

# The Acts of the Non-apostles

by Nancy Kuhlman

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## Leader's Guide

### Lesson 1 – The Empowering of God's People

*The goal of this six-session study is to help class members realize they are the means God has chosen and equipped to carry out His mission on earth. It is designed for use in a small-group setting, giving participants opportunity for discussion. It is most effective if participants have the lesson ahead of time and prepare for the session by answering the questions in advance.*

*The theme of Acts is in Acts 1:8, where Jesus tells his disciples, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The book opens soon after the crucifixion of Jesus and records the spread of the Gospel over 30 years. In that short period of time, the church grew from what was considered an insignificant Jewish sect to a major force in the Roman Empire. And that growth does not end with the end of the book of Acts. It continues today.*

*It is an amazing account, and I think you will be intrigued as the Holy Spirit guides us through this study. What was set into motion on that first Pentecost after Jesus' death and resurrection has tremendous impact on us today.*

*Visual aids help people learn. A time line, with points showing the development and growth of the church as the story unfolds through the six weeks of the study, would be one such helpful tool.*

#### Read Acts 1:1-11

1. From Acts 1:1-2; Luke 1:1-4; Colossians 4:14; and 2 Timothy 4:9-11, who is the author of the book of Acts and what do we know about him?  
*The author is Luke—a physician, a careful historian and close and loyal companion of Paul*
2. If Luke's Gospel is about "all that Jesus began to do and teach...", what is happening in Acts?  
*Jesus' work is continued as the Gospel is spread by believers empowered by the Holy Spirit.*  
*Note: Many Bible scholars note that the book, "The Acts of the Apostles," could quite appropriately be named, "The Acts of the Holy Spirit." We repeatedly read that people are "filled with" or "led by" the Holy Spirit.*
3. Luke, in essence, wrote a two-volume account of the life and work of Jesus. How does the work of Jesus appear in the book of Acts?  
*Acts tells what Jesus continued to do in the person of the Holy Spirit after He ascended to heaven. The Holy Spirit works through God's people to carry out God's will, whether or not these people are named in the book.*
4. Use Acts 1:8 as an "outline" to show the unfolding of the theme of this book. Name some of the "major players" in the drama (Acts 2:14; Acts 9:4).  
*The work of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts is seen in the most detail in the ministries of the Apostles Peter and Paul, but that work is also seen through the many non-Apostles who spread the Gospel. And it becomes dramatically clear when we look at what was going on with these people.*



*A children's book by Richard Scarry, Cars and Trucks and Things That Go, can be an interesting visual aid. Scarry's wonderful children's books are crammed with action pictures of all kinds of appealing animal characters. What captures the imagination of many children, and this adult, is the appearance of one little character, Goldbug, on every page. Goldbug is not always obvious; in fact, sometimes you'll swear that he is not on the page. But keep looking—you'll find him. This demonstrates one way in which we're going to look at the book of Acts. Like Goldbug in Richard Scarry's books, the Holy Spirit is present throughout the book. If we only focus on the main characters of Peter and Paul, we might miss an important point. So we focus on the "lesser characters," some of whom aren't even named, and we see where the Holy Spirit is working and what He is doing. In leading this study, I used Scarry's Cars and Trucks and Things That Go repeatedly as a visual aid. Everyone enjoyed it and got the point.)*

5. Why were the disciples to remain in Jerusalem? (verse 4)

*To receive power.*

*It is very important to point out that God equips those He calls.*

For what purpose will they receive this power?      *To spread the Gospel (v. 8—be witnesses)*

What does this tell you about what God wants and His plan for accomplishing it?

*God wants everyone to hear the Gospel of salvation. His plan is to equip people with the Holy Spirit to enable them to do this work.*

6. It is clear that Peter and Paul and the other "famous" people of the Bible were not the only people involved in the amazing spread of the Gospel. Who else is involved?

*Many named and unnamed individuals and groups.*

Why do you think it is important for us to understand this?

*It's tempting to think the work is for someone else to do. In reality, God's plan is that all His people participate in some way in the work.*

### Read Acts 1:12-14

7. What did the disciples do while they were waiting for this "power" that Jesus promised?

*Met together and prayed constantly.*

### Read Acts 1:15-26

8. What general principles did the disciples consider in selecting a replacement for Judas?  
*Prayer; they deliberated and reported to the 120 believers; referred to Scripture for guidance; considered the necessary qualifications for candidates; left the final decision up to God.*
9. How are these principles followed in *our* church today?  
*Look for examples such as call committees, voters meetings, etc. that demonstrate how church members today are doing the same sorts of things the disciples did then.*



10. Remember the context here—they were *waiting*. Maintaining their numbers and meeting and praying and voting were in preparation for what was to come. For what were they preparing?  
*Consider the concept of waiting in preparation. These people were waiting for the power promised them for carrying out the Great Commission. They were “taking care of business” in preparation for a greater purpose—that of carrying out God’s mission.*

11. How does viewing some of the activities of our congregation from the perspective of preparation help you see the connection between these activities and God’s purpose for His Church?  
*Extends our vision beyond the immediate task at hand to God’s plan and purpose.*

What might such a change of perspective on “church work” bring about in a congregation?  
*Members would see a connection to the mission of the church in the service they are performing.  
What might be a pitfall if we don’t see the connection?*

### Read Acts 2:1-13

12. What attracted people to the disciples at Pentecost?  
*The sound of wind got their attention.*
13. How does being filled with the Holy Spirit relate to being a witness for Jesus? *The Holy Spirit makes it both possible and effective. He works through the mouth of the speaker and on the heart of the hearer.*

### Read Acts 2:14-21

14. Martin Luther said the event of Pentecost marked a change. “There will not be some order - as there was in that old people [the Israelites] - of those who alone had the power of priestly function. Instead, the Holy Spirit will be poured out on all flesh. All will be teachers and priests of God.” \*  
*Tell the students to pinch themselves. That flesh —yours. You have the Holy Spirit poured out on you. You are teachers and priests of God.*

How do we at *this* church fit into this picture and what does that mean in terms of our place in God’s plan? *Encourage discussion about how members perceive the mission of their congregation and how it relates to that of the whole Church on earth.*

### Read Acts 2:42-47.

15. What reliance do you see developing in the early church?  
*Reliance on the Holy Spirit for everything - an awareness of His presence and power.*

*That awareness of the Holy Spirit and reliance on Him of the early church is often looked back on with longing. Somehow “church” then seemed more exciting, more alive, than “church” now. What changed? What would happen today in a congregation when reliance on the Holy Spirit is increased? Karen Kogler, in the paper on which this study is based, suggests that such an increased reliance “would likely be demonstrated by increased prayer. Our planning, working and fellowship together would be infused with prayer, rather than simply (and sometimes perfunctorily) begun and concluded with prayer. An increased reliance on the Holy Spirit would also result in increased alertness for His activity in our lives and the lives of others, believers and non-believers alike, with heightened anticipation and expectation of the Spirit’s action. Such an increased*



*reliance on the Holy Spirit would certainly also bring with it two other qualities: increased joy, so that, like the disciples in Psidian Antioch, we would be 'filled with joy and the Holy Spirit' (13:52), and also increased boldness, like those in Acts 4:31 who 'were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God boldly.'"*

16. What picture do you get of the role of prayer in the church? (see also Acts 1:14; 4:31; 12:5)  
*It was a major activity of the group.*
17. Describe the role and meaning of "fellowship" in the early church. Explore what such a fellowship would look like in our congregation today. *More than a social activity or coffee and donuts after church, it might include more overt prayer, more sharing and caring and support for each other's role in ministry.*
18. What words from vv 43-47 describe the sense of unity in Christ the early church experienced?  
*They had the shared experience of seeing wonders and signs, they pooled their resources for the good of the group, and they worshipped together as a whole, as well as in small groups.*

What can we do right now to regain that acute awareness?

*Talk to each other about what God is doing in our lives, especially what He's doing to motivate us to ministry.*

19. What did the Apostles teach? (quickly review Peter's sermon in vv. 14-40)  
*Facts about Jesus' life, death and resurrection; showing Him to be the Messiah promised in Scripture.*

How do we also devote ourselves to the Apostles' teaching today?

*Corporate/personal Bible study and application of what is learned; hearing and applying sermons to our lives*

20. What did Jesus say about the practice of breaking bread together? (see Matthew 26:26-28)  
*His body and His blood given for us*

21. How did outsiders respond to the church (v. 47)? They *liked* the Christians!

Do others today respond the same way to our "Christian community"? Explain and explore.

*Discuss what outsiders saw in that group of early believers that caused them to find favor in the eyes of outsiders. Consider how our church could "find favor" in our community. What would we need to do?*

*Closing prayer: Heavenly Father, right now, increase our reliance on Your Holy Spirit, increase our awareness of Your constant presence with us and in us, increase our understanding that You have called, equipped, and empowered us to carry out Your mission in our world today. Make us both bold and joyful as we serve You. Amen*

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\*quoted on page 27 in *Acts* by Richard D. Balge, from the *People's Bible Commentary* series, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri, 2005.

