

STEP 38

The Early Church Period- The Beginning of Something Great...Acts 1:1-28:31

The Early Church Period is comprised of only one book, **Acts**. It contains the birth of the church and the early work of the Holy Spirit in the Church. It truly was the *Start of Something Great*.

Acts is the historical account of the early church. Within the framework of this book can be found the background events in which the letters to the churches were written. Therefore, **Acts** is a key book in understanding the rest of the New Testament.

To take a trip through the pages of **Acts** is to be present when the Holy Spirit gives birth to the church at Pentecost, travel on missionary journeys with Paul, evangelize with Phillip, solve problems with the apostles, and even die with Stephen. **Acts** also opens the window to the events that the Holy Spirit used to shape the early church.

This book, while it goes by the name of **Acts of the Apostle** in most modern Bibles, has been suggested to be more apply named the Acts of the Risen, Glorified Christ Jesus the Lord, Acts of the Holy Spirit. While it is called the **Acts of the Apostles** it records very little concerning most of the Apostles. It is Peter and Paul that are the prominent characters in the book. The book itself does not lay claim to be exhaustive in its account of the apostles.

Acts is important for various reasons. Without it we would know little about the early church. The Apostle Paul who was used by God to write many of the New Testament books was not even mentioned in the gospels. **Acts** introduces him with his conversion story.

This book is not a day by day account of the early church. Instead it is a series of glimpses in the life of the church.

The author of the book is the same as the Gospel of Luke. **Acts 1:1**. Luke as you will recall was written to Theophilus. (**Luke 1:3**) This same man is the recipient of this book as well. In one sense the book is a continuation of the Gospel of **Luke**.

Acts is a very broad book for us to attempt to understand in only one STEP. I would recommend that you read and become very familiar with this book as you study the New Testament. We will study **Acts** with the following outline for our purpose.

I- The Ascension Acts 1:9-11

II- The Birth of the Church (Pentecost) Acts 2:1-41

III- The First Martyr (Stephen) Acts 7:1-60

IV- Gospel Spreads To Samaria Acts 8:1-40

V- Gospel to the Gentiles Acts 9-12

VI- The Missionary Journey of Paul Acts 13-28

I- The Ascension Acts 1:9-11

The book of Acts begins by giving us the final words of Christ as He encouraged them to wait for power from on high. After He spoke He ascended back into heaven. With His ascension is the promise of His Second Coming.

II- The Birth of the Church (Pentecost) Acts 2:1-41

John 14:16-18 contains the promise Christ gave that another

comforter would come. This was the promise that the Spirit would come that was kept on the Day of Pentecost. When the Holy Spirit swept across the believers on that day is seen my most scholars as the birth of the Church that Christ had said he would set up. The events that occurred on that day cannot nor need to be duplicated by the Church today. The tongues that causes so much controversy in the church on the day of Pentecost were known languages spoken by men who did not know that particular language. We can get side tracked easily on this tongues question and fail to realize the main thing that happened was the empowerment of the church by the Supernatural Holy Spirit for the work.

III- The First Martyr (Stephen) **Acts 7:1-60**

Stephen preaches a sermon that is a good Old Testament summation. **7:1-53** This sermon cut them to the heart and for that he will be stoned to death. **7:54-59** He become the first of a long line of martyrs for faith in Christ.

IV- Gospel Spreads To Samaria **Acts 8:1-40**

The book of Acts gives us a self-outline in **Acts 1:8**. After the stoning of Stephen and the persecution that followed the result was that gospel began to spread.

A man named Phillip was sent to preach the gospel to the Samaria. While he was in a great revival he was called away to go in Gaza to an Ethiopian. The Ethiopian is saved, baptized and then Phillip is whisked away.

V- Gospel to the Gentiles Acts 9-12

9:1-21 records the first of three times the conversion of Paul is recounted for us in Acts. Paul was set aside by God and became the apostle to the Gentiles.

Peter is nevertheless the most prominent player in this section. He saw the visions of the sheets that showed him the gospel is for every one. Cornelius sent for him and he went and preached the gospel to them and the first Gentile is converted. This takes place in Caesarea by the Sea. Peter is called to defend his actions in preaching the gospel to the Gentiles and their conversion in **Acts 11**. In addition we also have the record of the gospel going into Antioch. It was there that the converts were first called Christians. **(11:26)** Antioch also become the center of missionary activity from this point on. Until this time the center has been Jerusalem.

VI- The Missionary Journey of Paul **Acts 13-28**

The last **Acts 16** records the gospel spreading into the whole world. The focus now shifts from the ministry of Peter to the ministry of Paul.

A- First Missionary Journey **Acts 13:1-14:28**

The purpose of the journeys of Paul was to plant churches and to help those already planted by him. As he came to a city he would generally go into the synagogues and preach Christ. His first journey took about two years. He went to Selucia and departed for Cyprus. **(13:4-12)**. Next the move was to Perga **(13:13)** and there it was where John Mark left the party and returns to Jerusalem.

They next traveled to Antioch in Pisidia and Paul went to the synagogue to preach. The Gentiles received the gospel but the Jews were upset at the preaching of Jesus. Next the move was to Iconium (**14:1-7**). Paul and Barnabas became aware of a plot to stone them and escaped town.

The next stop was Lystra. (**14:8-20**) Paul performed a miracle on a man crippled from birth. The people thought they were Greek gods that had come to earth. Paul seizes the opportunity to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

They travel next took them to Derbe (**14:20-21**) and finally back to Antioch and reported to the church.

B- The Jerusalem Council

Acts 15:1-35

The first church council was called to settle the question of how a Gentile could be saved and enter the church. On one side were those who demanded you must be circumcised and on the other side those who said circumcision had nothing to do with their salvation. James, the half brother of Christ, was the man in charge of this council. He gave the decision reached by the council, as no circumcision (which represented legalism) needed for salvation.

C- Second Missionary Journey

Acts 15:36-18:22

The second journey begins with a disagreement over John Mark who had deserted them on the first journey. Paul and Barnabas part company over him. During this second trip Silas would be Paul companion. They first checked to see how the work was going in the places they traveled to on the first journey. Derbe and Lystra (**15:1-5**),

Troas (**16:6-10**) and Philippi (**16:11-40**). At Philippi Lydia was the first convert in Asia and the Philippian jailor is saved.

He then goes to Thessalonica (**17:1-9**) and on to Berea (**17:10-14**) and Athens (**17:15-34**). He visits Corinth (**18:1-17**) where he met Aquila and Priscilla who would be of great value to the gospel. He remained in Corinth for at least a year and a half before returning to Antioch.

D- Third Missionary Journey

Acts 18:23-21:19

On his third journey he would visited the Galatian county as well as Phrygia (**18:23**). He worked in the city of Ephesus (**19:1-41**) for almost three years. He also traveled to Macedonia and Greece (**20:1-3**) He visited many other cities on this journey as well.

E- The Trip to Rome.

Acts 21:17-28:31

Paul had a great desire to preach to the city of Rome. God allowed him to do this but I'd say Paul did not every consider for a moment the mode of transportation that would arrive him at Rome. He traveled as a Roman prisoner. This last section contains the shipwreck and trials of life of Paul in his struggles as he went to Rome. In all there were a total of three different ships used in this travel as well as land travel. However Paul continued to preach the gospel along the way. Or we might say he lived the gospel along the way. From Rome he had a chance to touch the world because Rome was the center of the world at that time. Eternity alone will tell of the conversions that took place as a result of this great man's submission to the Holy Spirit.

