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Acts

Textbook:

The Book of Acts

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The Promise of Jesus

Some non-Pentecostals feel uncomfortable with the attention given by Pentecostals to the Book of Acts. But if you master the background study of Acts as well as the opening ties with the Gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry, you can help overcome this hesitation to accept the Pentecostal content of the Book of Acts.

The ties with Gospels and the earthly ministry of Jesus are of importance. No Christian has any reservations about the first book written by Luke. As the author of the third Gospel, Luke is respected as a qualified historian and interpreter of the things he observed. This same careful precision is characteristic of the Book of Acts. We can place the same confidence in Luke's account of the Day of Pentecost and subsequent Holy Spirit in fillings as we put in the account of the shepherds in the fields at the birth of Christ or the presence of the Father and the Holy Spirit at the water baptism of Jesus.

Notice also the relationship between the last verses of the Book of Luke and the first verses of the Book of Acts. Turn to Luke 24 and read the last eight verses of the book (46-53). Then turn to Acts 1, keeping your finger in the Luke passage so that you can make quick comparisons. Note particularly the similarity of Acts 1:4 and Luke 24:49. The significance of the announcement or prophecy of Jesus cannot be minimized. The Holy Spirit is the promise, and the Book of Acts records the fulfillment of that promise. The acts of the apostles are really the acts of the Holy Spirit through the apostles.

Like many Christians today, however, the disciples heard in the announced promise of the Father what they had been wanting to hear, not what Jesus was actually saying to them. So they asked a question about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel: Was that what Jesus was referring to? But we are richer because the disciples asked that misguided question. In setting their thinking straight, Jesus gave to those disciples--and by extension to all who would receive the Promise in the future--an exciting declaration. The times are in the hands of the Father, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you"

There has been some discussion about the action of the early disciples in choosing Matthias to replace the fallen and deceased Judas. It is interesting to speculate from the very effective ministry of Paul that God intended him to be the 12th disciple. But that interpretation casts an aspersion on the biblical account when God's Word itself makes no suggestion. We are safer in assuming that these persons who were about to be filled with the Spirit and were already enjoying a spirit of unity did have the mind of God.

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Introduction

To study the Book of Acts is to relive some of the most exciting days in the history of the Church. So vivid is the biblical description that it takes little imagination for the student to become a part of the group in the Upper Room, part of the multitude listening to Peter on the Day of Pentecost, or a member of Saul's company at his conversion experience on the road to Damascus. The inspiration and challenge that burn in the pages of this New Testament book have special meaning for the Pentecostal Christian.

"The Acts of the Apostles" is a title which describes the nature of the book. But the 28 chapters are not a complete history of all the experiences of the apostles in the Early Church. The book records primarily the "acts" of two of the apostles (Peter and Paul), although it certainly omits many experiences that these two great men had. The word acts was commonly used in the first and second centuries for what we today might call "biographies" or "memoirs." It was, and still is, customary to select highlights and representative incidents for inclusion in such works.

Yet as the textbook suggests, the title might better be "The Acts of the Holy Spirit" or "The Acts of the Risen Lord by the Holy Spirit in and Through the Church." Whether the title emphasizes the human channel which is used by the Spirit or the fact that God himself was the prime Mover in the beginning of the Church, the basic meaning is clear: The Spirit anoints human vessels to accomplish the great work of reaching the world with the gospel.

How would the impact to the New Testament differ if the Book of Acts were missing from the canon? All Scripture is profitable, but it seems that the Book of Acts has something special about it--especially for Pentecostals. The content of this book has greatly influenced the development and doctrine of the Church. It is the bridge between two distinct ages: the ministry of Christ on earth (recorded in the Gospels) and the ministry of the Holy Spirit (given doctrinal statement in the Epistles). Without the Book of Acts, there would be a large gap between two important segments of Scripture. The Book of Acts is indeed the link between the fantastic early ministry of Jesus and the exciting move of the Spirit in the early ministry of Jesus and the exciting move of the Spirit in the early days and in these final days of the Church age.

Objectives

The purpose of this course is to lead the student to a mastery of the content of the Book of Acts so that he will understand the early historical development of the Church and appropriate for his own life the unlimited power and impetus for holy living available today through the work of the Holy Spirit. It will also call attention to the lives of some of the great apostles and evangelists who played such an important role in the early days of the Church. From their lives we can draw applications and examples after which to pattern our own lives.

After you have mastered the material treated in the textbook and this study guide, you should achieve the following competencies.

1. Discuss the important background facts about the Book of Acts: Authorship, date, purpose of the book, etc.
2. Describe and explain the significance of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.
3. Show how the experience on the Day of Pentecost was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.
4. Demonstrate how the Early Church grew through the miracles performed by the Holy Spirit in the ministry of the apostles.
5. Describe the Spirit-led response of the early apostles to intense persecution.
6. Give an example of how discipline operated in the Early Church.
7. Explain the development of organization and administration in the early Church.
8. Describe the expansion of the Church to include the Gentiles.
9. Trace the conversion and developing ministry of Paul, one of the greatest early spokesmen for the spread of the gospel.
10. Follow on a Bible lands map the travels of Paul on his three missionary journeys.
11. Discuss the details of Paul's arrest, trials, and trip to Rome.

The Founding of the Church

Many volumes have been written telling the story of the Church down to the present day. But the Book of Acts is volume 1 of these many volumes. Unit 1, consisting of five lessons, takes us back to the very beginning: the founding of the Church.

While the Book of Acts brings before us the picture of early Christianity as a pattern to be followed even today, the picture it presents is clearly not a golden age of unblemished perfection. The men who walked through the pages of Acts were of like passions with us. They were not above personal quarrels or party controversies. But these disagreements and personal flaws are not presented in the Book of Acts to justify similar attitudes and actions in Christians today. Instead, they seem to be included, in the divine foreknowledge of God, so that we might know that disagreements among Christians should end in friendly compromise, each party making concessions rather than stubbornly insisting that logic proves a particular position to be correct.

Keep in the back of your mind, the thrilling story of rapid growth of the Early Church. This expansion took place (in spite of disagreements and even sin that had to be judged) because dedicated men and women saw beyond their personal ambitions and desires and were willing to make any sacrifice in order that the Kingdom of God might go forward. And go forward it did! The same principle holds true today. Though leaders may make honest errors of judgment, though some laypersons (or even leaders) may succumb to the temptations of greed and power, though some may even lack human wisdom or experience one would think necessary, the Church will still go forward if its members are motivated by Christian love and humility.

The Church Begins at Pentecost

The term Pentecost means something quite different to us today than it did to an Old Testament Jew. In the Christian church today, it immediately calls up pictures of early Christians praising God and speaking in tongues in the presence of holy wind and fire. But that was not the original meaning of the word Pentecost. The event that took place on that day has come to be the meaning of the word.

Why was the Spirit outpoured on the Day of Pentecost? Was it just coincidence? Could it just as well have been another feast day on the Jewish calendar, in which case we might today be referring to ourselves as Tabernaclists, Passoverists, or First Fruitists (after the Feast of Tabernacles, the Passover, or the Feast of First Fruits). Such labels are too humorous to be true, but such speculation does point out that the events that come to our minds at the mention of the Day of Pentecost take their identification from the fact that they happened on an already established national feast day.

On the other hand, the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost has more significance than mere coincidence. Of all the feasts of the Jewish year, Pentecost attracted the largest number of pilgrims from distant lands. There was no other occasion on which the gift of the Spirit was likely to produce more direct and immediate results. Furthermore, the "50th day" feast carried a symbolism for the people at that time that looked ahead to the Pentecostal experience. This was the Feast of Harvest, and the work of the Holy Spirit in reaping a great harvest of souls was just beginning.

Finally, Pentecost had a commemorative character. The Jews remembered with thanksgiving God's great work in the religious history of Israel. Some assumed that the Law was given at Sinai at approximately this date on the annual Jewish calendar. God chose this special day for another epoch-making event: the beginning of the Church. It seems very appropriate that the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit first came on the Day of Pentecost and that we today are known as Pentecostals.

It is important to understand the sign or proof of the initial infilling of the Spirit so that you can answer the questions of any doubters concerning the importance of speaking in tongues as the initial physical evidence of the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Pay particularly close attention to the passages in Acts (beginning with Acts 2) that describe an initial infilling experience.

Miraculous Healing, Persecution

Let's put the miraculous healing of Acts 3 in proper perspective. Jesus had just concluded 3 years of spectacular ministry. Blind eyes had been opened, the lame had been made to walk, and demon possessed people had been supernaturally delivered. Certainly the entire region should have been buzzing with the reports--and the reality--of healings and miracles.

We would hardly have been surprised if the miracle of Peter and John had gone unnoticed. But that was not the case. Some people evidently had not been touched by the direct, personal ministry of Jesus, even though it had affected multitudes. On the other hand, there is another principle to be observed in the development of a new spiritual ministry. People come to expect the miraculous from a proven miracle worker--such as Jesus. His miracles proved that He had special divine powers. But here were two common men who had not yet gained a reputation of being miracle workers. The miracle performed through them created quite a stir.

Isn't that the way it often is in the church world today? People flock to hear those whose ministry has already been substantiated by signs and miracles. They may even expect or feel greater faith just by seeing the "miracle worker" in person. But when a new or untried ministry of miracles begins to develop in an individual, there is surprise and even amazement. "He is just a common, ordinary person, like me. He couldn't be used to perform a miracle." Every young minister faces this surprise (we might even call it doubt) from others as he begins to open his life to the unhindered flow of the Holy Spirit.

As you are studying this course, you can probably identify more readily with the novices Peter and John than with the accomplished miracle worker Jesus. But just remember--it is the Holy Spirit who does the work, not the experience of the servant. A more experienced spiritual leader may have learned how to yield consistently to the Spirit, but the opportunity is available to all. As you confront human need and are sensitive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit in meeting that need, you can be used as a channel for the powerful flow of the Spirit.

Pay particular attention to Peter's second sermon which immediately followed the miracle. The first question he asked of the crowd was, "Why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?" Peter resisted one of the first temptations that confronts the person who is used miraculously by God. If Peter had allowed the attention and glory to come to himself, he might never have seen the further development of this new ministry. Immediately, however, he was called to face the test of persecution (Acts 4).

Discipline and More Persecution

Discipline is frightening or reassuring, depending on the perspective from which it is viewed. The purpose of the discipline described in Acts 5 was to maintain a holy church. Though the handing down of discipline is distasteful to the discipliner as well as to the disciplined, when done in the proper Christian spirit it results in a stronger and more effective organization. The death of Ananias and Sapphira was certainly a stern warning to any men=members of the Early Church who might have been a reassuring sign to the sincerely honest and dedicated members that they were part of a holy and pure fellowship. A Christian could give himself without reservation to such a group of believers.

But consider for a moment the high price of being assured a holy fellowship of believers. Does the motivation that pushed Ananias and Sapphira to their wicked deed have any counterpart in the church today? The reputation gained by those who sold their estates must have been very great, so it is not surprising that ambition for honor should in some cases overpower the fear of being discovered in the deception. But any increase in the number of professed Christians of dishonest character would have disgraced, and possibly even destroyed, the growth and effective ministry of the young Church. Infection spreads all too quickly. It was therefore important to check such evil in the opening days of the Early Church.

The instructional value of such discipline cannot be overlooked. There had been a similar discipline that ended in death for many in the early days of the dispensation of Law. There was also discipline after the sin of Achan (Joshua 7) shortly after the Israelites had entered into the Promised Land. We should not become reckless in thinking that such discipline and judgment cannot happen today. God's judgment may be more visible and dramatic at crucial times in His dealings with men, but judgment is promised for all evil and disobedience to God. When that fact is remembered, the pain of discipline seems preferable to the judgment of utter desolation.

Notice what follows the cleansing of the Early Church. First, there was growth. Multitudes were added "to the Lord" (5:14) and the sick were healed (5:16). Those results of the cleansing were to be expected. But what about the next result? The growth and the miracles caused indignation among the Sadducees, and the apostles were arrested. So persecution is indirectly linked with the discipline that cleansed the Church. Cleansing brings growth, and growth through the move of the Spirit brings persecution. But when the persecution is for Jesus' sake, God many times provides a means of assistance.

The First Martyr

Growth continued to bring problems to the young Church. Persecution came from outside as opponents became angered at the success of the new group. They began to lose some of their followers to the message the apostles were preaching. but there were also internal problems.

Unity was a distinguishing feature of the Early Church. but unity did not guarantee that there would be no problems. Fortunately, where there is unity, problems are fewer and the ones that do arise are solved quickly if the spirit of unity prevails in the search for a solution. The problem that the young Church now faced was the inability of the first leaders to minister effectively to the many individuals and special needs that came with increased membership. The widows, especially the Greek-speaking widows, were being neglected. Their physical and material needs were very great.

You can almost see the full details of the problem unfolding. The Greek-speaking Jews might have complained against the Hebrew-speaking Jews and the apostles. The leaders might have ignored their complaints, because they were too busy with more important things, saying, "That's your problem; you'll have to solve it yourselves." And then the "Greeks" might have pulled out and started their own church. Fortunately, however, this was not to be the time for the first church split. There was still a spirit of unity and everyone wanted desperately to preserve that unity. If the self-centered greed observed in Ananias and Sapphira had continued the Early Church through this crisis would have been impossible.

Out of the solution to this problem comes one of the most thrilling stories of heroism in the Early Church. One of the laymen selected to help the apostles with some of the operations of the church was Stephen. Although he was not ranked with the apostles in the spiritual ministry of the Early Church, his faithfulness and martyrdom were certainly what one would expect from a full-fledged apostle. His steadfast stand before evil opposition gave him a prominent position in heaven's hall of fame.

Men who are about to be executed are sometimes given an opportunity to make a last request or say some final words. Stephen's final words were a sermon. What would you say as your final words before being put to death?

The Early Growth of the Church

Unit 1 dealt with the founding of the Church; all of the activity took place in the city of Jerusalem. but Jesus had promised that after the Holy Spirit had come and endued them with power, these early Christians would be witnesses not only in Jerusalem, but in Judea in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). The second stage of the prediction was now ready for fulfillment. Along with growth comes outreach.

Unit 2 covers chapters 8 through 18 of Acts. New names are added to the list of heroes who were used by the Holy Spirit to lead the handful of believers (whose testimony touched only a few) to become an extended body whose members carried the gospel to the uttermost parts of the then-known world.

Philip took the gospel to Samaria (Acts 8). Then in Acts 9 one of the most exciting conversions of the Early Church demonstrated that the growth of this Spirit-led body of believers could not be stopped. Persecution, we have seen, caused the Early Church to grow. But the irony is that some of its greatest growth came after the conversion of its greatest persecutor, Saul. God not only helps us to succeed and grow in spite of persecution, but as the Psalmist said, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee" (Psalm 76:10). Saul's wrath was transformed into a life of praise and dedication to the One he had worked so hard to destroy. Through Paul, the gospel was now taken to the Gentiles. The experiences of Paul on his first and second missionary journeys are some of the most thrilling in the entire Bible.

As you study the lessons , you should achieve the following competencies.

1. Show how the ministry of Philip, like that of many early believers, represents the New Testament pattern in which every believer became an evangelist or witness.
2. Describe the precise timing of the Holy Spirit in bringing Philip to minister to the Ethiopian eunuch.
3. Explain how Saul's conversion experience is one of the best examples of the power of the Holy Spirit in changing the lives of sinful men.
4. Describe how the Holy Spirit delivered Peter from prejudice and national pride by leading him to witness to the Gentile household of Cornelius.
5. Show how the Holy Spirit leads Spirit-filled believers to expand their horizons and embrace all that God is seeking to do in the world.
6. Explain why God sometimes chooses some servants, such as Stephen and James, for martyrdom, but delivers others, such as Peter, Paul, and Silas, in spectacular fashion.
7. Trace the travels and ministry of Paul on his first and second missionary journeys.

The Ministry of Philip

The Philip who is the focus of Acts 8 is not the apostle named Philip, but one of the seven men chosen in chapter 6. He has come to be distinguished from Philip the apostle by calling him Philip the evangelist (Acts 21:8). No other person in the New Testament is referred to by that title. Philip, of course, was not the only evangelist. The office of evangelist is included in Ephesians 4:11 along with apostles, prophets, pastors, and teachers.

But in a very real sense, all believers in the Early Church became evangelists. "They were scattered abroad" (8:1) and "they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word" (8:4). An evangelist is one who evangelizes or preaches the gospel.

We should also note that the man who became known as "the evangelist" was also a layman. Philip's example, however, is not an encouragement to look down on ministerial recognition, but rather a challenge to every believer to use every ability and opportunity to witness faithfully for Christ. When a person moves under the direction of the Holy Spirit the labels of minister and layman become meaningless. Every believer can and should minister to and for the Lord.

Acts 8 is the first chapter after Acts 2 in which mention is made of believers "receiving the Holy Ghost" (8:17). So you should now and another entry to your comparison chart begun in lesson 2. Are any evidences mentioned in this chapter as being observed at the time of Holy Spirit baptism?

The account of Simon the sorcerer is very important in answering this question. No specific mention of speaking in tongues or any other evidence is found in the chapter. But Simon the sorcerer or magician saw something at the laying on of the apostles' hands that made him offer money for the power. A sorcerer maintained his prestige by performing dramatic and visible acts. Speaking in tongues would have been a highly desirable sign for a magician to bring about at will. Of course, the other signs would also have had some effect on Simon's hoodwinked followers, but hardly more than the sign of speaking in tongues.

We conclude from this passage that there was a sign, even though it is not mentioned specifically. As we compare this passage with the other four in Acts, when believers are said to have received the Holy Spirit, we find that speaking in tongues is the only sign of those mentioned on the Day of Pentecost that is repeated.

The account of Philip's ministry to the Ethiopian eunuch has been the basis for many an anointed evangelistic sermon. Can you construct a three-or four-point outline that you could use either as a sermon or as a vehicle for personal witnessing? Your study of Acts should prepare you to be a more effective evangelist or witness.

The Conversion of Saul

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus had great significance to the Early Church and its development down through the centuries. It has also influenced the spiritual life of Christians even today. The importance of this event to the Early Church is seen in the fact that it is reported three times in the Book of Acts: here in its initial account, as told by Paul to a mob of Jews (Acts 22), and again as Paul stood before Agrippa (Acts 26).

The story of Paul's conversion explains the intensely motivated career of Paul. If there had not been such a dramatic initiation into the Christian life, we might be inclined to call Paul's single-minded passion to spread the gospel pure fanaticism. At the time of his conversion, Paul was in the full maturity of his abilities, had a favorable reputation in Jerusalem, and held a position of wide influence. There have been some almost unbelievable conversions in the 20th century (sports figures, entertainers, political activists, etc.), but none of them has had a dramatic impact like Paul's conversion had on the Early Church. The role that Ananias played in the conversion is a strong encouragement to every person who seeks to be a faithful witness for Christ. Even an obscure disciple may influence generations and nations through a faithful witness to a divinely called servant.

Acts 9 contains the third reference to receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit. As you study this lesson, fill in an additional line of your chart begun in lesson 2. Verses 17 and 18 are the pivotal verses. Again, we find no sign mentioned at the time Paul is "filled with the Holy Ghost" (v. 17). Read Dr. Horton's explanation of this passage very closely. There is no question as to whether or not Paul ever spoke in tongues. He later told the Corinthians that he spoke in tongues ore that all of them (1 Corinthians 14:18). Is it not logical to believe that Paul first spoke in tongues at the time he was filled with the Spirit?

How should a church accept the profession of faith from a previously staunch opponent of the Christian walk? Should the local church today open its arms immediatly to everything a converted convoke, sports figure, or reformed addict claims? The Early Church, with all of its unity and access to the supernatural gifts (such as discernment), was suspicious that Saul was making his confession as an impostor or spy. We certainly should be cautious today as well, but if the experience is genuine, it will not take long to demonstrate that the change is a divine work.

Paul's confession of faith was spectacular. It surprised his former associates as well as the Christians with whom he chose to be identified. When the unbelieving Jews tried to kill Paul, the evidence of change was obvious.

The Gospel Taken to Gentiles

Beginning with the final verses of Acts 9, the focus shifts from Paul back to Peter. The healing of Aeneas and the raising of Dorcas from the dead are exciting miracles which called further attention to the dynamic power of the gospel and helped spread the influence of the early Christians.

Paul is known as the apostle to the Gentiles. But it should be noted that the first recorded outreach by the Early Church to Gentiles involved Peter, not Paul. In the order and timing of God, the entire Church had to be prepared so that the outreach ministry of Paul would be more effective through the support and good will of the Jewish Christians. It took an indisputable miracle to persuade the Early Church that Jesus really meant that they should take the gospel "to the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Chapters 10 and 11 of Acts are treated as a single unit in this lesson. In chapter 10 we see the shifting scenes of divine drama as both Peter and Cornelius are prepared for a desegregation experience. Peter becomes a believer in the fact that the gospel and Holy Spirit baptism are intended for Gentiles as well as for Jews. But can't you imagine Peter's feeling and fears after his experience with Cornelius but prior to his sharing it with his Jewish brethren? "How will they ever believe me? They see things just the way I did before I saw the miracle with my own eyes." It took a man of strong persuasive powers and a special anointing of the Spirit to modify minds that had been so permanently fixed on what they thought was truth. Yet the Holy Spirit is faithful to guide into all truth those who are sincerely open to His leading.

Acts 10 contains the fourth reference to one or more persons receiving the Holy Spirit. As you fill out your chart on the five passages of Acts, you will note that this account is one of three that *does* mention speaking in tongues specifically. One might speculate as to why reference to the sign was omitted in the other two, since the question of the initial physical evidence of the Baptism in the Spirit is controversial for some evangelicals. But we must remember that what is controversial today might not have been controversial at the time that the Holy Spirit was being poured out in such a dramatically new way.

Luke was not writing to persuade opponents of speaking in tongues that the phenomenon *did* actually occur each time. The happening was no doubt so commonplace that there was no need to mention it on each occasion. Luke's readers naturally accepted the fact of speaking in tongues whenever Luke mentioned that believers received the Holy Ghost. Your chart will help demonstrate this conclusion.

Peter's Deliverance

This lesson on the deliverance of Peter from prison actually relates rather closely with the account in the previous lesson in which the Holy Spirit was given to Gentile believers. Of course, Peter is the main character in both incidents. But more than that, we are observing a definite transition in the development of the Early Church as recorded in the Book of Acts. Because of the experience of Cornelius at Caesarea, the early Christians knew that the gospel and the infilling of the Holy Spirit was for Gentiles as well as for Jews. But one more step remained before the great shift to the Gentiles would be complete: the rejection of the gospel by the Jews.

The persecution that took place under Herod confirmed the fact that the Jews as a people wanted nothing to do with Jesus Christ and His disciples. Herod first killed James. Although he no doubt had the authority and power to take the life of James, it was the encouragement of the Jews that gave him the incentive to continue his persecution to the Christians. Very little value would have come to Herod directly because of the death of James, or even of Peter, except that such actions "pleased the Jews." A power-hungry despot is always looking for ways to solidify his authority. Doing little things to please his subjects would permit him to have his own way in matters of greater concern to him personally.

The Jews by now had a rabid hatred for the Christians. Whereas the Christians were willing to die for their convictions, the hateful Jews were willing to kill (and let Herod kill) in order to achieve their selfish desires. God's timing is always perfect. Just as the opposition of the Jews reached the point of complete rejection, the opportunity and the ready acceptance to be found among the Gentiles was becoming a reality.

Why God chooses to deliver some of His servants from persecution and allows others to become martyrs may never be known in this life. But the very fact of divine intervention in Peter's deliverance was a clear declaration that even though a secular power may persecute, and even though Christians may be forced to suffer, no government can destroy the Church of Jesus Christ.

Were people any different in New Testament days from what they are today? The believers prayed earnestly for Peter's deliverance, but when Peter appeared free and without any injury, they did not believe it. Does their belief that he was a disembodied spirit show any degree of faith?

This divine deliverance may have been in response to intense intercession for Peter, but it hardly seems to have been in response to overwhelming faith that God would really deliver Peter. Can we learn a lesson from that?

Paul's First Missionary Journey

Beginning with this lesson, between two and six chapters of Acts will be covered in each remaining lesson. This increased study content is appropriate because of the nature of the material in the last 16 chapters of the Book of Acts. Whereas in the earlier portions there is great variety in subject matter and biographical focus, the remaining material focuses almost exclusively on Paul's ministry. In some ways, the preceding material has been setting the stage for the very dramatic ministry of Paul among the Gentiles.

Your study of the remaining portions of Acts should take a twofold approach. First, you should trace on a Bible lands map the locations where Paul ministered. The maps at the end of the textbook should be sufficient for this purpose. Then, within the general framework of Paul's movement from one location to another, you should study the events that transpired at each city with a view to gleaning applications that can be used in your personal life and/or ministry.

We are first introduced to the team appointed by the Holy Spirit: Barnabas and Paul. We were originally introduced to Barnabas and his individual ministry in Acts 11. It would be of value to turn back and reread Acts 11:22-26. What a testimony this man had! The Word of God speaks of him as "a good man...full of the Holy Ghost and of faith" (Acts 11:24). As a result of what Barnabas was, "much people was added unto the Lord." What a refreshing adjustment to the commonly held view! Barnabas' success in the ministry was not from what he was: a righteous man, filled with the Spirit, and full of faith. There is a lesson to be learned here by the Christian who wants to be used of God in bringing people into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. We must be before there can be any lasting result from what we do.

Notice the role of the Holy Spirit in putting this gospel team together. By a supernatural word of prophecy, the Spirit tells the gathered congregation that He has called Paul and Barnabas. Luke sums it up by saying that they were "sent forth by the Holy Ghost." How could there be anything but outstanding success with a send-off like that?

After we trace the ministry of Paul and Barnabas through Cyprus, Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, we find the team returning to Jerusalem to answer to Church leaders concerning their ministry among the Gentiles. They had not been requiring converts to keep the law of Moses. The explanation given by Paul and Barnabas, supported by the obvious approval of the Holy Spirit on their ministry, caused the Jerusalem Conference to give their approval to the liberty that Paul and Barnabas were preaching as part of the gospel. Once again, miracles and signs had been used by the Holy Spirit to confirm the validity of the message.

The Second Missionary Journey

The original intention of Paul's second missionary journey was to visit the churches he had established on the first journey. But God had other plans. There were still new areas to be reached with the gospel. According to Acts 16:6, Paul and Silas (Paul's new companion on the second journey) were forbidden by the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia. And yet most of the first-journey ministry had been in Asia. Through the well-known Macedonian vision, Paul was called by the Holy Spirit to sail to what is now known as Europe and begin establishing churches in various cities there. Paul was sufficiently sensitive to the Spirit that this change in his own plans caused him no difficulty. As long as he knew he was ministering where God wanted him to minister, he was content.

The second missionary journey was filled with memorable accounts of miracle after miracle. In your study notebook, list the various miracles and the location of each.

As you study the names of the cities to which Paul traveled, you will recognize the names of familiar New Testament epistles. There was a rich ministry at Philippi. Later Paul wrote a letter of encouragement to the church that was established there. Then came ministry at Thessalonica. The converts in this city were later addressed in the epistles to the Thessalonians. After brief stops at Berea and Athens, Paul and Silas came to Corinth. The Corinthian epistles were later sent to the church in this Greek city. In your future study of the epistles you should compare the content of each epistle with the events that happened in the appropriate city as Paul ministered there. You will also note other relationships with the Book of Acts. It was at Lystra, on the second missionary journey, that Paul met Timothy who became his understudy in the Christian ministry. The books of 1 and 2 Timothy grew out of this meeting.

The Finale of Paul's Ministry

What can the servant of God expect as he approaches retirement years? Should there be a time of leisure, a time to do all those personal things that had to be set aside because of the press of the Lord's work?

As a man's strength wanes in later years, God certainly does not expect the same physical pace that a younger body was able to maintain. But for one who has been in the thick of the battle, there is no retirement from the conflict. The task may change because strength and circumstances change, but the heart of the soldier remains firmly committed to the fight.

Some older Christians might be tempted to say, "I have fought a good fight; let someone else take up the fight now. I'm entitled to some time for myself." But Paul was not a quitter. The only thing that could stop the burning passion of his heart was death. And as he approached that time, he proclaimed triumphantly, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7).

Unit 3 begins with Paul still very active in his missionary ministry. But external circumstances of arrest and imprisonment **changed** the nature of his ministry greatly. Yet Paul was not stopped. He took up the pen, and his new ministry was every bit as effective as his previous ministry. And when he was not reaching out to new converts or sinners, he was interceding in behalf of the faithful colaborers with whom he had worked. There is always something to be done for the Kingdom, no matter where the soldier is or what his circumstances are.

As you study the three lessons of unit 3 (pp. 220-293), you should achieve the following competencies.

1. Summarize the last instance in Acts of believers receiving the Holy Spirit.
2. Review the first four Pentecost passages and make a biblically based statement for speaking in tongues as the initial physical evidence of the Spirit baptism.
3. Describe the important ministry of Paul to the Ephesians.
4. Correlate the warning of the Holy Spirit that Paul should not go to Jerusalem with Paul's insistence on going there.
5. Show the extent to which God was with Paul even during his times of greatest trial and difficulty.
6. Describe Paul's great defenses before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa.
7. Summarize Paul's very eventful trip to Rome for the purpose of standing before Caesar.
8. Describe the arrival of Paul in Rome, his ministry while incarcerated, and his continuing interest in the progress of the gospel throughout the world.

The Third Missionary Journey

As Dr. Horton points out in the textbook, Acts 19 begins with a very pivotal question: "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" It takes a great deal of interpretative juggling to make this question fit the common non-Pentecostal view that a person is filled with the Holy Spirit at the time of conversion. But some people make the attempt.

At this point in your study, you should complete your chart on the five instances in Acts when believers received the gift of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 8 and 9 we had to use deduction to show that the Samaritans and Paul must have spoken in tongues when they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2 and 10, the sign is mentioned specifically. And the same can be said for the instance in Acts 19, with the added clarification of a distinction between the experience of conversion and the experience of receiving the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues.

You will notice that those who received the Holy Spirit at Ephesus prophesied as well as spoke in tongues. We do not, however, consider prophecy as the initial physical evidence, because it is not observed in or easily deduced from the other four passages. It does call to our attention though, that there may be additional manifestations, other than speaking in tongues, when a Christian receives the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Your completed chart on Acts 2,8,9,10,19 should be of real value to you in the future in explaining the Pentecostal position.

Paul seemed to cause a stir wherever his ministry led him. Sometimes the stir became an uproar or a riot. Some Christians who have difficulty in getting along with others use this fact as justification or explanation as to why they always seem to be at odds with others Christians. But it should be noted that Paul always preached and practiced unity and peace with his brethren. Only those who rejected Christ fell into a frenzy over Paul's preaching. Study the account of the uproar of the silversmiths at Ephesus to see how Paul conducted himself as a representative of Christ in the midst of conflict.

How does a Christian say good-bye? Farewells are particularly difficult when the Christian bond has become stronger than a blood bond. Paul considered those he had won to Christ as his spiritual children.

Paul's departure from the Ephesian elders is touching. Paul knew they would never see each other again. But rather than a time of hand-wringing and self-pity, it was a time of instruction and encouragement to continue in the faith. There were tears, but they were tears of appreciation and love. Paul had certainly not caused conflict and dissension among these brethren. They loved him.

Growing Opposition, Arrest, Trial

Some Bible students have concluded that Paul disobeyed the Spirit, suddenly persisting in going to Jerusalem to face needless peril and loss of liberty. And this seems on the surface to be a logical conclusion. Acts 21:4 speaks of disciples "who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem." One edition of the King James Version inserts the heading before verse 4, "The Holy Spirit forbids Paul to go to Jerusalem."

Dr. Horton's explanation of this apparent discrepancy is excellent. Study it closely on pages 243 and 244. Paul knew of the peril that awaited him in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit had made that clear when He gave Paul directions to go to Jerusalem. And the Holy Spirit does not contradict himself. When we understand that the translation "through" can also be "in consequence of," we see that the Spirit was preparing Paul and the brethren, just as Jesus had earlier prepared the disciples, for coming hardship and persecution. But telling one that persecution or even imprisonment is coming is not the same as telling him to flee from the trials. What greater strength can be drawn during the time of difficulty than to be reminded that God knows just what you are going through, and having told you about it, He promises to be with you throughout the entire ordeal? The record of Paul's arrest and imprisonment, and the faithfulness and miraculous help of God through it all, proved that Paul was right in clinging to his Spirit-prompted plan to go to Jerusalem.

The remaining chapters of Acts are concerned with the experiences of Paul as a prisoner of the Roman authorities. It is estimated that 5 years passed between the time of his arrest in Jerusalem and his release in Rome. The impetus for the original arrest, however, was the angry Jewish mob. But in the plan of God, as the representatives of the Roman government interrogated Paul and sought to determine the propriety of the mob's claims and demands, one thing led to another, and Paul was on his way to Rome to answer to Caesar for causing disruption. Some have felt that if Paul had not appealed to Caesar to save his life from the mob, he might have been freed to continue his ministry. But each of these circumstances was in the hand of God, and Paul had already announced, "After I have been (to Jerusalem), I must also see Rome" (Acts 19:21). So rather than attributing Paul's statement which sent him on to Rome as a mistake, we should view it as directed of the Holy Spirit for the accomplishment of divine purposes.

By this stage in his life, Paul had become the great apologist of the Christian Church. He had learned to rely on the prompting and direction of the Holy Spirit. The example of this man of God for all to follow is inspiring.

The Trip to Rome

No story of the sea is more fascination or more widely known than the account of the shipwreck suffered by Paul and his fellow travelers on the way to Rome. Luke was one of Paul's companions on the trip, as evidenced by the use of "we" and "us" throughout the account. The fact that the writer actually experienced the perilous adventure no doubt account for the graphic detail and drama. Luke was a historian of the first rank.

Although a shipwreck is not an occurrence experienced by many people, there are applications to be made from Paul's encounter with the elements. We all must pass through times of storm and peril (figuratively if not literally); yet we have been assured the presence, power, and protection of our Lord. We can be certain that through all storms and tempests a divine hand is still in control, and that there is being achieved through the experience a God-ordained purpose.

The story of the shipwreck needs little elaboration. But before we bid farewell to Paul for this study, a brief look at his experience upon reaching Rome will be helpful. Paul was treated in Rome with great leniency. He was allowed to rent a house or lodging in the city and live at his own convenience under the surveillance of a soldier who had to guarantee that Paul was available whenever his presence was required. Paul could invite friends into his house and preach to all who came to visit him. He simply could not leave the confines of the home.

We do not know why Paul's trial was delayed for so long. It is possible that his opponents preferred to delay, fearing that they would not be able to secure his conviction. A Paul under limited restraints would be better (they may have felt) than a Paul completely free to travel where he pleased. Little did they realize that Paul was having a very effective ministry of preaching, writing, and encouraging even while he was under arrest. During this time he wrote Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians, and Philipppians.

Upon being released from this imprisonment, Paul wrote the pastoral epistles: 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. Paul's later career is not as sharply defined as are his experiences before his arrival in Rome. The pastoral epistles contain hardly any references to Paul's travels. There are brief references to his second imprisonment which was much more rigorous and restrictive than the first (e.g., 2 timothy 2:9).

We do not have a biblical account of Paul's death like that of the martyrdom of Stephen. It might have been just as dramatic. We do know, however, that his triumphant testimony to Timothy (while Paul was still alive) was also a fitting epitaph as he laid down his life for the gospel: "I have fought a good fight....I have kept the faith".

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