

## Introduction to Acts

### *Introduction*

Acts progresses based on Jesus' proclamation in Acts 1:8. Jesus said, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

- The Jerusalem mission is described in Acts 1-8:3.
- The mission to "all Judea and Samaria" begins in Acts 8:4 with the scattering of the Christians from Jerusalem.
  - It also includes Philip's work in Samaria and with the Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-40) and the ministry in Palestine and Syria (8:4-12:25).
- The mission to "the ends of the earth" (i.e., the Gentiles) begins in Acts 10 with the conversion of Cornelius.
- The last word in Acts (28:31) is "unhindered" (or, "without hindrance"), which is key for the spread of the gospel to the Jews (3:1-5:42); the Samaritans (8:4-8); the "God-fearers" (8:26-40); and the Gentiles (10:1-47).

### *Key Themes in Acts*

How do we measure up to the first century church?

1. The Holy Spirit (1:8; 2:1-4; 2:19, 22, 43; 4:8, 28-31; 5:12; 6:3-10; 7:36, 55; 8:6, 13, 15-17; 10:44; 11:24; 13:1-4, 9, 52; 14:3, 15:12; 16:6-7; 19:6; 20:22-28).
  - In what ways is the Holy Spirit active and involved in Acts? How is the Holy Spirit active and involved in our church?
2. Experience and discernment (1:4, "waiting"; 1:15-26; 4:23-31; 6:1-6; 9:26-30; 10:44-48; 11:15-18; ch. 15)
  - How is experience and spiritual discernment practiced in Acts? In our church?
3. Evangelism and church organization. While the entire book describes the missionary activity of the early church, there are several themes to note.
  - Evangelism through teaching (speeches; chs. 2-5; 7; 10; 13; 22; 26).
  - The gospel is open to all: both Jews and Gentiles (incl. Samaritans and those who would normally be barred from the kingdom; i.e., the Ethiopian eunuch); both men and women (5:14; 8:12; 16:13-15; 17:4, 12, 34; 18:26; 21:9).
  - The organization of the church is set up in order for converts to be taught and to grow, even while evangelism was to continue (6:1-7; 8:14-24; 11:22-26; 14:21-23; ch. 15; 19:21-22; 20:2, 17-38).
  - What types of evangelism did the early church do? How did they effectively organize their churches for evangelism? How do we focus on evangelism in our church? How are we structurally organized in our church? Does it aid or promote evangelism?

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4. Christian faith fulfills Scripture; salvation is through Christ (2:16-36; 4:11-12; 8:35; 10:36, 42-43; 13:16-41; 16:17, 30-31; 17:30-31).
  - How is Christian faith a fulfillment of Scripture? How do we treat the Old Testament? Do we understand the basics of salvation? How do we present that to others? Do we understand the links between the old and new covenants?
5. Prayer advances God's kingdom (1:12-15; 2:1-4; 4:24-31; 12:5).
  - How and why did the early church pray? What emphasis do we give to prayer in our church?
6. God's purpose. There are three words, or phrases, used in Acts to describe God's purpose.
  - "to purpose"/"purpose" (2:23; 4:28; 13:36; 20:27).
  - "it is necessary" (1:16, 21; 3:21; 4:12; 5:29; 9:16; 14:22; 16:30; 17:3; 19:21; 20:35; 23:11; 27:24, 26).
  - "to determine" (2:23; 10:42; 17:26, 31).
  - What do the use of these words teach us about God's purpose? How did the early church understand God's purpose? How do we understand God's purpose in and for our church? the world?
7. What other themes exist in Acts?
8. What questions do you have about Acts?