

The Book of Acts

Study Guide

LESSON
THREE

MAJOR THEMES OF ACTS



THIRD MILLENNIUM

MINISTRIES

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HOW TO USE THIS LESSON AND STUDY GUIDE

This study guide is designed for use in conjunction with the associated video lesson. If you do not have access to the video, the study guide will also work with the audio and/or text versions of the lesson. Additionally, the lesson and study guide are intended to be used in a learning community, but they also can be used for individual study if necessary.

- **Before you watch the lesson**
 - **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.
 - **Schedule viewing** — In the Notes section of the study guide, the lesson has been divided into sections that correspond to the video. Using the time codes found in parentheses beside each major division, determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may also want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
 - **Take notes** — The Notes section of the study guide contains a basic outline of the lesson, including the time codes for the beginning of each section and key notes to guide you through the information. Many of the main ideas are already summarized, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.
 - **Record comments and questions** — As you watch the video, you may have comments and/or questions on what you are learning. Use the margins to record your comments and questions so that you can share these with the group following the viewing session.
 - **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.
- **After you watch the lesson**
 - **Complete Review Questions** — Review Questions are based on the basic content of the lesson. You should answer Review Questions in the space provided. These questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
 - **Answer/discuss Application Questions** — Application Questions are questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

Preparation

- Read the book of Acts

Notes

I. Introduction (0:25)

Luke addressed three major concepts as he unfolded the unhindered spread of the gospel of God's kingdom.

II. Holy Spirit (2:10)

- Empowers the church to live transformed lives and to evangelize the world.
- Performed many signs and wonders to validate the ministry of the apostles and other early church leaders.
- Gave great courage to Christians who faced opposition and persecution.

A. Before Pentecost (3:37)

Jesus spent forty days between his resurrection and ascension teaching his apostles.

1. **Timing (4:47)**

When Jesus announced the coming baptism of the Spirit, the apostles asked if Jesus was about to restore the kingdom to Israel.

Old Testament prophets predicted:

- Because of Israel and Judah's great sins, God would:
 - exile them from the Promised Land
 - subject them to the tyranny of foreign rulers

- God would send the Messiah to restore his people by:
 - forgiving their sins
 - returning them to the Land
 - ruling over them

- The Messiah would become king over Israel and Judah, turning the Promised Land into the center of God's kingdom on earth.

- God's people would enjoy eternal and blessed lives.

The apostles hoped Jesus would fulfill the Old Testament predictions before he ascended into heaven.

God would fulfill Old Testament prophecy through:

- The spread of the gospel throughout the world
- Christ's glorious return

When judgment was over, God would pour out his Spirit as never before.

Old Testament prophets proclaimed:

- Before the Messiah came Israel would live in this age of sin, corruption and death.
- When the Messiah came he would usher in the age to come.

Jesus explained the transition to the glorious kingdom of God would come in stages.

- Inauguration — during Jesus' earthly ministry
- Continuation — during Christ's reign in heaven
- Consummation — when Jesus returned in the future

2. Purpose (10:13)

The Spirit was to be poured out to empower the apostles to be Christ's godly and faithful witnesses.

- Power — The association of the Spirit with power was common in the Old Testament (e.g., "Spirit of God").
- Witnesses — The Spirit of God gave his people power to speak boldly and effectively on God's behalf.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was significant for the early church:

- Reminded them of the hope announced by Jeremiah.
- Jesus sacrifice on the cross occurred during the feast of Passover.
- Coming of the Spirit was the first fruits of the harvest of eternal salvation.
- Indicated the church had received the writing of God's law on the heart.

2. Tongues (18:50)

There is much confusion in the church over the gift of tongues.

Some argue that tongues were a miracle of hearing rather than of speaking.

More likely, the miracle was one of speaking human languages that the speakers had never learned.

- Luke wrote that the Holy Spirit enabled the speakers.
- The Greek word for *tongues* usually refers to ordinary human languages.

Peter's explanation of tongues:

- Referred to Joel 2:28-32.
- Believed the events of Pentecost were part of the last days.
- Indicated the Spirit's coming was to occur before the great and glorious day of the Lord.

Many Christians miss the significance of the outpouring of the Spirit.

It is popular for Christians to expect that all truly spiritual Christians will experience the dramatic manifestation of tongues.

Great and mighty acts of God took place to inaugurate the kingdom of God:

- Christ died for our sins.
- Christ rose from the dead
- Christ ascended to the right hand of God the Father.
- Each time a person comes to faith in Christ, the merits of these events are applied to that person's life.

Pentecost was one of those great once-for-all-time events through which God brought the last days.

3. Results (26:26)

The Holy Spirit gave power to the apostles and used this power to bless the spread of the gospel of the kingdom.

Peter before Pentecost:

- Rebuked on the mount of transfiguration.
- Denied Christ three times.
- Did not have higher education.
- Not the type of person expected to speak in compelling ways.

Peter at Pentecost:

- Preached a successful gospel message on the day of Pentecost.
- Refuted those who accused the Christians of being drunk.
- Quoted, interpreted and applied the Old Testament convincingly.
- Received power to work miracles as a testimony to the gospel.

God blessed the witness of the apostles.

- Three thousand people were converted on the day of Pentecost.
- Internal growth also resulted from the empowerment of the Spirit.

C. After Pentecost (31:00)

1. Samaria (31:17)

Believers received the Spirit after their conversion.

This marked the first time Samaritan converts came to Christianity in large numbers.

When the gospel reached Samaria, it represented a new stage in the fulfillment of Jesus' commission to his disciples.

2. Caesarea (35:08)

The first time Gentiles were converted to Christ in significant numbers.

Parallel to Pentecost: those who believed the gospel began to speak in tongues.

It came as a surprise to the early church when Gentiles were converted to Christ without first being converted to Judaism.

3. Ephesus (37:12)

Parallels to Pentecost: converts spoke in tongues and prophesied.

The recipients were repentant Jews who had received the witness of John the Baptist prior to John's revelation that Jesus was the Messiah.

- Brought closure to the issue of the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus.

- Indicated that Jesus' work of bringing the Spirit had reached a new level.

III. Apostles (40:51)

Before Christ ascended into heaven, he appointed the apostles to continue his ministry by extending his kingdom from Jerusalem to the very ends of the earth.

The Holy Spirit was given to the apostles so that they would become his witnesses throughout the world.

A. Unique (40:51)**1. Requirements (43:06)**

The requirements for their office excluded anyone else from being called as an apostle.

Specific requirements:

- Taught directly by Jesus.
- Saw Jesus after his resurrection.
- Appointed to the office by God.

Paul was chosen as an apostle after Jesus had ascended into heaven.

2. Foundational Time (46:49)

The apostles were appointed to establish the church of Jesus Christ.

The apostles served as the foundation of the church:

- Carried the gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.
- Gained the first Christian converts from Judaism, Samaria, and Gentile paganism.
- Established the first churches and the patterns the church would follow.
- Unique work will never need to be completed again.

B. Authoritative (49:21)

1. Function (49:32)

The word *apostolos* in Greek means “one who is sent.”

- Messenger
- Agent
- Ambassador

Jesus commissioned missionaries as his surrogates.

Jesus delegated authority to his missionaries.

The apostles were authoritative ambassadors who differed from other disciples in two significant ways:

- Perpetually appointed to an office of the church.
- Authorized to speak to all matters related to the establishment and governance of Christ's church.

2. Blessings (53:48)

God gave the apostles converts almost every time they preached the gospel.

The external, numerical growth of the church was evidence of God's approval and power.

3. Miracles (55:21)

One of the main functions of miracles is to prove that God's messengers speak the truth and bear God's delegated authority.

The apostles' miracles proved that their testimony concerning Christ was true.

4. Revelation (57:55)

The Holy Spirit gave guidance to the apostles to:

- Flesh out the truth of the gospel.
- Make decisions for the church as a whole.
- Shape structural elements that allowed the church to grow to maturity.

The apostles' official function, blessing in ministry, authenticating miracles, and revelation were convincing proofs of their unquestionable authority.

C. Varied (59:39)**1. Strategies (59:55)**

- History

- Scripture

- Nature

- Personal Experience

- Signs and Wonders

- Loyalty to Christ

2. Settings (1:06:34)

- **Public Speeches** — sermons, defense speeches, other types of orations

- **Dialogue** — People invited to give counterarguments; apostles defended the gospel
- **Households** — often included many relatives, friends, and household servants
- **Personal Evangelism** — tailored their word to the knowledge and experience of the audience

The apostles' example teaches us:

- To emphasize those elements of the gospel that resonate most strongly with our audience.
- To find specific ways to relate the gospel to the life of each unbeliever.

IV. The Church (1:10:05)

A. Necessity (1:10:19)

A handful of men could not take the message of Christ to the whole world by themselves.

1. Physical Limitations (1:10:58)

- The apostles could not be “living letters” to the entire world.
- The apostles delegated much of the responsibility of being authentic witnesses to the church.
- The apostles created a self-replicating model for authentic evangelism in every generation.

2. Temporal Limitations (1:13:20)

- At least some of the apostles would not survive until Jesus returned.
- The apostles trained the church to evangelize and to carry on building the church after they died.

Because of the apostles' limitations, the church was central to their strategies for advancing the kingdom of God.

B. Preparation (1:15:05)**1. Teaching (1:15:17)**

The apostles' teachings were the foundation of the church, the basis for the church's beliefs.

The church must be built not only on Christ as the chief cornerstone, but also on the foundation of the apostles and prophets of the early church.

2. Officers (1:18:44)

Various Christian traditions have understood the government and offices of the early church in a variety of ways.

The apostles appointed additional church officers to ensure that the church would be able to carry out God's mission.

- Deacons

- Elders

The apostles encouraged the elders to lead alongside them even when the apostles were present.

The apostles called on the officers of the church to carry out God's mission of the messianic kingdom.

3. Hardships (1:25:14)

The apostles' work was fraught with difficulty, danger and persecution.

The way the apostles prepared the church to face hardship can be seen in Paul's address to the Ephesian elders.

The apostles' intention:

- not to discourage the churches
- but to prepare the churches to trust Christ in the face of hardships

V. Conclusion (1:29:25)

Application Questions

1. How does the Holy Spirit empower people today to live transformed lives and to evangelize the world? In what ways have you experienced the empowerment of the Holy Spirit?
2. What is the gift of tongues? Why did God give this gift?
3. Why do we have to depend on the Spirit's power in order to be godly and effective witnesses to the gospel message?
4. In what way do the apostles still serve as the foundation of the church? Why can't there ever be another authoritative apostle? Why is this important?
5. Why are the authoritative judgments of the apostles binding on the church today? Give some examples of judgments the apostles' made, and explain how they obligate modern churches and individual Christians.
6. What strategies can you personally use as you witness to the gospel? How might you improve on your witness of the gospel?
7. How is your church carrying out the mission of expanding the kingdom of God? What can your church do to improve its efforts? In what ways can you personally help your church expand the kingdom of God?
8. What is the most significant insight you have learned from this study?

Glossary

Apostle – A messenger, agent or ambassador sent on a mission; special New Testament office held by someone who had been taught by Jesus, had seen the risen Lord, and had been chosen for the office by the Lord himself

apostolos – Greek word (transliteration) for "one who is sent"

Gamaliel – Jewish leader who advised the Sanhedrin to leave the apostles alone saying that if the apostles' movement was of man, it would fail, and if it was of God, they could not stop it

James (apostle) – Son of Zebedee and brother of John; martyred under Herod Agrippa

James (brother of Jesus) – Jesus' half-brother; leader of the church in Jerusalem and author of the New Testament book of James

Jeremiah – Old Testament prophet from about 626-586 B.C., also called the "weeping prophet"; prophesied about the future of Judah and of the new covenant to come

Joel – Old Testament prophet who ministered sometime during the deportations to Babylon; offered hope of restoration after the exile and spoke of a future outpouring of the Holy Spirit; quoted by Peter on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2

Matthias – Apostle chosen by the remaining 11 apostles to replace Judas Iscariot in Acts 1

Pentecost – Jewish festival, often called the "Feast of Weeks," that celebrated the early harvest; celebrated by Christians as the day the Holy Spirit was poured out on the early church

Peter – One of Jesus' twelve apostles; also called Simon; a leader in the early Christian church; preached on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2; according to church historians, Mark relied on Peter's accounts of Christ's life to write his gospel

ruach elohim – Hebrew term (transliteration) for "Spirit of God"

Tyrannus – Name of the person who owned a lecture hall in Ephesus where new ideas were tested and where Paul preached the gospel