.** How is Jesus' statement in Acts 1:8 being fulfilled?

- 17.** How does this episode encourage you, teaching as it does, that we won't always be spared from suffering to the point of death?

Acts 8:1 - 25

A Tale of Two Perspectives

- 1.** Is there a city or a country that you never want to visit, and would refuse even an all-expenses-paid trip? What do you never want to go there?
- 2.** Who is the “black sheep” or the family member never spoken of in your family?
- 3.** Name some things that bring you joy.

Read Acts 8:1 - 25

- 4.** How is Jesus’ commission to the Apostles in Acts 1:8 being fulfilled?
- 5.** What does this teach us about how God achieves his purposes?
- 6.** The very last words of the Hebrew Bible (2 Chronicles 36:23, as the books are in a different order to our Old Testament) are King Cyrus’ edict, “let him go up.” Every Jewish person was able to travel to Jerusalem as their Jewish identity compelled them. Why is it significant that

God's people are now being scattered from Jerusalem into the surrounding lands?

- 7.** Considering the animosity between Jews and Samaritans, how is Philip's ministry in Samaria, a natural and logical expression of the message of Stephen's speech in chapter 7?

- 8.** What are the characteristics of Philip's ministry?

- 9.** How do the miraculous signs Philip performs contribute to the spread of the gospel?

- 10.** How is the coming of the Spirit to the Samaritan believers similar to the pouring out at Pentecost? How is it different?

- 11.** Why does Luke record this giving of the Spirit, when he hasn't done so for any of the thousands of Jewish believers in Jerusalem since Pentecost?

- 12.** What has Simon not understood about the good news of Jesus?

- 13.** Why is Peter's extraordinarily strong rebuke to Simon more appropriate than we might at first expect?

- 14.** How would you describe the impact of the gospel in Samaria?

- 15.** Where have you seen God use hardship, or suffering, or the sin of others to bring about his purposes?

- 16.** How does this scattering of believers and the growth of the church help us have confidence amidst the suffering of Christians, and sinful decisions we witness today?

- 17.** What aspect of the gospel message brings you the most joy?

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