

Acts: A Model for Today's Church

Introduction: Why was Acts written?

HISTORICAL Purpose: Acts traces the first 30 years of the early church, from its beginning in Jerusalem to its establishment in Rome. We see this religious movement called “the Way” rise from being a small group in a backwater outpost of the Empire to a major force in the seat of the Western world!

APOLOGETIC Purpose: Luke wrote Acts to give a defense – to prove the political innocence of the new church to the Roman political machine (e.g., 25:8-11). Also, Luke defends the early church against the unbelieving Jews (4:8-12).

EVANGELISTIC Purpose: An underlying purpose in Luke's account of the early church is winning souls to Jesus Christ. Luke's account makes it clear that Christ died for the salvation of all mankind – a universal scope.

Acts 1

I. Institution of the CHURCH AGE (1:1-8)

Q: Just before His ascension, what did the disciples expect Jesus to do?

> Instead of what they expected, Jesus instituted the “church age.”
“church age” defined: that period between the 1st and 2nd Comings of Jesus Christ.

> Significance? It wasn't yet time for the completion of all things. Rather, Jesus inferred that there was much yet for his followers to do. The implication here is a shift is taking place – placing a definite task upon the believer's shoulders.

What are the 3 aspects of the church age as listed in vv. 7-8?

(1) We don't know the LENGTH of this age – we simply can't know WHEN CHRIST WILL RETURN.

* “I'm convinced He'll return in my lifetime.” – folly. Also irrelevant. Why?

> At the close of my lifetime (which could be today), I'll face Him. I better be ready either way!

(2) We are EMPOWERED by the coming of the Holy Spirit.

i. Power to PREACH THE GOSPEL effectively – not mere human skill

(ill: my conversation with Blake about leading worship)

ii. Power to PERFORM MIRACLES confirming the gospel message

(3) We are Jesus' WITNESSES to the world.

Q: In a trial, what makes a good witness?

> Thus, what does a witness do ... and not do?

II. A Double Prophecy (1:9-11)

- > While we may not be sure of the time of His return, we can be sure of the NATURE of Jesus' return:
... He will descend in BODILY FORM.

III. A Mundane, Yet Very Significant Act: The REPLACEMENT of JUDAS! (1:12-26)

How many of you answered the question correctly?

“Who replaced Judas as one of the 12 apostles?”

A: MATTHIAS

- > Why don't more people know the answer? A: He's not Biblically significant except for this event.
So ... why is he mentioned here?

(1) 1:15-22 – The early believers recognized the need to apply the Old Testament scriptures / prophecies to their lives and ministries!

- * ill: Some people claim they only need to read the NT – the early church immediately endorses the OT & nullifies the idea that the OT isn't necessary in new covenant life.

*** MORE IMPORTANTLY

(2) 1:23-26 – The METHOD by which Matthias was chosen is very important!

> He was chosen BY LOT!

-- Modern counterparts: drawing straws; pulling names out of a hat

-- This was a VALID way of discerning God's will (Prob. 16:33) – they prayed before casting lots!

- > This was (a) the last event before the Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost (Acts 2)
and (b) the last time 'casting lots' would ever be used by the NT church! Why?

Key: With the coming of the HS on the believer, we now have access to the Spirit's POWER
Some of those powers: DISCERNMENT; DIRECTION; GUIDANCE

“... it's like a circuit judge in the brain.”

-- lyrics from Newsboys' “Spirit Thing”

We don't have to invent tricks to find out God's will for our lives. We don't need to flip “spiritual” coins to make our choices! Consider Gideon's fleece (read Judges 6:36-40). How do we sometimes imitate Gideon's actions in our lives? What would be a better way to make our decisions?

- > ill: buying furniture in Atl

Next Week: “It's Just A Spirit Thing”

Acts 2