

# **TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH**

**PART 1: ACTS 1-8  
JERUSALEM, JUDEA & SAMARIA**

# INTRODUCTION:

Acts is a little different to most other books in the New Testament. It isn't a letter and it's not a gospel - well, not strictly anyway. But it's a vital book that we would very much be the poorer without.

Acts is the second book that Luke wrote. Although it's more accurate to say it's the second half of the book he wrote. The first was his gospel, and Acts is the continuation of Luke's record of what took place around him. In Acts Luke writes about what Jesus *continued* to do and teach (1:1), through the Holy Spirit, working in and through the Apostles (and eventually other followers).

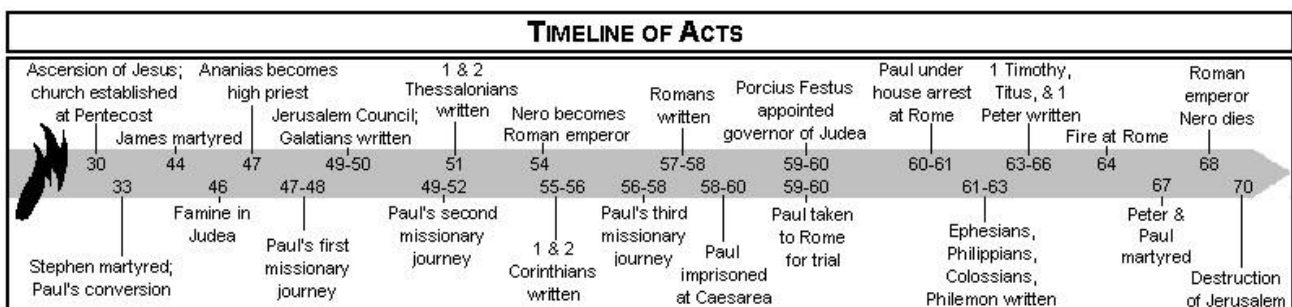
The two works were probably commissioned by Theophilus (Luke 1:3). He was probably a Roman Christian who met Luke while he was with Paul under house arrest, awaiting trial, in Rome. (This explains why the book finishes with Paul still under arrest). Luke writes his double-work so that Theophilus might know the certainty of the things he has been taught (Luke 1:4). Theophilus wants to know how the gospel of Jesus made its way from Jerusalem, across the known world, to Rome. Luke charts its progress from Jerusalem, through Samaria, into Europe, and then to the ends of the earth – Rome, the centre of the Gentile world (Acts 1:8). But not just geographically – Luke (a Gentile himself – see Colossians 4:11 cf 14) plots the progress of the message from Jews through Hellenistic Jews to Samaritans and then to Gentiles, in fulfilment of God's promise to make Abraham's descendants a blessing to all nations.

## AUTHOR:

Luke was a Gentile (non-Jewish) Christian, a travelling companion of Paul, and a medical doctor (Colossians 4:14). He was clearly a close friend of Paul's, and not one of the original twelve disciples. So he wasn't one of the 'inner circle' and he would have had a different perspective on Jesus because he was not a Jew seeing Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. All of this suggests that Luke's record of events had a certain objectivity above that of the other (Jewish) writers. He was clearly committed to spreading the gospel far and wide to see other Gentiles like himself come under its influence.

## DATE:

Luke probably wrote Acts between A.D. 60-61, while Paul was under house arrest in Rome. This explain why he does not mention the outcome of Paul's trial.



**WATCH:** The Bible Project video on Acts 1-12 (8 min)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch/CGbNw855ksw>

# ACTS 1: EXTREME MAKEOVER

## DISCUSS...

Acts describes some extraordinary things that happened. Apostles demonstrated seemingly amazing powers - one touch of an apostle's handkerchief, or even contact with an apostle's shadow on the footpath - can heal deadly diseases.

**Do you expect to find people with these powers today? Why, or why not?**

## SO WHAT'S AN APOSTLE ANYWAY?

If the book of Acts is about the "Acts of the Apostles," we need to figure out first of all what an **apostle** actually is. Why were they so special? What qualifications did you need to be one? Should we expect to find "apostles" today?

These are big questions, and the answers will help us to understand and apply what we read in Acts.

**APOSTLE** means "**one who is sent**" Our term "ambassador" has a similar meaning. In our special sense, though, it refers to someone who is commissioned and sent by Jesus.

1. Look back to Luke 6:13. What does Jesus do?
2. Who did Jesus spend time with and instruct after his resurrection? Why do you think he does this?
3. Back in Acts 1, according to verses 4 and 8, what will happen to these people next?
4. Why are the apostles going to receive the special gift Jesus promises?

## THE APPOINTING OF MATTHIAS

5. The fact that Judas had betrayed Jesus and then killed himself left the original 12 disciples short-handed. They're now "the eleven," and they decide to fill the vacancy.
  - a. According to Acts 1:21-22, what qualifications were needed to take over "*this apostolic ministry*?"
  - b. While it was important that the chosen apostle had been with Jesus from the beginning, what would the key part of their "*witness*" or "*testimony*" be?
  - c. Who do the apostles see as making the final appointment?

## THE RISEN KING

6. The heart of the Apostolic message is the RISEN CHRIST. Notice the two key parts of the Apostles' in-service training course in 1:3...

*Jesus convinced them that he was \_\_\_\_\_,*

*and spoke to them about \_\_\_\_\_.*

7. Look at the question the apostles ask Jesus in verse 6. What does this show about their understanding of the Kingdom?

8. How does Jesus widen their vision in verses 7 & 8?

9. Here's their job description. When the Holy Spirit comes on them...

*They will be his witnesses in \_\_\_\_\_ and in all \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_*

*and to the \_\_\_\_\_.*

10. The apostles' focus is on Jerusalem. In his reply, Jesus references Isaiah 49.6, where Gentiles is parallel with "the ends of the earth". Jesus' commission is about taking the good news beyond the Jewish nation to all nations. **Read Isaiah 49:1-7.** Who is God giving this commission to?

How effectively do they do that?

How does Paul, in Acts 13:47, use this commission as a motivation to go to the Gentiles?

Look at the map below. This is more than a Kingdom for Israel! **It's for everyone.** As the book of Acts unfolds, expect to see the Apostles do exactly what Jesus has just said - although with some hesitation!



Verse 8 is like a table of contents for the rest of the book - we'll see the gospel taken from Jerusalem, to wider Judea, to the despised area of Samaria, and to the ends of the Roman Empire - and later the world.

## COMING ON THE CLOUDS

11. Read about what happens to Jesus in **Acts 1:9-10**, and the angel's comments in **verse 11**. Back in the Old Testament, the prophet Daniel had a remarkable vision. He saw a time when the kingdoms of this world would be overcome by a new kingdom. Read what he says straight from Daniel 7:13-14...

*"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like **a son of man**[1], coming with **the clouds of heaven**[2]. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given **authority, glory and sovereign power**[3]; **all peoples, nations, and men of every language**[4] worshipped him. His dominion is an **everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.**[5]"*

## SOME POINTS TO PONDER...

Answer these from the numbers above...

[1] What title did Jesus often use to refer to himself?

[2] As he "comes in the clouds", who is the Son of Man coming towards? (Read the next sentence and you'll see!)

[3] In royal ceremony terms, what's happening here? (Queen Elizabeth had one when she came to the throne!)

[4] Who is the son of man given authority to rule over?

[5] How long will this Kingdom last?

So, putting it together... what is Jesus visibly announcing when he's taken up in the clouds?

*That he is \_\_\_\_\_, That his Kingdom is for \_\_\_\_\_*

12. What are the implications for us today of the fact that the gospel is a message for all the nations?

13. "*Christ's Kingdom tolerates no narrow nationalism. He rules over an international community in which race, rank and gender are no barriers to fellowship*" says commentator John Stott. Have you seen evidence of this in your experience as a Christian?

## PRAYER POINTS:

Thank God for the provision that he has made for you to be his witness.

# ACTS 2:1-41: COMING HOME

## THE STORY SO FAR

Just before Jesus is taken off in the clouds to his heavenly coronation, he tells his disciples that it's time for his Kingship to be proclaimed to **all** the nations. If the apostles are thinking about Daniel 7, they shouldn't be surprised by what happens next...

### Read again from Daniel 7:13-14...

*"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations, and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."*

## THE STORY CONTINUES

When Jesus takes up his place on the throne, it's time for people of every nation and language to worship him. That's the apostles' long term mission. But it's symbolised in a dramatic way in Acts 2.

1. Read what happens in **Acts 2:1-13**, and answer the following:
  - a) What do the wind and fire represent? (Ezekiel 37:9,14; Exodus 3:2; 40:38)

God filled the Old Testament tabernacle and temple with his presence, visible by his glory. Now he would fill his people, the new temple, with his presence. His Holy Spirit.

- b) From verses 6-8, what's the important thing about the "tongues" the apostles are speaking in?

- c) Make a list of the nationalities mentioned in verses 9 to 11...

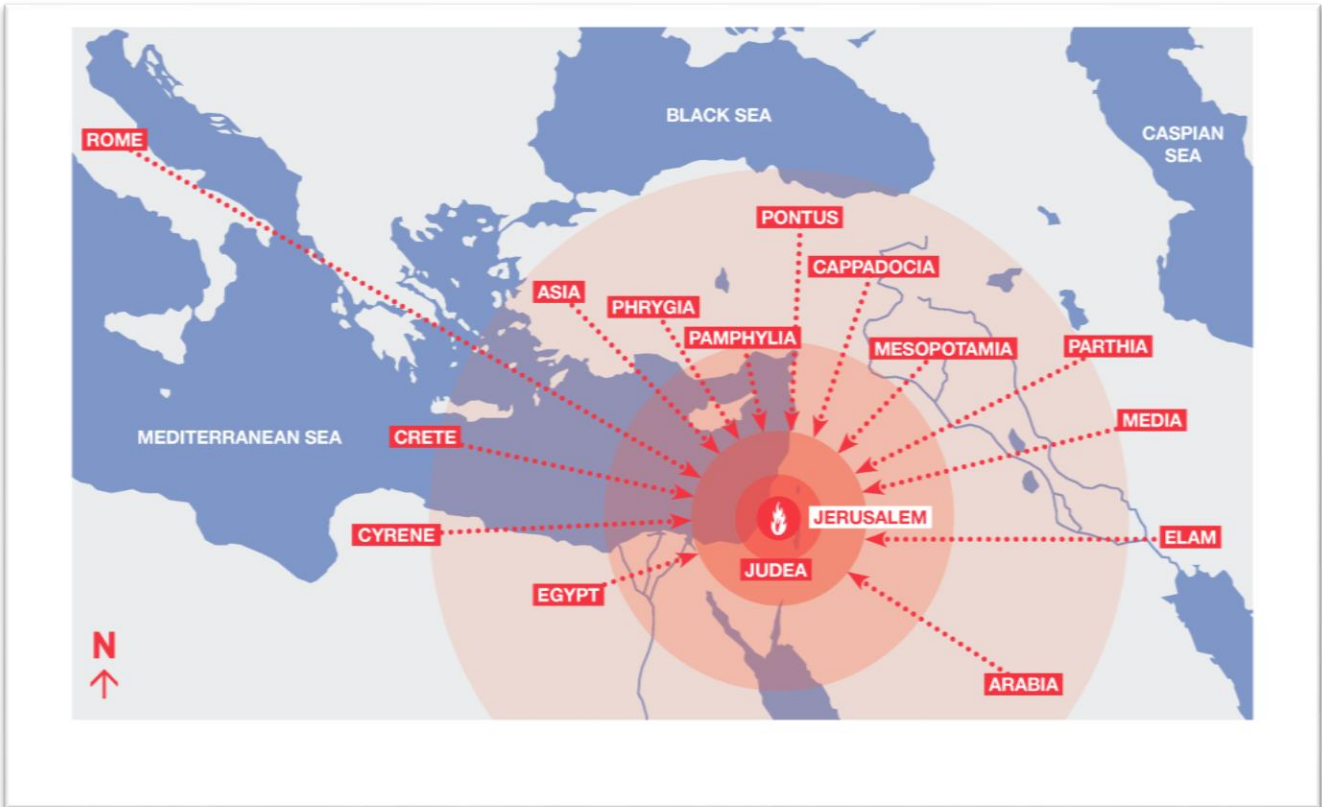
- d) Notice that these people all have something in common. What is it?

## BACK TO THE FUTURE...

When Israel was crushed by Babylon in 587 BC, Jews were scattered everywhere! Their land was smashed, and little groups of the people were scattered to all sorts of places. **Read what Isaiah says will happen when the "Root of Jesse" (the Messiah) takes his throne (Isaiah 11:10-12)**

*"10 In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious. 11 In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the sea. 12 He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; he will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth."*

**If you look at the map below**, these places mentioned in Isaiah look very much like those listed in Acts 2. The first step in the gathering of the nations around the King is the gathering of the scattered people of Israel.



2. What do the strange events of Acts 2:1-13 tell you about...

Jesus	the new era that's starting

### PETER'S FIRST SERMON

**Read Acts 2:14-40.** As you read, note the verse references for the following points.

	We're not drunk - it's the fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32
	Joel says in the "last days" God will pour out his Spirit
	Joel says there would be signs like the sun being darkened
	Joel says all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved
	Jesus did signs and wonders by God's power and you put him to death
	God raised him from death

	David said "I will live in hope, because death is not the end, and you won't let your Holy One see decay"
	David himself died, but he foresaw the resurrection of Christ
	Jesus has been "exalted" to God's right hand (at the throne) and has poured out the Spirit - just as David said
	Therefore God has made Jesus both LORD and CHRIST

3. Who was with Peter as he spoke (2:14)? What is significant about this? What advantages are there in evangelism as a *group* task, rather than an *individual* one? What implications might it have for *our* church?
  
4. Who was responsible for Jesus' death (2:23)? (Careful – trick question!)
  
5. How did the crowd respond to Peter's clear proclaiming of the truth about Jesus, and the truth about themselves?
  
6. What does Peter call on them to do?
  
7. What promise is made to them and their children?
  
8. When and how have you seen and/or experienced the work of the Holy Spirit in your life?

### **SIDE ISSUES: TONGUES TODAY**

Many Christians today are caught up in "speaking in tongues." It's interesting to consider whether this is the same thing as what's happening here in Acts. These dramatic events were the marker of a whole new era, and a fulfillment of prophecy. In this case, those who heard could understand what was said in their own languages. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul has the same concern - "Make sure there's an interpreter... it's better to speak a few words that can be understood than thousands of words in tongues." That's not often the way "the gift of tongues" is used today.

### **PRAYER POINTS:**



## **ACTS 2:42-47: THE HEAVENLY CHURCH ON EARTH**

1. **Read 2:42-47.** How big was the church by this stage? (See 1:15 and 2:41) Did it continue to grow?
2. Describe the fellowship of the young church.
3. What were their priorities?
4. People sometimes suggest that the church was a single community, living together, with no personal possessions. What evidence can you find from these verses that this *wasn't* the case?
5. What evidence is there that God is at work among them?
6. Why might the church today not see the same number of miracles?
7. What relationship did they have to the Jewish religion?
8. How do they relate to outsiders?

What could our church be doing to enjoy the favour of all the people?

9. How does your church or home group compare with this group? How does that make you feel?

What prevents it from being more like this first church?

What can you do about it?

### **PRAYER POINTS:**

# ACTS 3:1-4:31: PREACHING, PERSECUTION, & PLANS

Peter and John heal, preach, and then defend themselves in court. It comes as no surprise that they, as the representatives of Jesus, face the same opposition Jesus did a few short months before. They appear before the Sanhedrin (the same court that ordered the execution of the Messiah, and the last time Peter was here, he denied he even *knew* Jesus.)

Something has happened to change these men! What hints can you find so far in Acts for the source of this change?

## SILVER AND GOLD HAVE I NONE...

1. **Read Acts 3:1-10.** The beggar asks Peter and John for money, but receives something far more valuable. What does Peter do and to whom does Peter give the credit for what happens?

How did the crippled man respond to Jesus?

What is the response of the onlookers?

## PETER'S SECOND SERMON

**Read Acts 3:11-26.** Peter now seizes the opportunity to preach again. Just as the events at Pentecost prompted his first sermon, the crippled man's healing prompted this address. Both Pentecost and the healing were mighty acts of the risen Lord Jesus. Both were signs that screamed out "he is Lord and Saviour!" Any wonder both aroused the crowd's amazement!

2. Whenever Peter sees a crowd, there's only one thing he wants to do and that's preach about Jesus!
  - a) By whose power does Peter say the beggar has been healed?
  - b) What does this indicate about Jesus? What does it say about his Apostles?
3. List the verse references for these points in Peter's sermon...

	The God of our fathers has glorified Jesus, but you've disowned him
	God raised Jesus from the dead, and it's faith in him that healed the cripple.
	You acted in ignorance - God used it to fulfil prophecies that said the Christ would suffer
	Repent and turn to God so that your sins will be wiped out
	Jesus will return, but he will remain in heaven until the time comes for restoration
	All the prophets spoke about him and looked forward to these days.
	Moses said "listen to God's prophet or be cut off from his people."
	He fulfils the covenant with Abraham, that said "all peoples on earth will be blessed."
	God sent him to you Jews first to turn you from your wicked ways.

## A DAY IN COURT

4. **Read Acts 4:1-22.** Before Peter can call for any response to his sermon, he and John are taken to prison.
- a) The Sadducees were a Jewish political party that believed there was no resurrection of the dead. What was their main concern with Peter's preaching?
  - b) Even though Peter and John had been dragged off mid-sermon, there's a huge response. What happens?
  - c) What does the Holy Spirit enable Peter to do?
  - d) Summarize his message in one sentence...
  - e) How does the healing of the cripple demonstrate the truth of verse 11?
  - f) Why are the members of the Sanhedrin surprised? (v13) What is their main concern? (v17)
  - g) How do Peter and John respond when they are ordered **not** to preach in the name of Jesus?
  - h) There are times when we face pressure not to speak about Jesus. How is this pressure applied to us? How have you responded?

## BACK TO THE BELIEVERS

5. **Read Acts 4:23-31.** When Peter and John report back to the other believers, they again see the Scriptures fulfilled in what's happening.
- a) Why doesn't the opposition of their rulers surprise them?
  - b) What do they pray for in response to this opposition?
  - c) What is the immediate response to their prayer?
  - d) What is the result of being "filled with the Holy Spirit"?

## OUR PRAYERS

Do you have problems speaking boldly to others about Jesus? Maybe you need to change your prayer life! Like the first Christians, we shouldn't be surprised to meet opposition - the Bible says we will. We live in a world that hates to be challenged by God's rightful authority. In many parts of the world, Christians are governed by leaders who will tolerate no competition. We should pray for boldness. And we should expect God to answer this prayer, by filling us with his Holy Spirit in such a way that we will be able to speak his word boldly. Will you pray that?

## PRAYER POINTS

# ACTS 4:32-5:16: KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

## GETTING STARTED

Often, even though we have good intentions, it's hard to help one another through times of need. For one thing, we tend to be so proud and independent that we hate to admit we need help. Also, our social security system provides a reasonable "safety net," so we rarely see anyone starve to death. But is that enough to justify the fact that we so rarely seem to get involved in helping meet the needs of others - even when they are Christian brothers and sisters?

How would you identify the point at which a fellow Christian's need was serious enough that you should help?

Can you identify a time when you...

- ❖ should have offered help but didn't?
- ❖ offered help and it was rejected?
- ❖ offered help and it was accepted?

In the early days of the church, there were many acts of incredible generosity. There were also incredible acts of insincerity, just as there are today!

## Read Acts 4:32-35.

1. From verse 32, what is the starting point for Christian sharing?
  
2. What attitude did these first Christians have to their possessions?
  
3. What is the continuing focus of the Apostles' ministry?
  
4. Why were there no needy Christians?
  
5. Discuss: How big would someone else's need have to be to prompt you to sell your house or land to help them?
  
6. What practical lessons can your group and our church learn from this example? **Be specific!**

## ATTITUDE COUNTS!

7. As usual with Christian giving, your *attitude* as a giver counts far more than the numbers on the cheque! **Read Acts 4:36 to 5:16** for a case study of two givers...
  - a) **Barnabas**                      What does Barnabas do, and why?
  
  - b) **Ananias and Sapphira**      What do Ananias and Sapphira do?
  
  - c) What do you think their motive was?
  
  - d) Why was it wrong for them to withhold some of the money?

e) What was the essence of their sin?

### **PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER...**

8. From what Peter says, do we **have to** sell our property and give?

9. What do you see as the biggest difference between Barnabas and Ananias and Sapphira?

10. Do you think God's action is unduly harsh? Why, or why not?

11. What effect did God's action have...

a) on the church?

b) on the wider community (v11-14)

### **WHAT ABOUT US?**

12. In striking down Ananias and Sapphira, God left the church with an enduring lesson! ***But have we learned from it?*** How easy it is to do our good deeds for the sake of appearances, rather than from the heart! Can you think of examples where you have been tempted to do this?

13. How can we encourage one another to be more caring and generous, yet at the same time sincere?

14. How should the things we read of in this passage affect parts of our Christian life?

For some further thinking and discussion, read 2 Corinthians 9:1-11 (esp. v5-8)

### **PRAYER POINTS:**

## ACTS 5:17-42: THE DIRTY DOZEN

The Apostles have been performing miraculous signs and wonders - the sick were being brought out on the streets so that even Peter's shadow might fall on them (5:15)! And anyone who was sick, or troubled by an evil spirit, was healed. But as the strength of the church grew, so did their opposition. Often, we're timid in the face of opposition. But let's take a look at the Apostles and how they react when the heat is on.

### TO START...

What do you think it would be like to spend time in prison? If you've ever been inside a jail (even just as a visitor!), describe it for your group.

### Read Acts 5:17-21.

1. Who are the main opponents of the apostles? (v17ff) What are they most concerned about?

*God sends some remarkable encouragement to the jailed apostles in the middle of the night. An angel opens the doors of the jail, and brings them out!*

2. Why does the angel release them?
3. How does the angel describe the essence of the message they are to preach?
4. How does this description of their message connect with what you recall of the apostles preaching so far (eg 4:33, 3:15, 2:32, 1:22)?

### Read Acts 5:22-42.

5. In what ways is this meeting of the Sanhedrin different to the one described in chapter 4?
6. What similarity can you see in the cross-examination, and Peter's response, to the things said in 4:18-20?
7. List the points made by Peter in his speech from v30-32. Which points do you recognise from his previous sermons? (Do you spot a trend here?)
8. According to Peter, Jesus is **Saviour** and **Lord** ("*raised and exalted as Prince and Saviour*" v31). What happens when we lose sight of either one or the other of these aspects of Jesus?

9. The Sanhedrin is furious, and wants to put the apostles to death. But one of them, Gamaliel, speaks out. What is the point of the comparison he makes between Jesus and the two rebels Judas the Galilean, and Theudas? What is the implication of verse 39 when you read it against the rest of Acts?
  
10. Last time they were in court, Peter and John were let off with a warning. What happens this time?
  
11. Usually, when prisoners were flogged, it meant 39 lashes - i.e. the same punishment that nearly killed Jesus.. How did they respond to this punishment?
  
12. Again, they are ordered "*not to speak in the name of Jesus.*" How do they respond to the order?
  
13. What encouragement and challenge do you draw from the example of the apostles here? Do **you** ever thank God for "*being counted worthy of disgrace for the Name*"? What do you tend to do instead?
  
14. In what ways can you be bolder in spreading the good news that Jesus is the Christ?
  
15. If we take the challenge of this passage seriously, what **concrete steps** can you take to bring people into contact with this good news? What possible "disgrace" do you fear as you do this?

### **PRAYER POINTS:**

Pray through some of these issues in your group, focusing on asking God to help you be faithful to the gospel.

## ACTS 6:1-7: A DUO OF DANGEROUS D'S:

**Division** and **diversion** can derail the church from being all that God wants them to be. As the church continues to grow, there are growing pains. In all the busyness, some people are forgotten.

### Read Acts 6:1-7.

Note: *At this stage the church was virtually entirely Jewish in its composition. But there were two groups of Jews: the **Greek Jews** and the **Hebraic Jews**.*

- 1. **The Greek or Grecian Jews** were those who spoke Greek and who had been born outside of Israel. They tended to be more Greek in their thinking and outlook and openness to ethnically-different ideas.*
- 2. **The Hebraic Jews** were those born in Israel and who spoke Hebrew or Aramaic. They were usually committed to closely maintaining the Jewish customs and practices.*

1. Given 2:44-45 and 4:32, how could the widows be neglected?
2. How do the Apostles resolve the problem? How does this reflect their priorities?
3. All seven men chosen have Greek names. Why would the brothers choose Greek-speaking Jews?
4. How should we treat those of a different culture or nationality? See Eph 2:11-18 and Gal 3:26-29. Historically, how well has the church dealt with the issue of unity and racism?
5. What principles can you draw out of these verses about the way the church should seek to solve such problems?
6. What qualities did the people need to have who were selected to "*wait on tables*"?
7. What were the results of the apostles delegating the social work in order to concentrate on their praying/preaching ministry? (v7)
8. How well does your church reflect this balance of priorities?
9. To discuss: What is/are the purpose(s) of a church? Is there an area that your church is not doing well on? How can you help this situation?

### PRAYER POINTS:



## ACTS 6:8-7:60: STEPHEN, STONES & THE SAVIOUR

At the end of Acts 5 the church was facing persecution from the Jewish ruling council who flogged the apostles and ordered them not to speak about Jesus. But the apostles simply rejoiced that they were counted worthy of suffering for Jesus, and continued to preach the good news. But things are going to get worse!

In this section of Acts we meet **Stephen**, one of the seven deacons, a godly man who pays the ultimate price for his faith.

### Read 6:8 to 15.

1. What are we told about Stephen in these verses? How is he described?
2. Who is it who opposes Stephen? What was the result of their attempt to 'out-argue' Stephen. Why?
3. What false accusations are made against Stephen? (Make a note of them - you'll need these key points to help you make sense of his reply speech in the next chapter.)

AGAINST (v11)

AGAINST (v11 )

AGAINST (v13)

AGAINST (v13)

### Read through Stephen's speech in Acts 7:2-53.

4. Stephen retraces the history of the Old Testament, and answers the key allegations against him - that he spoke against the law of Moses, and against the temple. For each of the key points in his speech listed in the chart below, try to identify the part of the Old Testament where you find the original account.

Passage	O.T. event	Reference
Acts 7:2-8	God's promises to Abraham	Genesis 12-20
Acts 7:9-16	Joseph sold as a slave by his brothers, rescued by God	Genesis 37-50
Acts 7: 17-27	Moses, appointed by God but rejected by Israelites	
Acts 7:28-39	Moses sent to Egypt to save the people of Israel; leads them to freedom, but "our fathers refused to obey him."	
Acts 7: 40-43	The golden calf and idol worship	
Acts 7:44-50	The temple replaces the tabernacle (tent), but God does not live in houses built by men.	

5. What common accusation does Stephen draw from all these Old Testament passages (v9, 35, 39)? How does he apply this to his listeners? (V51-53)

7. Stephen is accused of speaking against the temple - "this holy place" (6:13). How does his speech identify other places as holy, rather than Jerusalem?

V2	
V9	
V30-33	
V36	
V44-45	

8. According to verse 53, there's one thing worse than not having had God's law. What is it?

9. **Read 7:54-60.** How do the hearers respond?

Why might Jesus be **standing** at the right hand of God?

10. What two similarities can you see between the last words of Stephen recorded here, and the last words of Jesus?

### REPLAY...

What we're seeing here is the death of Jesus playing out all over again! Even though the long promised Messiah of the Jews had come, they didn't want to know him. And even though Jesus had risen from death and ascended to rule with God (where Stephen sees him in verse 56) they simply don't want to hear about him. The Jewish leaders literally cover their ears - and then stone him to death! Maybe you've met people who have a similar reaction to hearing about Jesus?

### Read 8:1-8.

11. As Stephen is stoned to death, there is one young man watching with particular approval. Who?

12. God delights in bringing good from bad. How do the events of 8: 1b and 8:4 help fulfill the strategy Jesus gave in Acts 1:8?

The gospel is unstoppable! As persecution increases, the message simply spreads wider. In fact, it's on record that that has been the trend right through the history of Christianity.

13. During this study series, we've been encouraged to become bolder in speaking about Jesus. Are there any times that this has brought opposition for you? What lessons can you draw from Stephen's example as you face suffering and opposition?

### PRAYER POINTS:

Pray for one another, that when we face opposition for the sake of the gospel we will actually grow bolder and stronger rather than weaker!

# ACTS 8: A MIRACLE OF MULTICULTURALISM

## THINK IT OVER...

Should we expect to see **more** miracles today? Are we lacking faith? Would more people become believers if we could do more miracles? Talk it over with your group.

## THE STORY SO FAR...

**Read Acts 8:4-40.** At this point in Acts, the focus shifts from Stephen to Philip. Look back to 6:5, and you'll notice he's the second of the seven men appointed to distribute food to the widows. Funny thing... like Stephen, the next we hear of Philip is that he's proclaiming the gospel! For some reason, the focus has shifted from the apostles to this second rank of (Hellenistic) gospel workers – perhaps because they are the ones who are the first to do what Jesus said, and break the boundaries of Israel. In fact, this is a **very significant** point in the book!

1. Why do you think Acts 8:5 should be seen as an important point in the book? (Hint: where have you heard about Samaria and its inhabitants before?)
2. According to 8:6, what was the effect of the miraculous signs Philip did?

## "GIVE US A SIGN!"

In this case, the signs Philip did made the Samaritans pay close attention to his words. Like the apostles, Philip's priority was **ministry of the word (6:4), and that should be our priority too.**

## SIMON THE SORCERER

3. Simon was able to do some amazing tricks - whether genuine or fake we don't know. In what ways does he use his abilities to his own advantage? How does this contrast with the example of the apostles? (See Acts 3:12-13, 4:7-10; and 14:11-15)
4. What is it that turns the people from following Simon to following Philip?
5. What do you think motivated Simon to "believe and be baptised" too? (v13)

## THE APOSTLES CHECK IT OUT

6. Remember that the Samaritans were traditionally enemies of the Jews. What do you see as the possible significance of the events of verses 14 to 17?

This was a **huge turning point** in the history of the Kingdom of God. The Samaritans and the Jews were related races, but for hundreds of years they had been separated by deep hostility. The Samaritans had a temple of their own, and were viewed with suspicion by the Jews. As Philip is preaching "the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" in Samaria (8:12) he is taking a phenomenal step. He's inviting the Samaritans to join in! It's likely that the Apostles were called in to make the step "legitimate" - and the giving of the Spirit at their arrival confirmed, for them, God's approval.

7. What is Simon's reaction to the coming of the Spirit?
- a) What was it that he was longing for?
  - b) How does Peter respond?
  - c) In what ways do people today repeat Simon's mistake?
8. In this chapter, we've seen a number of 'right' and 'wrong' responses to the Spirit, to the signs and wonders of the apostles, and to the preaching of the gospel. Try to summarise these responses under these three headings...

	The Spirit	Signs and Wonders	The Word
Right Responses			
Wrong Responses			

9. It's easy to want all the wrong things! Simon loved to be the centre of attention, and longed for the same powers as the apostles. He wanted this power for all the wrong reasons. From the things you've summarised above, how should we deal with these same issues (and temptations) when they arise?

**Wow! What a book!** And we're less than half way through! We are just at the start of the breakthrough that would see the gospel of Jesus Christ taken to the world beyond Jerusalem and Israel.

But the book goes much further than that. As God establishes his church as the vehicle for the gospel to move out into the world, we can learn about the principles that the church was built on. Are we sticking to those principles? Do we have the same unswerving commitment to the gospel that the Apostles and other early believers had? Not just in doing evangelism (although that is very important), but in the way we let the gospel drive *who we are* and *how we function* as the body of Christ.

We mustn't skip the painful step of self-examination and prayerful repentance. In your group, discuss how you should do this, and how the things you've learned in these studies should change the way you live and serve the risen Lord Jesus...

**PRAYER POINTS:**