



The Park Church: Corporate Bible Study

BIBLE JOURNEY: ACTS OF THE APOSTLES– LESSONS 4&5

JAMES NICHOLS

Review: Looking Back, Moving Forward

▶ A Gospel for Jews and Gentiles

- Peter as the apostle for the Jews, Paul to the Greeks
- The Gospel is boldly preached in spite of resistance both from Jewish religious leaders and Roman government officials, spreading the message to all areas of Roman society.

The center of worship for the fledgling church would transition from the Synagogue, to house churches, to formal church buildings

▶ A Gospel of Restoration

- The gospel presentation is accompanied by miracles, signs, and wonders confirming the message in new areas and showing the power of the Holy Spirit
- The gospel is presented to those normally on the fringe of society, offering them full membership in the body of Christ and fellowship with the church

Acts 1: 1-14 (ESV)

¹ In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

⁴ And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

⁷ He said to them, **“It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”**

Acts 1: 1-14 cont.

⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away.

¹³ And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. ¹⁴ All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

The Start of the Apostolic Church

- ▶ Following Jesus' Ascension, His mission is handed to the 12 Apostles as leaders of the new church following the descent of the Holy Spirit, becoming the foundation of what we call the Apostolic Church, along with other witnesses and disciples of Jesus
- ▶ There was a vacancy among the Twelve was left after Judas betrayed Jesus, and The disciples in Acts 2 select Matthias. However, the Lord in Acts 8 chooses another Apostle—Saul of Tarsus. Saul then becomes the most prominent Apostle in the book of Acts, and we don't hear again of Matthias.
- ▶ Some of the twelve disciples selected in Luke 6:12-16 are not mentioned in Acts because Acts follows the geographic spread of Christianity—from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to Greece finally to Rome. According to tradition, many of the original disciples went to other regions of the world.

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Play Video(both):

In | The Church, Jesus' Family, the Twelve

In | The Authority of "Those Sent"

(Lesson 4)

The Continuity of the Gospel

Acts 1	Luke 24
Jesus teaches the disciples through the Spirit. (1:2)	Jesus teaches the disciples after the Resurrection. (24:25-27, 32, 44-48)
Jesus offers many proofs of his risen state. (1:3)	Jesus demonstrates his risen state. (24:13-32, 34, 36-40)
Jesus orders them not to leave Jerusalem. (1:4)	Jesus orders them to stay in Jerusalem. (24:49)
Jesus instructs them to wait for the Father's promise. (1:4)	They must stay in the city until they receive the Father's promise. (24:49)
Jesus promises the Spirit and that they will be witnesses. (1:8)	They are witnesses and will receive promised power. (24:48-49)
They will receive power. (1:8)	They will be clothed with power (24:49)
Jesus ascends. (1:9-11)	Jesus ascends. (24:51)
The disciples leave Mount Olivet for Jerusalem. (1:12)	The disciples leave Bethany (near Mount Olivet) and return to Jerusalem. (24:50, 52)
They pray in the upper room. (1:13-14)	They worship in the temple. (24:53)

Champions of the Church: Peter and Paul

- ▶ The Church in Acts was the continuation of Jesus' ministry—very literally the “body of Christ” in the world. These eyewitnesses and disciples patterned their ministry after Jesus. However, as the story of the church unfolds a greater amount of power, and therefore focus, is seen around two specific apostles, Peter and Paul (Saul of Tarsus)
- ▶ While there is evidence of conflict between the two Apostles (Galatians 2:11-14, 2 Peter 3:15-16), Acts emphasizes their shared mission in spreading the Gospel of Christ, Peter to the Jews and Paul to the Gentiles. Though they have many differences, Luke highlights many parallels between their ministries

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Play Video:
In | Jesus, Peter & Paul
(Lesson 4)

Expansion of the Early Church: Vertical and Horizontal

- ▶ In the Gospels, we're given the sense that Jesus is reaching out to every layer of society. He reaches out to Samaritans, women, the poor, tax collectors, the unclean—and even the demon-possessed who are forced to live outside the city. Christ reaching down to us and embracing all levels of humanity is often called His vertical ministry. He brings honor and freedom to those on the lower levels of society who were subjected to shame and alienation.
- ▶ The Apostles and other disciples take this ministry and expand its scope to the ends of the Roman Empire, eventually the world through us. We can think of their ministry in Acts, and beyond, as the horizontal expansion that spreads the vertical breakthrough of Jesus in the Gospels across the globe.

Growth via House Churches

- ▶ In common religion, including 2TJ, women often had minor supporting roles in ministry, if any. But the fact that most churches were at that time house churches would have given women a central role in these meetings and communities. Household dynamics would have been at the center of church dynamics. Church meetings and services would have been reliant on female leadership in a number of areas.
- ▶ Women would have typically handled hospitality, logistics and child care. There was no “children’s church,” and the meals were a focal point of gatherings. The management of these issues alone would have placed female responsibilities at the center of every gathering. But business women were also patrons of churches, and in some cases, they were the primary household figure who was associated with the church “in her home” (Col 4:15; Acts 12:12; 16:40).

The Necessity of Women in spreading the Gospel

- ▶ The churches in Acts resemble gatherings in the Gospels. There were men and women, Jews and Gentiles, gathering in homes to discuss what it meant to follow the Messiah.
- ▶ In the year 305 AD, Roman officials recorded their findings from a raid on a house church in the North African city of Cirta. This report of the Roman authorities suggests that early churches contained a disproportionate number of women, based on the apparel found. For women, there are 82 tunics and 47 pairs of shoes listed. For men, there are 16 tunics and 13 pairs of shoes.
- ▶ Women had little independence in Roman society, and Christian women especially could be pressured to abandon their faith by controlling husbands or masters. On the other hand, women were still the binding fabric of society—at the center of domestic life. Since domestic life was especially crucial to the life of the empire, women were effective evangelists in domestic settings. We know from surviving ancient texts that, “Christian women were able to enter households that were inaccessible to Christian men.”

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**Behind | Onsite: Lydia & a Jailer - First Converts in Europe
(Lesson 4)**

From Acts to Us: Prescriptive or Descriptive

- ▶ Descriptive: tells you how things **are**
- ▶ Prescriptive: tells you how something **should** be
- ▶ Since the practices of the Church described in Acts follow the direct leadership of Jesus' apostles and disciples, this issue is especially important. We have to decide what we should imitate and what we should simply acknowledge as an ancient Christian practice or event.
- ▶ There are many details about worship included in the book of Acts, and depending on cultural dynamics or doctrines, each church may closely imitate the Early Church or not

Your Turn

Practice	Prescriptive or Descriptive
Prayer	
Speaking in tongues	
Sharing all possessions	
Caring for widows	
Meeting in houses	
Going to Synagogues(Temples)	
Meeting by the river	
Fasting	

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**Play Video(both):
In Front | Acts: Descriptive or Prescriptive?
(Lesson 4)**

Who is Luke?

- ▶ Luke is almost universally considered to be the author of Acts, so many scholars refer to the two books together as a single work, by the name of “Luke-Acts.” One reason for this view is the common phrasing or terminology that is distinctive in comparison to other New Testament books. Luke and Acts both emphasize the guidance and baptism of the Holy Spirit, and the outward spread of God’s kingdom.
- ▶ Widely considered the most historically focused of the Gospel writers, this carries over into his account of the growth of the early church. One evidence of this When we talk about Christ followers, we probably use the term “Christian” to describe them, but Acts uses a number of other terms as well. “Christian” was less an official label than it was one label among many that early believers used to describe themselves.
- ▶ Similarly, Acts contains a large number of different titles for Jesus, reflecting the wide range of thought about how best to describe the risen savior to those they were evangelizing.

The Gospel in Acts

- ▶ There an unusual reference Paul makes to the Gospels in Acts. While speaking to elders from the church in Ephesus he says,

In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Acts 20:35

- ▶ The words of Jesus that Paul references are apparently well known by his audience, but don't appear in any of the four Gospels that we have today. Even Luke, the author of both Luke and Acts, doesn't include this quotation in his Gospel.
- ▶ Of course, not everything Jesus said or did was recorded in the relatively brief Gospel accounts, but examples like this, which directly quote Jesus' teaching from sources outside of the Gospels, are a reminder that the Bible doesn't include all of Jesus' teaching.
- ▶ The revelation of Jesus in history and in the Bible continues in Christians through the indwelling Spirit of God. We'll hear more about this from Paul in the letters to come.

Luke as a writer of History

▶ Luke's introduction to his gospel:

¹ Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, ² just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, ³ it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

⁵ In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

▶ Luke's foreword in Chapter 3:

¹ In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, ² during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³ And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

The Death of Herod Agrippa in Acts (Historicity)

► The Death of Herod Agrippa- Acts 12:19-24:

¹⁹ And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there.

²⁰ Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and they came to him with one accord, and having persuaded Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for peace, because their country depended on the king's country for food.

²¹ On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. ²² And the people were shouting, "The voice of a god, and not of a man!" ²³ Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.

²⁴ But the word of God increased and multiplied.

Now read Flavius Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 19, 343-350:

Now when Agrippa had reigned three years over all Judea, he came to the city Caesarea, which was formerly called Strato's Tower; and there he exhibited shows in honor of Caesar On the second day of which shows he put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a contexture truly wonderful, and came into the theater early in the morning; at which time the silver of his garment being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays upon it, shone out after a surprising manner, and was so resplendent as to spread a horror over those that looked intently upon him; and presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another from another, (though not for his good,) that he was a god; and they added, "Be thou merciful to us; for although we have hitherto revered thee only as a man, yet shall we henceforth own thee as superior to mortal nature." Upon this the king did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery A severe pain also arose in his belly, and began in a most violent manner. He therefore looked upon his friends, and said, "I, whom you call a god, am commanded presently to depart this life; while Providence thus reproves the lying words you just now said to me; and I, who was by you called immortal, am immediately to be hurried away by death. But I am bound to accept of what Providence allots, as it pleases God; for we have by no means lived ill, but in a splendid and happy manner." When he said this, his pain was become violent. Accordingly he was carried into the palace, and the rumor went abroad every where, that he would certainly die in a little time. But the multitude presently sat in sackcloth, with their wives and children, after the law of their country, and besought God for the king's recovery. All places were also full of mourning and lamentation. Now the king rested in a high chamber, and as he saw them below lying prostrate on the ground, he could not himself forbear weeping. And when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life, being in the fifty-fourth year of his age, and in the seventh year of his reign.

The Death of Herod Agrippa in Josephus (Historicity)

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Behind | Luke the Historian

Lesson 5

The Story is True

- ▶ The Apostles and early believers didn't share a rigid or formulaic message, nor elaborate and outlandish stories, but adapted the Gospel to their audiences and used language and types of rhetoric designed to resonate with the people in front of them. This combination of their Jewish heritage and the fervent belief of gentile converts led to the blending of cultures and the need to express the Gospel in new and innovative ways in the burgeoning Roman Empire. Christianity was for both the Jew and Gentile, and its method of spreading reflects this, using those not normally seen as valued in the common society and religion to spread the truth of Jesus and His salvation.
- ▶ Acts tells us the riveting story of the struggles and triumphs of the early church as it sought to establish the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth and spread the Gospel to all nations
- ▶ With this in mind, take some time to consider what it means to be "bicultural" today, in the culture(s) we live in.