

Acts: Signs You Are Part of A Genuine Jesus Movement



Acts stands for “Acts of the Apostles.” IOW: What the apostles did, endured or experienced as God used them to spearhead the first genuine Jesus movement after His death and ascension back to heaven. Given the purpose of Scripture, those actions and events can be considered the signs of when such a movement is taking place today. In broad strokes, they are the following:

1. The gospel message being preached will have teeth.

1.1. Two things are meant by this figure of speech:

1.1.1. the message was offensive not only to the world, but also the majority of those claiming to follow God (e.g., the Jews of Jesus’ day; Evangelical Christians) (Act 7:51-54) = Like the messages preached by the former prophets, Stephen’s gospel was offensive to the majority of those already believing themselves to be the followers of God (the Jews of Jesus’ day; popular Christianity) (Act 17:6 “upset the world”, Act 28:22 “it is spoken against everywhere”). Most people (pagans and “Christians”) will hate the gospel of a genuine Jesus movement.

1.1.2. salvation would not be free and easy – or something you get for nothing (with no strings attached). It would instead require sacred vows of loyalty to Jesus and a life of faithfulness to God’s Laws (Act 2:38):

1) “repent” = Commit to practicing obedience to God’s Laws (which means putting off/turning from the practice of sin) (Luk 3:3 [notice, like faith, repentance is also necessary to the forgiveness of sins], 4-14 = IOW: Practice the Law in all things, this is what it means/looks like to repent (Isa 40:3-8 “word of our God” [i.e., God’s Law]) = Eternal preservation/salvation will require clearing out of our lives all lawlessness and clinging to God’s Law as preached (esp. at the time of His Messiah) (Isa 42:1-4, 51:4-5). Notice this message (or offer of salvation) also applies to the “nations” – people other than the Jews (Isa 55:1-7 w/56:1-8)¹. That by repentance is meant commitment to obeying God’s Law is also supported by other passages in the book of Acts (Act 21:21-24) = Paul would have refused James’ request if the version of Christianity he had converted to did not view obedience to the Law as necessary; (Act 24:14-15 w/25:8) = Likewise, Paul could not say these things if the version of Christianity he had converted to did not view the Law as necessary; (Act 17:11) = The Bereans would have found Paul’s gospel to be false if it ignored obedience to God’s Law since this was the central message of the OT Scriptures they were using to validate his message.

2) “each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” = Notice, this too (baptism) is necessary for salvation (or the forgiveness of sins). According to Peter’s first epistle, baptism represents a sacred vow of loyalty to Jesus (1Pe 3:21 “an appeal [Lit., a vow or pledge of loyalty] to God [*in exchange for*] a good conscience [i.e., forgiveness] through the resurrection of Jesus Christ [the person whose blood is the source of our forgiveness]”). This vow of loyalty is also picked up in the word faith [Grk., *pistis* = loyalty]. Examples from Acts (Act 3:16 “faith in His name”) = A common ancient idiom referring to a person’s loyalty to another (usually a person more powerful or of higher status than themselves); (Act 20:21 “repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ”) = Not only is the aforementioned idiom expressed, but this time the word “faith” is used as the substitute for baptism. Instead of Peter’s former gospel combination of repentance and baptism, it is repentance and faith – demonstrating faith to be both a suitable synonym for baptism and another term communicating vows of loyalty.

1.2. Why a gospel requiring such things was (and continues to be) so offensive to those outside a genuine Jesus’ movement = Because the gospel preached by the majority of those claiming to follow God has always been a gospel which requires no such loyalty or commitment. True now and true also in Jesus’ day. The rebellious Jews were the first Evangelicals. They too believed in a FAG (Jer 6:14-19; Luk 3:8 w/Joh 8:39).

1.3. A gospel causing this kind of offense among the majority was prophesied as central to the genuine Jesus movement (Luk 2:34-35 w/Mat 10:16-39) = The people Jesus is calling “wolves” - who will do these awful things, with the majority of those claiming to follow God and blood family.

2. The gospel message is powerfully and irrefutably proven from the Scriptures.

1.1. (Act 18:24-28 “powerfully refuted...demonstrating by the Scriptures”) = Proving by powerful argument and irrefutable Scriptural evidence (“demonstrating”, Luk 17:14).

1.2. (Act 1:17:1-3, 8:4, 19, 19:8 “synagogue”) = Jewish place of worship where scrolls containing all the OT Scriptures would be found. Though Paul [ml] possessed some books (e.g., Pentateuch – 2Ti 4:13), it would have been almost impossible to his missionary endeavors to carry everything.

¹ Scholars believe Acts to be the fulfillment of these chapters in Isaiah. See David W. Pao’s *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus*

Hence therefore the common practice of going to the synagogue to evangelize. (“explaining and giving evidence”, “reasoning”) = The employment of logic and facts to make an argument. In this case, the logic and facts established by the Scriptures. (“persuading”) = Irrefutably proving.

1.3. Jesus preached the same way (Luk 24:27 w/32 “our hearts burning within us”) = Idiomatic phrase indicating the presence of strong conviction where there had once been doubt. Jesus’ demonstrably proved from the OT Scriptures that the gospel message He had preached (most esp., that the Christ would need to suffer and die) was true.

1.4. Point not to miss: the gospel of a genuine Jesus movement doesn’t just claim its message is irrefutable, but proves it from the Scriptures in such a way that it leaves its opponents w/o a valid rebuttal (in re: to ordained men, Tit 1:9-11 silenced” = their mouths made shut/stopped).

3. Because what is being preached as the gospel is both offensive and irrefutable, those rejecting its message (including those within the majority) will employ slander and shady tactics to shut the preachers up.

2.1. (Act 6:7-13 “cope with the wisdom”) = Refute his arguments from Scripture. Jesus promised to give His preachers this kind of wisdom (Luk 21:15). (“secretly induced men to say...put forward false witnesses”) = Employed slander and shady tactics to shut Stephen up bc (once more) they couldn’t refute him.

2.2. (Act 9:22-23 “plotted” [20:3 “plot...formed by the Jews”, 19 “plots of the Jews”]; See also 23:12-15 “conspiracy”) = Shady tactics. In this case, the shady tactic of condemning someone w/o giving them the opportunity to defend their actions or beliefs (e.g., a kangaroo court). God’s Law forbids such shady tactics (Exo 23:1 w/Deu 19:15; Hence Joh 7:51). Even the pagan Romans viewed such behavior as shady and illegal (Act 19:21-28 w/35-42; See also Act 23:30, *25:16).

2.3. Because they could not refute their gospel, the Jews called the Christians a cult (“sect”) so that others would view them with suspicion.

2.4. Another common (shady) tactic of those who are unable to refute the preachers in a genuine Jesus movement is to slanderously attack their personal character. This they also do, in the hopes of scaring others out of listening to them (Act 24:5 “deceivers...pest”) = Translates as “scoffer” in the OT. It refers to a wicked person who boldly condemns those who are right as though they were wrong. (“dissension”) = Insurrection (against God). See also Paul’s words in (2Co 6:8 “regarded as deceivers”) = Imposters.

2.5. Jesus’ character and intentions were likewise attacked by those who were unsuccessful in attacking what He preached (Mat 11:19 “gluttonous man and a drunkard” [Notice they condemned JtB also- v18]; Joh 8:41 “fornication” = Implying that Jesus was a bastard child; See also v48).

2.6. It is for these reason that both Jesus and Paul were confident that those part of a genuine Jesus movement will experience hatred and persecution from others (including once more, those a part of the majority followers of God) (again, Mat 10:22; See also Joh 15:18-21; Act 14:22).

4. The church will possess real authority.

4.1. The fact that Acts speaks of those being baptized as receiving forgiveness of sins means there is real power in this sacrament. Another text that speaks of baptism as the place where we are forgiven - or our sins are washed away, is (Act 22:16).

4.2. Seeing that the church (or her elders) were the only ones able to carry out this powerful act (Act 8:12, 35-38 = Philip was an elder in the Jerusalem church [Act 6:1-6], 9:18 = Ananias was the elder at the church in Damascus, 10:46-48 = Peter as an apostle/elder of the Jerusalem church, 16:14-15, 31-33 = Paul was an apostle/elder in the church at Antioch) means that the church possessed real spiritual authority – the authority (or power) to “bind and loose”, just as Jesus had promised (Mat 16:17-19; Joh 20:21-23).

4.3. That those churches associated w/a genuine Jesus movement possess real spiritual authority is also supported by the church’s exclusive ability to: 1) determine who received this authority from the HS (Act 8:15-19, 14:23; Act 20:28) = Notice it mentions the HS [or His authority and power] in conjunction w/ the elders at Ephesus (“the HS made you overseers...to “guard...oversee [and] shepherd” the church), 2) to pronounce and secure divine judgment in relation to the disobedient in the church (Act 5:1-11) = Notice again, the mention of the HS w/respect to the elders. When Ananias and Sapphira lie to the elders, they are viewed as lying to the HS.

4.4. As a final note, it should be mentioned that Acts also indicates that false churches and their leaders – or those not part of a genuine Jesus movement, will not possess such authority – and as a result, not be able to keep the demons out of their covenant communities (Act 19:11-16 w/Mat 16:18-19).

CLOSING CONTEMPLATION: Many have claimed that their church is (or has been a part of) a genuine Jesus movement. If the present study’s findings are correct, how many churches truly are (or were)? What about us? Is what has been discussed today, what we see or have experienced in this church? If so, welcome to a genuine Jesus movement.