

Women's Bible Study

A TWO-YEAR JOURNEY THROUGH
THE STORY OF GOD

Week 6 | The Kingdom of God is Expanding | The Book of Acts

The Holy Spirit empowers the church to carry the message of the Kingdom to all nations

The book of Acts is an historical account of the spread of Christianity. It was written by Luke, who was also the author of the gospel of Luke. The book of Acts is a continuation of Luke's orderly account of the life and teaching of Jesus. Whereas the *Gospel* of Luke described Jesus' earthly ministry, Luke's book of *Acts* gives an account of Jesus' continuing ministry through the Holy Spirit after Jesus' ascension to the throne of God.

The book of Acts reveals a quantum leap forward in the progress of redemption. This book describes how God is drawing to Himself a *new people of God* in this age—a diverse multi-ethnic family of people—comprising rich and poor, Jews and Gentiles, male and female, slave and free. These diverse people have been *embraced* by God and *transformed* by the Holy Spirit, and they are—we are—citizens in the eternal Kingdom of God. We are the *church*. We are the people of God *through faith*, drawn from all nations and transformed with power by the Holy Spirit.

1. Read Acts 1:1-11 *Jesus commissions His followers to take the gospel message to all nations*

- a. After His resurrection, Jesus remained in Jerusalem for 40 days teaching about the Kingdom of God. What burning question did the disciples have for Jesus in His post-resurrection ministry? (1:6)
- b. *For deeper thought:* What do you think were the disciples' (incorrect) expectations of what Jesus was about to do?
- c. What did Jesus reveal to the disciples about the timing of Jesus' return to establish His Kingdom? (1:7)
- d. What did Jesus reveal about the task *they* were called to accomplish? (1:8b)
- e. How would they be enabled to accomplish that task? (1:8a)

2. Read Acts 2:1-12 *The glory of God descends, and the Holy Spirit fills Jesus' disciples*

- a. On the day of Pentecost (50 days after Passover), a dramatic event occurred. Describe what these disciples experienced. (2:2-4)
- b. There was a huge crowd of Jews from many nations who had come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. What did they hear? (2:6-8,11)

SEMESTER 04: _____

Transformed

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT

Women's Bible Study

A TWO-YEAR JOURNEY THROUGH
THE STORY OF GOD

3. Read Acts 2:22-24,32-47 *The gospel of Jesus is proclaimed in Jerusalem*

- a. Peter addressed the crowd and explained this astonishing event of tongues. According to Peter, how had God affirmed Jesus' claims during His earthly ministry? (2:22)
- b. How had the people of Israel responded to this miracle-working Son of God in their midst? (2:23)
- c. *For deeper thought:* In what way was this evil act against Jesus being used by God for His glorious purpose in salvation? What did Jesus' death accomplish on our behalf? (See **1 John 4:10**)
- d. How did God demonstrate conclusively that Jesus' claims were true and His provision of salvation was effective? (Acts 2:24)
- e. Where is Jesus now? What is He doing on our behalf? (2:32-33)
- f. What is the logical, but stunning, conclusion of Peter's argument? (you'll find it in Acts 2:36)
- g. *For personal private reflection:* In Acts 2:37, there is the statement: "When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'"

Have you had the experience of being "cut to the heart" as you thought about your own sin and what Jesus has done to bring you forgiveness? Have you made a true heart commitment to Jesus?

Take a moment to ponder the fact that God loves you so much that He provided this great sacrifice in order to embrace you as His daughter. Ask God to pierce your heart with gratitude for the unfathomable gift He has given you.

- h. What did Peter challenge these Jews to do? (Acts 2:38-39)
- i. *Personal reflection:* In Acts 2:40, Peter pleads with these repentant Jews, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." How might that apply to us today? How can we heed Peter's warning?

The early church in Jerusalem continued to grow, but opposition from the Jewish leaders grew more and more intense. The volatile situation came to a turning point when Stephen, a leader of the early church, was brought before the Jewish ruling council, accused of rebellion, and stoned to death by an angry mob. A great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all of the Christians (except the apostles) were driven out of Jerusalem. They were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

SEMESTER 04:

Transformed

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT

Women's Bible Study

A TWO-YEAR JOURNEY THROUGH
THE STORY OF GOD

4. Read Acts 8:4-8; 14-17 *The gospel of Jesus is proclaimed in Judea and Samaria*

- a. How did the persecution and eviction of Christians from Jerusalem serve to expand the gospel? (8:4)
- b. In Genesis 12, God told Abraham that the blessing God promised to Abraham would extend to *all* nations. Nevertheless, the Jews of the first century were expecting a Jewish Messiah who would bring blessing particularly and exclusively to the Jews. They would have wondered: since Gentiles were not ethnic descendants of Abraham, were the Gentiles really *qualified* to receive the blessing that was to come through Abraham's offspring?

The fact that Gentiles (non-Jews) were hearing the gospel and being included in Messiah's Kingdom was perplexing to some Jewish Christians. It was not what they expected. How did God confirm to the early church that Gentile believers were accepted in the community of Christian faith? (8:14-17)

5. Read Acts 9:1-19 *Jesus commissions His apostle to the Gentile nations*

Saul was a brilliant, zealous Jew—a Pharisee—who was vigorously opposed to Christians. Saul was on a mission to capture Christians, but Jesus intervened. Jesus confronted Saul and gave Saul a different mission. What was that mission? (9:15)

6. Read Acts chapter 10:34-48 *The gospel is for people from every nation*

- a. In Acts chapter 10, God gave Peter a dramatic supernatural vision in order to teach him (and us) an important principle about the heart of God. What is that principle? (10:34-35)
- b. Peter proclaimed the good news of Jesus to the Gentile household of the Roman centurion Cornelius. What is Peter's summary testimony about Jesus, which he states in Acts 10:42-43?
- c. How did God confirm that these *Gentiles* had received salvation through faith in Jesus? (10:44-48)

The gospel of Jesus is proclaimed to the ends of the earth

7. Read Acts 11:19-26 and Acts 13:1-3 *The multi-ethnic church at Antioch is established*

The city of Antioch, at the southern-most point of modern-day Turkey, was the largest, most cosmopolitan city in that part of the Roman Empire. It became the first large multi-ethnic Christian church. The church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas to provide leadership to this rapidly growing church, and Barnabas recruited Paul (formerly Saul) to go with him and to help lead the Christian community at Antioch. After a year, the church at Antioch began sending missionaries to proclaim the gospel throughout the Roman Empire.

SEMESTER 04:

Transformed

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT

Women's Bible Study

A TWO-YEAR JOURNEY THROUGH
THE STORY OF GOD

- a. *Challenge question for keen observers:* Do you notice anything interesting about the men who are named in Acts 13:1?
- b. How did the church decide to send missionaries, and how did they know whom to send? (13:2)

The gospel is clarified: salvation is through faith in Jesus, not by obeying the Jewish Law

8. Read Acts 15:5-12 ***Obedience to the Law of Moses is not required for salvation***

- a. As some of the converted Jewish leaders from Jerusalem and Judea heard about the inclusion of Gentiles into the family of God, what was their strong opinion? (15:5)

A council of church leaders was convened in Jerusalem, and this council considered the issue from various perspectives:

- ✓ From the evidence of Peter (15:7-9)
- ✓ From the experience of Barnabas and Paul (15:12)
- ✓ From the testimony of the prophets (Amos 9:11-12, quoted in Acts 15:16-18)

- b. **Read Acts 15:28-29** What was the conclusion of the Jerusalem Council? (15:28-29)
- c. What is the bottom line: Are people who come to faith in Christ required to be circumcised? Are they required to keep the rules of the Sabbath and the dietary regulations and “clean laws” of Judaism?
- d. *Personal reflection:* We understand that salvation is by faith in Christ alone, and yet, sometimes we tend to assume that our cultural notions of righteousness and clean living are necessary as well. Do you have a tendency to be judgmental toward Christians who smoke? Who are chronically tardy? Who fail to recycle? Who are adorned with lots of tattoos? These are frivolous examples, but we all tend to elevate the values of our social culture to the status of divinely-ordained righteousness. Christianity thrives in *every* culture; people of *every* cultural background are embraced by God through faith in Christ. Is there a critical attitude toward others that you need to lay aside?

In Acts chapters 13-20 there are accounts of three missionary journeys led by Paul and his companions.

- In the first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas traveled to Cyprus and Asia Minor, establishing communities of faith. They traveled about 1400 miles over a period of 4-5 years.
- In the second missionary journey, Paul and Silas and others traveled back through Asia Minor and also to Greece. Their journey lasted three years and covered about 2800 miles.
- Paul's third missionary journey was a return to cities in Asia Minor and Greece, and it concludes with Paul's journey all the way back to Jerusalem. This journey lasted 5-6 years and covered 2700 miles.

In each city that Paul visited, he tailored his presentation of the gospel to connect with the culture of the city where he was preaching. Paul traveled to dozens of cities; he founded Christian church communities throughout Asia Minor (Turkey), Syria, Phoenicia, and Greece. Christianity was spreading throughout the Roman Empire.

SEMESTER 04:

Transformed

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT

Women's Bible Study

A TWO-YEAR JOURNEY THROUGH
THE STORY OF GOD

Christianity encounters strong opposition

- 9. Read 2 Corinthians 11:24-27.** Paul's amazing success in spreading the gospel was not accomplished easily. What sorts of hardships did Paul encounter as he persevered in the mission that Jesus gave him?
- 10. Read Acts 20:22-23.** At the end of Paul's third missionary journey, he made his way back to Jerusalem. What had the Holy Spirit revealed to Paul about his immediate future? (Acts 20:22-23)

Paul was indeed arrested in Jerusalem. He stood trial before the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem (the Sanhedrin), and then he was taken to Caesarea, where he was tried and questioned before a series of Roman leaders—Governor Felix, Governor Festus, and King Herod Agrippa II. The charges against him never seemed to stick, but Paul remained imprisoned in Caesarea for two years.

Paul exercised his right as a Roman citizen to appeal his case to Caesar. Paul was transferred as a prisoner to Rome, and after a terrifying voyage across the Mediterranean, Paul was placed under house-arrest in Rome. For the next two years, Paul was able to live in a rented house by himself, with a Roman soldier to guard him. He was able to receive visitors, to preach to gospel to all who came to him—and he was also able to write letters to the churches.

The book of Acts ends with Paul in prison—chained to a Roman guard. Paul's great passion was to be on the road, carrying the gospel to the ends of the earth, and starting new communities of faith wherever he went. While Paul was in prison, he was not free to do what he most wanted to do. Nevertheless, during Paul's imprisonment, Paul was able to write his apostolic letters to Colossae, Ephesus, Philippi, and to Philemon. Through these letters, Paul's missionary legacy has continued for almost 2000 years after his death.

- 11. Personal reflection:** Has there been a time in your life when you were not able to do the thing you most wanted to do? Have you considered that the Creator God who loves you is bringing about something more needful in your life? God is not only powerful; He is also wise. He knows the end from the beginning. He is absolutely good.

Examine your heart. Do you harbor a resentment in your heart for something God has denied you? Come to Him in faith and give those expectations back to Him. Just as Paul's imprisonment was used for God's glory, God is working in your life to shape you into the person who will be a channel of blessing and glory on behalf of His kingdom.

***The good news of God's Kingdom is being spread to the ends of the earth...
and You are part of that Kingdom!***

SEMESTER 04:

Transformed

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT