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Acts of the Apostles



YOU SHALL BE WITNESSES

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Introduction to Acts of the Apostles

The book of Acts should come with a warning label that says: “If you are open to God, this book could change your life.”

Acts is an extraordinary work. In essence, it is the story of transformed lives – and the difference these lives made in the world.

Just before Acts begins, we see the disciples behind closed doors wallowing in the mud of their own fear, self-doubt and personal shame. Apart from their master, they were a pathetic group indeed (John 20:19; Luke 24:11). However, by the second chapter of Acts, the same men who abandoned Jesus at Gethsemane have become irrepressible dynamos, preaching with complete conviction – and at great personal risk to their own lives – “the mighty acts of God.”

Acts is an important book for us today because it confirms that the power that transformed the disciples’ lives is the same power that can transform our lives today! That is, of course, God himself – coming to us through the Holy Spirit.

There are many benefits in studying Acts:

- ☞ *Acts serves as a distant mirror.* We will see the dynamics of the earliest church, the nature of their fellowship, the intensity of their prayer life, and their sold-out zeal to declare the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. Through this example, our own situation will be called into question. What does it mean to be the church today – and what are we to be doing?
- ☞ *Acts emphasizes the primary task of the church – evangelization.* Speaking the gospel is only part of the task. It is the formative process that we see in these earliest communities. In Acts we see the entire process of calling, healing, empowering and sending people forth to love and obey Jesus Christ. Acts will challenge us to a holistic community spirituality that can renew our churches today.
- ☞ *Acts calls us to a vital experience with the Holy Spirit.* Jesus promised power to the disciples after the Holy Spirit came on them. And the book of Acts reveals the Holy Spirit as the driving force behind all meaningful ministry in Jesus’ name. Where do we look for spiritual power today? Education? Work? Religious heritage? Acts calls us to a Spirit-filled life.
- ☞ *Acts forges a new sense of identity.* The disciples gradually realized they were no longer Jews steeped in their traditions and rituals. They were slowly to understand that they were part of that new community of the Spirit that was prophesied in the Hebrew Scriptures. And they saw the need to call all people – Jews and Gentiles – to repentance and fellowship in this new community – the church. Baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and the Lord’s Supper became the outward signs of the inward grace. The emphasis is on relationships both with the Lord and with fellow believers.

Through these studies, the explosive power of this living document will touch you. As you work through these studies, may you experience the calling, healing, empowering and sending dynamic of the Holy Spirit.



I remember a friend telling me this once: “If I were dying, what I would most need is to have the confidence that all I believed about Jesus were true. I would want you to read the Bible to me, pray with me, and talk to me about Jesus and heaven.” This confidence is not only what you need most when you are dying, but also when you are alive.

During the days between Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, Jesus built the confidence of his disciples. he demonstrated and spoke the truth about himself. And then he left them with a clearly defined task and the promise of the power to carry out that task. As such, Luke was able to write with confidence to Theophilus about Jesus.

REFLECTION:

Think of someone you love. What sacrifices have you made to make that person happy?

DISCOVERY:

1. What did Luke, the author of Acts, report to Theophilus about Jesus’ last days on earth?
2. What makes this report believable?
 - a. How does the truthfulness of the report affect your faith in Jesus Christ?
3. What do you understand about the task that was given to the disciples in v8?



They aren’t the same men. Oh, I know they look like it. They have the same names. The same faces. The same mannerisms. They look the same. But they aren’t. On the surface they appear no different. Peter is still brazen. Nathanael is still reflective. Philip is still calculating.

They look the same. But they aren’t. They aren’t the same men you read about in the last four books. the fellows you got to know in the Gospels? These are the ones, but they’re different.

You’ll see it. As you read you’ll see it. In their eyes. You hear it in their voices. You feel it in their passion. These men have changed.

As you read you’ll wonder - are these the same guys? The ones who doubted in Galilee? The ones who argued in Capernaum? The ones who ran for their lives in Gethsemane? You’ll wonder, “Are these the same men?”

The answer is no. They are different. They have stood face to face with God. They have sat at the feet of the resurrected King. They are different.

Within them dwells a fire not found on earth. Christ has taught them. The Father has forgiven them. The Spirit indwells them. They are not the same.

And because they are different, so is the world.

Read about their adventures and be encouraged. Read about their adventures and be listening. What God did to them, he longs to do for you.

Max Lucado

4. If you were one of the disciples then, how would you feel to be the first to be given the task?
5. How do you think we would be equipped for this task?
6. As you look up to the sky after Jesus had left, how do you think you would be affected by the promise that he would return?
 - b. How are you affected by that promise today?
7. In Acts 1:12-26, how did the disciples respond to all that they had seen and heard?
8. Why was it important for them to be together?
 - c. How are you affected when you pray with other believers this way - especially as you consider your part in this task (v14)?
9. Peter became the leader of this group. He quoted the Old Testament. How do those words of David influence their confidence as well as give them direction?
 - d. How does this passage define your task, equip, motivate and give you confidence to complete the task?



For further discussion:

The Second Coming of Christ
This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven. (Acts 1:11)

The second coming of Christ is said to be mentioned 318 times in the 260 chapters of the New Testament, or once for every 25 verses. Paul preached much about Christ's return and frequently mentioned the subject in his epistles (e.g. 1 Thess. 4:18). This doctrine is not given the prominence in the church today that it received from Christ and the apostles.

Paul emphasized three great truths concerning Christ:

1. His death
2. His resurrection
3. His coming again

These are His past, His present, and His future work for man. As Christians we need to look up for His return, and we also need to proclaim this promised event.

I. The Fact of Christ's Coming

Why do we believe that Christ is literally coming again?

1. Jesus Himself said He would return (John 14:3)
2. The angels said He would (Acts 1:11), and they were not mistaken when they announced His first coming (Luke 1:30-33; Matt 1:20-22)
3. The Holy Spirit, by the apostles, repeatedly said He would (1 Thess 4:16; Heb 9:28; 10:37)
4. God, through the prophets in the Old Testament said He would (Zech 14:1; Mal 4:1-2)

II. The Manner of Christ Coming

Christ's coming will be:

1. personal, "the Lord himself" (1 Thess 4:16)
2. bodily, "this same Jesus...in like manner" (Acts 1:11). Jesus went away with a real body, flesh and bones (although somewhat different). He now sits at the right hand of God, ministering as our High Priest until the day when he will return for the church.
3. visibly, "every eye shall see him" (Rev 1:7; cf 1 John 3:2)
4. suddenly, "as...lightning" (Matt 24:27)
5. unexpectedly (Matt 24:37-39, 44; Rev 19:11-16)
6. triumphantly (2 Thess 1:7-10; Rev 19:11-16)

III. The Object of Christ's Coming

Christ will come in order:

1. to receive His own to Himself (1 Thess 4:16-17; 1 Cor 15:51-53)
2. to reward His servants (Matt 16:27; Luke 19:11-27;

1 Cor 9:25; 1 Thess 2:19; 2 Tim 4:8; 1 Peter 5:4; Rev 3:21)

3. to judge and reign (Rom 14:12; 1 Cor 3:13-15; 15:24-26; Matt 25:32, 46; 2 Thess 1:7-10; Jude 14-15; Zech 14)

IV The Time of His Coming

The exact time of Christ's coming is not revealed (Matt 24:36, 42; Mark 13:32; 1 Thess 5:1-2). It has been hidden from us, with divine purpose. This makes the command of daily faithfulness a real test. Are you ready for is coming?

Read and study these passages on your own or as a group.

1 Thessalonians 4:14

Matthew 6:10; revelation 22:20

2 Timothy 4:8

2 Timothy 4:1-2; Matthew 25:14-30; 28:18-20

Mark 13:35; Romans 8:19, 23; 1 Thessalonians 5:6;

Titus 2:13

1 Thessalonians 1:10; 2 Thessalonians 3:5

2 Peter 3:3-4

Philippians 3:20; 1 John 3:1-3

1 John 2:28

*As you conclude this study,
bring together these two
statements and ponder about
their urgency for us as
individuals and as a church.*

**This Jesus ... will come
back.
You will be witnesses for me.**

Sources:

Irving Jensen, **Acts - A Self-study Guide.**

Phyllis J. Le Peau, **Acts.**

Max Lucado. **Life Lessons with Max Lucado: Book of Acts.**