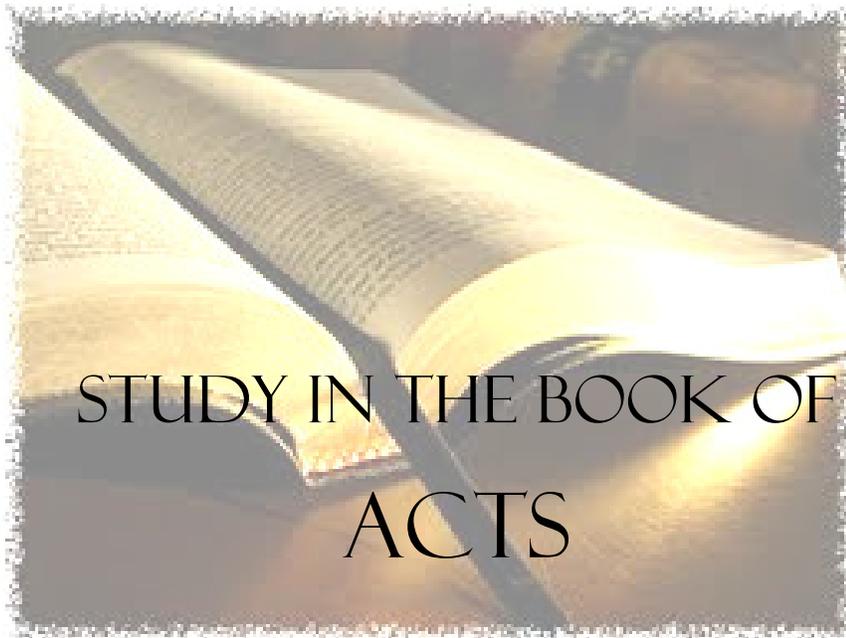


Footprints



CHRISTIAN RESOURCES



Footprints into Africa

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Acknowledgement of the assignment work by Frances Hansen

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¹ Buttrick, G.A. (ed.) *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia A-D* Abington Press: New York, 1962; pg 29.

² Guthrie, pg 973.

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BOOK STUDIES: ACTS

7. SHORT NOTES ON DATE, AUTHOR AND MAIN MESSAGE

i. Date

Acts was most likely written before the end of Paul's first Roman imprisonment (AD 60-62). "That date is the most natural explanation for the abrupt ending of Acts- which leaves Paul awaiting trial before Caesar."³

However, other scholars say that "Acts would have been written shortly after Luke, not much later than 65AD."⁴

ii. Author

Acts begins with the words, "In the first book, O Theophilus" (v1) clearly showing that there was a former book written to Theophilus. This was the Gospel of Luke. "Since Luke's gospel was the first book addressed to Theophilus (Luke 1:3), it is logical to conclude that Luke is also the author of Acts"⁵.

"Luke regarded the Acts as 'neither an appendix nor an afterthought,' but as forming with his gospel 'a continuous work'.⁶

iii. Main Message

Our Lord Jesus' last words to the disciples encapsulate the main message of Acts: "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." (Ch1:8)

Griffith Thomas has described Acts as an "inspired textbook for Christian workers". Acts describes the spreading of the Gospel through the work of the Holy Spirit in the church across the early Roman world.

The evangelistic impulse bursts from every page and highlights the pressing need to win the world for Jesus with a Christ- centred message.

³ MacArthur, J. *The MacArthur Study Bible* Word Publishing: Tennessee, 1997; pg 1630.

⁴ Rosebank Bible College Foundational Module Notes. *Module 3: New Testament Survey: The Book of Acts*; Slide 1.

⁵ MacArthur; pg 1630.

⁶ Stott, J.R.W. *The Message of Acts* InterVarsity Press: England, 1990; pg 21.

2. THE WITNESSING OF THE EARLY CHURCH IN JERUSALEM (Chapters 2-7)

The early Church witnessed with power and with selflessness.

a. The Coming of the Holy Spirit (2:1-12)

This was a turning point in the history of the Church ushering in the birth of a new age. This would be an age of the glorious expansion of the Gospel until the Second Coming of Christ. The Lord promised that “the power for this work would be sufficient.”⁷ The disciples were to wait for the Spirit. They could not begin witnessing without the energising power of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit came in force with the sound of a violent, rushing wind and the presence of tongues of fire on the heads of the disciples. Spurgeon says they were to be “ablaze with love, intense with zeal and burning with self sacrifice”. The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit. This inward, invisible reality powerfully demonstrated externally the presence of Christ. The timid became bold, the arrogant humble.

The Spirit provided the impetus for the spread of the Gospel. Ordinary men were suddenly filled with the Holy Spirit and they gave immediate testimony to this. They began to speak. They couldn’t stop talking about Jesus. Miraculously, the multitudes who had gathered in Jerusalem for the time of Pentecost each heard the disciples speaking in their own language: the Parthians, Medes, Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome; Cretans and Arabs. This was God’s incredible way of spreading the Gospel from the word go. As each would return home they would carry the Word of God back with them. This was a remarkable witness on the part of the disciples.

b. Christ is preached in the first sermon (2:14-41)

The witnessing in Jerusalem continues as Peter stands up and delivers a great declaration that Jesus is both Lord and Christ. Gordon Kelly stated how vital this is saying that Jesus must be held up “as the only Saviour of sinners.” Peter eloquently extols the Saviour emphasising that Jesus is different from other prophets and that the exaltation of the Risen Christ was foretold by the Scriptures. Speaking primarily to Jews in this first sermon Peter draws on Scripture to back up and support what he is saying highlighting that the age of fulfilment has come.

⁷ Winter, D. (ed.) *Matthew Henry's Commentary: Acts to Revelation* Hodder & Stoughton: London, 1975; pg 13.

Peter clearly brings the Gospel message across, pleading with those gathered to “Save (themselves) from this corrupt generation” (v40). He called on the people to repent and be baptised. Peter’s preaching was effective because it was empowered by the Holy Spirit. The people were therefore convicted of sin and “cut to the heart”. The results were incredible. Three thousand people were added to the Church on that one day.

c. The Early Church in Jerusalem (2:41-47)

The early Church was dedicated to the Lord Jesus as they preached faithfully and obeyed implicitly. They gave the Word of God prominence meeting regularly for fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer. These characteristics caused them to be fruitful evangelists in Jerusalem. The apostles’ influence was widespread. People saw that their lives were real and powerful. Miracles testified to the truth of Christ. There was phenomenal growth to the Church by conversions.

They were a sharing, joyful, unified Church and the Lord added to them those who were being saved on a daily basis. The Church grew from strength to strength.

c. The first miracle (3:1-10)

Through wonders and miraculous signs the disciples attested to the reality of Christian faith and life. These served to cement their testimony about Christ.

The first miracle recorded for us is the healing of the lame beggar at the temple gate Beautiful. He was well known at the temple which makes the miracle that took place all the more effective in spreading the Name of Jesus.

Peter very clearly stated, “In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” (v6) No one was in any doubt as to how Peter and John were healing the man. The Lord was given honour. In this way, Peter’s witness was clear and strong. “The apostolical miracles were all performed in the name of Christ, according to his own command and promise.”⁸

The miracle was instantaneous and complete. It was a message in itself to the power of God. The disciples didn’t just witness in what they said, but in what they did.

The man’s response was understandable. He was filled with delight and went leaping and praising God into the temple courts. This was personal testimony at its best. The indisputable fact of a life changed. The “miracle was public and notorious”.⁹ Furthermore, all recognized him at the temple- which gave even more evidence to the authenticity of the Gospel message.

⁸ Alexander, J.A. *Acts: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 1980; pg 102.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pg 104.

e. Peter's first sermon- directing the people's attention to Christ (3:11-26)

Always, in every way, Jesus was given His rightful place. In the aftermath of this Jerusalem miracle there was amazement and wonder. Peter used this opportunity- once again an effective witnessing tool- to talk to the people about Jesus.

Here Peter is very direct in his witnessing, outlining how the Lord was crucified, the Prince of Life destroyed by the choice of the Jews- who wanted Barabbus' freedom. Peter is clear, declaring that this Jesus was raised from the dead saying, "We are witnesses of this" (v15).

Peter then makes the clarion call for repentance again- a radical transformation of thought, outlook and direction, a turning away from sin unto God and His service. His witnessing is simple and easy to grasp.

f. Persecution in Jerusalem (4:1-31)

In the face of the inevitable persecution we see Peter and John standing firm attesting to the Truth of Christianity. The priests and the Sadducees and the captain of the temple opposed these two disciples vigorously. Peter and John were arrested and put into custody directly because of their witness concerning Christ and the resurrection of the dead.

Amazingly, because of Peter and John's strong witness "many... believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand" (v4). This despite the persecution!

At every opportunity Peter and John spoke of Jesus. As they stood before Annas the high priest, Caiaphas and John and Alexander amongst others they weren't afraid or quieted. Boldly, Peter shared the Gospel. When charged not to speak anymore in the Name of Jesus they said, "we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (v20). The people were all praising the Lord for the miracle that had taken place. The Lord used this to greatly further the Gospel in Jerusalem.

Once they were released the disciples did not stop preaching about Jesus. They persevered and prayed for more boldness continuing to spread God's Word. Witnessing was done with dedication, endurance and tenacity.

g. Reaction to the Gospel (5:12-42)

The Church took root and the power of the Holy Spirit was among them. Many signs and wonders were regularly done by the apostles. They met openly in Solomon's Portico. There was open faced enthusiasm for fellowship and corporate worship. They rejoiced in God. They were thrilled at the assurance that Jesus was their Saviour. The early Church was passionate about meeting together. This all served to emphasize the power of the Gospel to the people round about. The people held the apostles in high esteem and multitudes became believers.

The apostles rejoiced in any suffering they received and never stopped teaching and proclaiming the Good News.

h. Stephen's Powerful Witness (6:1-7 & 7:1-8:1)

Stephen, along with six others, had been chosen to serve as a deacon. As the Church grew so more assistance was needed in different areas. Stephen was selected to debate against by those of the synagogue, but he answered with wisdom. They then stirred up the people secretly inducing men to lay a charge of blasphemy against him. False witnesses were chosen and Stephen was charged with speaking against the synagogue and the law. They also spoke against Jesus.

Stephen's face shone like that of an angel. All could see that there was something beautiful and courageous about this man. His witness was so clear- it was pure.

Stephen then calmly and lengthily spoke to the Jews in his defence. He gives a devastating attack on the Jewish people to ultimately highlight the work of Christ and Jewish disobedience. He artfully speaks about Abraham, Joseph and Moses. Stephen then discusses the tabernacle and contrasts spirituality versus formalism and dead religion. Pawson says, "This speech is a theological explanation and justification for the spread of the message to the Gentiles."¹⁰ He boldly showed the Jews the error of their ways bringing conviction.

Stephen warns the Jews about their lack of repentance and their resistance of the Holy Spirit. Penultimately Stephen describes how the Jews have betrayed and murdered Jesus. Stephen here is an incredible example. With unwavering trust in Christ he expresses the Gospel freely. This is the mark of a true witness.

A true witness is also ready to be martyred for the sake of Christ. As Stephen exposes the Jews they are angered and cast him out of the city to stone him to death. Stephen maintains his witness right to the end staring steadfastly at his Saviour. He is given a picture of Jesus standing to welcome him home.

Stephen is gives further testimony to the truth of the Gospel as his last words are , "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (v60) Stephen displays here an amazing love for his enemies. Throughout he models firmness of character and a great knowledge of the Bible. He is truly a witness we can follow!

¹⁰ Pawson, D. *Unlocking the Bible* Harper Collins Publishers: London, 2007; pg 867.

3. THE WITNESS OF THE CHURCH IN JUDEA, SAMARIA AND SYRIA

a. Persecution's effect (8:1-3)

After the stoning of Stephen tremendous persecution was unleashed. But through the persecution the disciples grew in number. Also because of the persecution the disciples were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. They were forced to move out of Jerusalem. All the Christians preached wherever they went. They evangelized. The Church was reaching out, dispersing. This was the spreading of the Gospel and had world changing significance. The Gospel cut across the prejudice of the Jews and crossed over boundaries. All the Christians were involved in sharing their faith, witnessing was not just left to a few professionals!

b. Samaritans converted! (8:4-25)

Philip then proclaimed Christ in Samaria. These people who were considered dogs, rubbish, Gentiles to the Jews were now being reached. Philip was Christ centred in his focus, and lives were changed. People were wonderfully saved, paying attention to all Philip had to say.

Moreover, the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit as Peter and John laid hands on them. This was a unique experience that was happening in the early church. God, in His sovereignty, did something unequalled to unite Jew and Gentile. God was preserving the unity of the Church so that they could come together and form a stronger witness.

However, a sorcerer named Simon wanted to buy the power of the Holy Spirit from the disciples. He was showing that his faith was counterfeit. Despite this attempt to imitate God's power, the work went on and the gospel was preached to many in the Samaritan villages.

c. Africa and the Ethiopian (8:26-40)

God took the Gospel to Africa *first*. Philip was called of God to go. Philip had a love for the lost. He wanted to touch the lives of men and women. He was driven with a great heart for the lost. That is a hallmark of evangelism – compassion for the sinner. Philip explained Jesus to the Ethiopian Eunuch. He pointed to Christ. . Philip didn't get sidetracked he stuck to the main point, the Gospel message of Jesus drawing on his knowledge of the Old Testament.

As a result the Ethiopian received Christ and was baptised. It is clear that the disciples had a strong emphasis on the Word of God and this had results, as many were saved. The Gospel had now reached Africa, and would spread.

d. Saul's Conversion (9:1-31)

Next to the resurrection, the most important event in the history of the world was the conversion of Saul. He would do more for the establishment of the Church in Asia Minor, Greece and Rome than any other man. He was to write over 25% of the New Testament. Saul was a very, very strict Jew. He saw Jesus as a heretic and a blasphemer. He hated him and despised him. What drove Saul was to persecute Christians. He was a zealous, religious fanatic.

“It was on his journey to Damascus that Saul was confronted by the vision of the risen Christ which wrought such a revolution in his life, and made him thenceforward the most zealous champion of the faith he had hitherto sought to destroy.”¹¹

The common denominator of all conversions is Jesus. In all these accounts we see Jesus lifted up. In all witnessing there is the conviction of sin, so the Lord challenged Saul and he is broken and falls to the ground. He surrenders to Christ as Lord. His sins were taken away and he is now a child of God- saved. He is saved by a sovereign work of the grace of God.

Saul is then sealed. The Lord tells Ananias that Saul is a chosen instrument. He would be used to spread the gospel. It would involve costly service. He would suffer wherever he went and would have opposition. He would be shipwrecked, endure imprisonment and would be beaten- all for Christ.

Saul is filled with the Holy Spirit, baptised and immediately begins to preach. His was a genuine conversion. There was fruit and growth. The focus of his evangelism was Christ. He proclaimed Jesus as the Son of God and proved that He was the Christ, baffling the Jews. This was a radical conversion leading to a passion for others. God converted the biggest persecutor of the Church.

e. Characteristics of effective witnesses (9:32-48)

The early Church got involved. Peter travelled throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria. He also visited Christians in their homes in Lydda, found needs and met them. Peter always exalted Christ. He always sought to bring people to Christ. He directed them to Christ. Peter was also always available, no matter how busy he got. Dorcas is another example of a disciple who unceasingly helped the poor. The emphasis of the early Church was not on ability, but availability. They were available anytime, anywhere, at any cost, to do anything.

¹¹ Guthrie, D. (ed.), et al *The New Bible Commentary Revised* InterVarsity Press: London, 1970; pg 983.

The believers were also a prayerful company. Prayer is the fuel that keeps things burning. Peter prayed before raising her to life. Further, the disciples lives were fruitful. There was one-on-one evangelism and care. They bore fruit. Lastly, their lives were characterized by a freedom from prejudice. Peter stayed at Simon the Tanner's house displaying a love for people just as they are. Christianity cut across barriers. Christians were aware that they were brothers and sisters in Christ. There was a unity amongst the believers.

f. Cornelius- born again! (10:1-48)

God clearly showed Peter in a vision of clean and unclean animals that there was to be no prejudice, that salvation was also available for the Gentiles. The spread of the Gospel was to reach beyond boundaries, the new covenant issued in a new dispensation. Peter was never again to call anyone unclean. Every man, every woman is made in God's image and in need of salvation. Peter's obedience to the Spirit in going with the men back to Cornelius' house is distinctive of his witness, he was faithful. Peter was submissive to God's will. This had wonderful consequences, as many were brought to Christ-including Cornelius.

Peter demonstrates to us how to witness as he gives Cornelius a very simple presentation of the Gospel. Amazingly he was able to bring Cornelius the message that God was impartial. Peter then brings Christ to Cornelius. He tells Cornelius seven truths about Christ: His peace; His Lordship; His reputation; His ministry; His substitutional death; His resurrection and His witness.

God continued His work as the Holy Spirit fell on all present, as Peter was speaking. Here the Lord was making clear that salvation was for Jew and Gentile alike. The believers who were with Peter were amazed. The Lord made it evident so that they too would know that they could witness to all people who they came into contact with and that we are all one in Christ.

Peter commands Cornelius and his household to be baptised in the Name of Jesus. He is now a brother in the Lord, they then have sweet fellowship remaining there for some days.

g. The Model Church at Antioch (Ch 11:19-30)

The early Church was prepared by persecution. Massive growth occurred as there was a reaching out. As Christians left Jerusalem they spoke about Christ wherever they went. They travelled and spoke the Word of God. There were many conversions. News reaches the leadership in Jerusalem and they respond by sending the best available helper, Barnabas to this Syrian city- Antioch. Barnabas was full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit. He encouraged the believers there and the work grew. Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Saul and bring him back to Antioch and they taught the Church there.

The witness of the believers was strong because it was based on a solid understanding of the Bible. The community was penetrated. There was local evangelism. Further, the church at Antioch had missionary vision and zeal. They had a passion for missions. Paul was to use Antioch as a base. He would reach into Cappadocia, Asia Minor and the Islands from Antioch. The disciples whole focus was Jesus.

The Gospel had spread from Jerusalem, Judea into Samaria and Syria. The disciples strived with the energy of the Holy Spirit to tell people about Jesus and bring them to the point of conversion. Their witness and influence would extend still further as the church at Antioch would send Saul and Barnabas out on a missionary journey.

4. PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

"In keeping with the risen Lord's prophecy (1:8), witness has been borne to him 'in Jerusalem' and in all Judea and Samaria': now the horizon broadens to 'the ends of the earth'.¹²

a. The beginning of the journey (13:1-12)

The Holy Spirit told the disciples to separate Barnabas and Saul and send them out to extend the work of the spreading of the Gospel.

From Antioch the pair went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed on to the Island of Cyprus. When they reached the coastal city of Salamis they immediately preached the Word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. This clearly displays the intent and zeal of Saul and Barnabas to preach Christ wherever they could.

From Salamis they went through the Island to Paphos- "the provincial capital of Cyprus".¹³ There Saul (at this point he begins to be called Paul) confronted Elymas the sorcerer and convinced the proconsul of the truth of the Gospel.

b. Paul's sermon in Pisidian Antioch (13:13-52)

From Paphos they sailed to Perga and then came to Pisidian Antioch where Paul preached eloquently to the Jews in the synagogue there. He began by showing his knowledge of the Old Testament and expressed how God was faithful to His people. He promised Abraham descendants and land and this was fulfilled when the Israelites reached the Promised Land. Paul describes David, a type of Jesus, who was a magnificent king who brought prosperity to his people. Paul says that from the line of David would come the Saviour. He shows how Israel's history all points to Jesus.

The theme of Paul's sermon is now presented. His focus is Christ. Paul describes Jesus as the true missionary who incarnated Himself. John the Baptist had prepared the way for this great event- the fulfilment of God's promise. Paul then elaborates on the Gospel message explaining how Jesus not only came to us, but died for us. He rose again from the dead. God was vindicating the work of Christ. There were many witnesses that He was alive.

Paul then teaches on the blessings that come through faith in Christ. There is provision of saving faith in Jesus. There is forgiveness of sins and justification through faith in Christ. We obtain the righteousness of Jesus. Paul ends with a warning against unbelief.

¹² Stott., pg 215.

¹³ Ibid., pg 218.

Paul and Barnabas persuade many to believe in the grace of God but fierce opposition breaks out and they are forced to leave the region. This gives them, however, a wider opportunity to share the Good News.

c. Lystra and a pagan crowd (14:8-20)

The two apostles then went to Iconium where a 'great number' (v1) of Jews and Greeks believed after they had spoken again in the synagogue. Although they stayed there a long time the Gentiles minds were poisoned by unbelieving Jews and an attempt was made to stone them. They fled to Lystra.

In Lystra Paul healed a lame man and the people thought that they were gods wanting to worship them. However, Paul and Barnabas show great humility and give the glory to God. Jews from Antioch and Iconium stoned Paul leaving him for dead. But he got up when the disciples surrounded him and went with Barnabas to Derbe.

Through all this Paul showed great persistence and perseverance in preaching Christ, wherever he was making full use of every occasion he had.

d. Returning back (14:21-28)

Paul and Barnabas displayed great commitment as they then went back to Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch to encourage the disciples there. They were fearless in fulfilling their mission. They had a realistic view of the opposition they had faced 'saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.'(v22) Fatigue, stoning and more persecution could not stop the joy of sharing the Gospel and of souls saved. Paul appointed elders in each church, setting the churches in order so that they would be led and looked after.

Onward home and they went down to Perga in Pamphylia again where they *spoke the Word*. They went through Attalia from where they then sailed to Antioch where they were met with great rejoicing reporting back on their journey that they had now completed.

e. The Jerusalem Council (15:1-35)

Having returned the early Church was met with a great crisis. If Paul hadn't won the battle, the Gospel would have been lost. There was a sharp dispute and debate between Paul and Barnabas and some men who came down from Judea concerning whether one had to be circumcised to be saved. Paul and Barnabas left for Jerusalem to the apostles and elders to discuss this.

Peter and then Paul described how Gentiles had also received salvation through faith and that the Holy Spirit had been poured out on them too. Paul went on to relate the miracles that had taken place among the Gentiles. A decision was then reached as to what the Gentiles should be required to do. These only included a religious, moral, hygienic and civil prohibition.

A letter was then sent with Paul and Barnabas and the men who went with them back to Antioch outlining these requirements. This brought tremendous encouragement and continuous blessing to the believers. The issue was confronted and dealt with with grace, humility, conviction and the Holy Spirit. This clearly portrayed that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone.



5. PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Paul has a sharp disagreement with Barnabas as to whether they should take John Mark with them or not. Paul and Barnabas part ways at this point and Paul begins his second foreign mission. Paul was to move across into Europe during this journey.

a. Confirming the churches

Paul first went to places he had already visited, because he had the right priority. He wanted to make disciples, to establish churches he had begun in each city. He began by moving through Syria and Cilicia and moved on to Derbe and Lystra. Letting the churches know what decisions had been made in Jerusalem. Because of Paul's pastoral care the disciples were strengthened and the churches increased in numbers daily. Paul's witnessing was marked by his commitment to his spiritual children.

b. Timothy

At Lystra a disciple called Timothy lived. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him on his journey. "As one reason for selecting Timothy was no doubt his connection with both races (he was of Jewish and Greek descent), fitting him to be an instrument of good to both".¹⁴ So he joined Paul and Silas.

c. Troas and the Macedonian call

Next there were a "succession of heaven-sent inhibitions".¹⁵ As they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, the disciples were prevented by the Holy Spirit from going into Asia and Bithynia. They continued on their way coming to Troas where Paul had a vision of a man begging him to come and help those in Macedonia. Paul's obedience to the Lord is immediate as Paul and his company left at once from Troas to go to Macedonia. Paul had a passion for the lost.

d. Philippi and the First European convert

Paul sets sail and comes to Philippi- a leading city in Macedonia. They begin to speak to women at the riverside just outside the city and Lydia- a businesswoman from Thyatira- hears them. God opened her heart to respond and she was baptized along with her household.

¹⁴ Alexander, pg 102.

¹⁵ Guthrie, pg 994.

e. In Prison

A slave girl who followed Paul and Silas and ridicules them normally profits from fortune telling. Her owners have Paul and Silas apprehended, flogged and put into prison. Paul and Silas are not filled with self pity, but rather begin singing hymns and praising God. A huge earthquake follows and the jailor is shocked as he sees the doors of the prison open. He is petrified and asks Paul and Silas what he must do to be saved. Paul uses this opportunity to share the Gospel with him. "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household"(v31). He was baptized and proof of his conversion was that he had a changed lifestyle. He showed care for them washing their wounds and being hospitable. Once again we see Paul following up after his evangelism: when they were released from prison they visited Lydia.

f. In Thessalonica

Paul and Silas continued their travels and as soon as they arrived at a synagogue in Thessalonica, they began to evangelize. Paul involved himself in constant discussion and opening and explaining the Bible. It was a Christ-centred message based on the authority of the Bible. The Gospel had a great influence in the city and many were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas. However there was fierce opposition and Jason- in whose house they met- was arrested, but later released.

g. In Berea

Paul and Silas left by night for Berea. Here they found a receptive audience. The Bereans were noble and searched the Scriptures receiving the message with eagerness. Many Jews and Greeks both men and women, were converted after their honest inquiry into the truth. However, there was resistance again as Thessalonian Jews stirred up the crowds. Paul was immediately sent off to Athens. Maers says, "Cowardice did not prompt them to flee, for in every place we find them preaching the Gospel."¹⁶ The result of the hostilities was actually the spread of the Gospel!

h. Athens

When Paul comes to Athens he reaches the high peak of his missionary career. On arriving he saw a city full of idols, it was a city of idolatry. Paul was greatly distressed by the spiritual deadness in the city. Once again he rose to the occasion in the power of the Holy Spirit and reasoned continuously with Jews, Greeks, in the marketplace and with the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers who said he was a 'babbler'. Paul grabbed the opportunity, perceiving their need when he saw an altar to the unknown god. He began by describing who the Living God is- the Creator, Life-giver and that He is a spiritual being. Paul pricks their conscience urging them to repent before the judgment. Paul was met with ridicule, procrastination but also with acceptance.

¹⁶ Maers, H. *What the Bible is All About* Regal Books: California, 1980; pg 436.

i. To Corinth

Paul next went to Corinth which was a filthy, immoral, degrading place. Paul links up with Aquila and Priscilla while waiting for Timothy and Silas to arrive. He reasons with the Jews in the synagogue once again bringing them under the authority of the Word of God and trying to persuade people to turn to Christ. When he was opposed there he fearlessly went to the house right next door to the synagogue and continued preaching there. Through this Crispus- the ruler of the synagogue believed!

Paul was greatly encouraged by a vision he then had in which the Lord spoke to him telling him he was safe and that there were many who would believe in Corinth. As a result, Paul stayed there for a year and a half telling all he could the Good News.

However, the Jews made a united attack on Paul bringing him before Gallio- the proconsul- and the tribunal. However, Gallio did not take the bait and ordered them to sort out their own problems. Paul then returns to Antioch via Ephesus.



6. (5) PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Paul travelled from Antioch to Ephesus through the inland country and stayed there for some two and a half years.

a. Paul's work in Ephesus

He found some disciples who were ignorant of the Holy Spirit. They had been taught about John's baptism. Paul then gives them instruction clarifying the confusion and they are powerfully initiated into the Church as they receive the Holy Spirit.

Paul then went to the synagogue and with boldness he spoke persuasively for three months then when he had opposition he went to the hall of Tyrannus and reasoned daily impacting many. The whole province heard the Word of God and there was an intensification of his godly witness despite those who had maligned the Way and had hardened their hearts.

The Lord revealed His power through Paul as the blessing of healing was received by people who just touched his handkerchiefs. People wanted Paul's power but were proved false. As a result many witnessed to the power of the Gospel by confessing and divulging their practises and burning magic arts books. The Gospel continued to spread and grow and its influence was great. In two and a half years the whole city and Western Asia Minor had been thoroughly evangelised.

b. Miletus and the Ephesian elders

Paul left Ephesus and travelled up through Macedonia strengthening the believers going down to Greece and returning via Philippi to avoid a plot against his life. He came down to Troas and Miletus.

At Miletus he sent for the Ephesian elders and spoke to them encouraging them at length. He described the character of his ministry which was service with humility and tears. Paul also said that his ministry had been marked by trials. His methods were public- preaching and teaching and private-visiting homes. His message was of repentance and faith. He urged people to repent: desiring a radical transformation of heart and life and to faith: a trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. He taught the whole Gospel to the whole city with his whole strength. Paul was devoted to duty. He knew Christian ministry meant hard work. Paul urged the elders to keep watch over themselves- their hearts had to be right with Jesus. He also told the elders to watch over the flock- to protect them, calm them, comfort them. He parted from the Ephesian elders with great sorrow as he would not see them again.

Paul left Miletus and travelled via Rhodes and Patara, Tyre, Ptolemais, Caesarea. Despite warnings by Agabus about imprisonment and on his life, Paul was determined and continued on to Jerusalem.

7b. EXPLANATION OF ACTS' MAIN TEACHINGS FOR TODAY

a. The Great Commission

In Acts 1:8 Jesus charges the disciples saying:

“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.”

This is such an important mandate and has ramifications for eternity. It was not merely an instruction given to the disciples, but requires a present response. We are all called to be witnesses of our great salvation.

b. The Work of the Holy Spirit

The work of the Holy Spirit is vital for conversion and empowering for service. This is evident in 19:2 where Paul questions the disciples in Ephesus, “... “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” The Holy Spirit is essential for regeneration to take place.

c. The Scope of the Gospel

The Gospel is not exclusive. Acts clearly shows that the Good News is not just for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles. Jesus' death was sufficient for the whole world! In chapter 10 we see Peter's vision and Cornelius' conversion. In Acts 15:9 Paul highlights this at the Jerusalem Council, “and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.” We take the Gospel confidently into this dying world with that knowledge.

d. Jesus is God's long-awaited Messiah

Peter declares openly on the Day of Pentecost , “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (2:36).

Later, on being questioned by the high priest, Peter fearlessly says, “God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.” Jesus is still Saviour today and will be forever.

e. Perseverance of the Saints

Acts shows remarkably how the apostles endured persecution. Despite opposition they continued preaching Christ. In chapter 6 Stephen was arrested yet he preached with boldness, eventually being martyred for his faith in chapter 7.

On Paul's first missionary journey (as with the others) he and Barnabas endured persecution at Pisidian Antioch, "But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." (13:51)

This same tenacity needs to be characteristic of us believers. The apostles served as examples for us. No matter the cost we proclaim the Truth.

f. Make the Most of Every Opportunity

At each city the apostles went to Christ was preached.

Acts 17:2, "And Paul went in, *as was his custom*, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures."

Paul and Silas did not commiserate while in the Philippian prison, but rather sang praises to God. When miraculously freed through an earthquake they quickly reassured the jailer giving him hope, "And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (16:31).

In Athens, Paul used the altar 'To the unknown god' as a catapult for his message (17:22).

Later in his defence before Felix, Festus and King Agrippa Paul spoke the Gospel to the point that King Agrippa, tragic though it was, said in 26:28, "...In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?"

In all these instances we see the Word of God expounded and many times people were saved. In the same way, we need to always be on the lookout for times we too can bless others with the message of the Cross.

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