

The Acts of the Non-Apostles

by Nancy Kuhlman

Leader's Guide

Lesson 6 – The Progression of God's Plan

Aim: to help class participants see themselves as part of the same church that started in Acts and to experience the same excitement, joy and sense of purpose that permeated the church then.

Review

Present a brief summary of the points presented in the past 5 lessons.

- *God desires that all people might come to the knowledge of Jesus Christ and be saved.*
- *Toward that end, the Lord sent His Holy Spirit to empower His disciples - then and now - to do that work.*
- *He united His people into His body, the Church, and entrusted His Word, the very power of salvation, to us.*

Read Acts 2:17-21

1. How do you think Peter's use of the Old Testament prophecy from Joel indicates that Pentecost is a point on the continuum in God's plan?
Peter used Joel's words, which would have been familiar to the Jews, to bring the ancient promise into the present, and on into the future. Pentecost was an ancient and well-established Jewish festival.
2. In what way would you describe Pentecost as a starting point?
It was the beginning of the rapid spread of the Gospel. It instantly went beyond the small band of Jewish believers to include thousands of Jews who had gathered in Jerusalem, and quickly went out over the land, first to areas where dispersed Jews had fled, and then jumped cultural, religious and racial boundaries and spread to and among Gentiles throughout the world, and is still moving across the earth today.
3. How is Matthew 28:18-20 connected to this starting point?
In these verses, Jesus charged His disciples with the commission of taking the message of what He did and taught, the Gospel message, to the whole world.
4. How does Luke connect Jesus' earthly life and works with what is happening in Acts? (See Acts 1:1-2).
In Acts 1:1-2 Luke states what he had written in his first book, the gospel of Luke, was what "Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven." In his second book, the book of Acts, Luke picks up where he left off. Acts continues the story of Jesus - but now it's His Holy Spirit acting.

In the events immediately following Pentecost, we see individuals (i.e. Peter, John, dispersed Jews) but very little of an organized structure for the work. As Acts unfolds, a new picture emerges.

Read Acts 4:32-37

5. Where in these verses do you see that a *corporate identity* among believers is developing?
³²All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. ³³With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. ³⁴There were no needy persons among them. For



from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. ³⁶Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), ³⁷sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet." (Note the introduction to, and the background of, a future missionary)

Read Acts 6:1-6

6. What corporate action and indication of a more formal organization do you see in these verses?
Delineation of duties and the development of a structure to support ministry. At first the spread of the Gospel by the non-Apostles, the dispersed Jews, occurred without planning or intent on their part. Now we see some organization and intentional planning going on. The Holy Spirit created the church and is leading it.

Read Acts 11:19-26; 13:1-3

7. Describe the establishment of this congregation and the actions you see that show it functioning as a corporate body that understands its mission.
The Gospel was proclaimed to both Jews and Gentiles; many believed. News about these new believers reached the apostles in Jerusalem. They sent Barnabas, who came and taught and encouraged them. Then he went to find Paul and bring him to Antioch to provide further teaching.
8. What elements do you see present in the church at Antioch that would contribute to its understanding of its identity and its purpose?
The Word was both spoken and taught. There was considerable desire to hear the Word and the teaching. A group identity was evident to outsiders. A sense of unity and purpose appears to be present. They heard the Holy Spirit's direction and acted on it by sending out missionaries.

Read Acts 14:26-28

9. How is this church a "support system" for the missionaries it sent out?
They prayed for the missionaries, asking for God's protection for them and praising God for what He was doing through these missionaries. The missionaries reported back to the sending church - they were a team - and spent time with them. This church understood the concept of being the body of Christ.
10. What do you surmise might have been occurring during the "long time" mentioned in verse 28?
Possible answers include mutual encouragement and teaching, prayer, planning, time of physical rest and refreshment, time for gathering needed personnel and supplies for the next trip.

Read Acts 15:1, 6

11. What challenge occurs here to test the unity of the church?
Judaizers wanted to interject law into the message of salvation being proclaimed to the Gentiles; doctrinal disagreement divides the body
12. In what way is the corporate identity of the church strengthened by it?
Disagreement provides opportunity for deeper discussion and teaching, resulting in strengthening of the body.



13. Where do you “see” the Holy Spirit at work? *In the agreement to the truth.*
14. In what situations do we see this “testing” concept occur in the church today, and how can it strengthen us as a church?
Many of our disputes deal with bringing the church “up-to-date” in its appeal to the masses. As we work together to separate tradition from truth, and agree on the truth, we are strengthened.
15. How did the “sent” missionaries and the “sending” church members spend their time together? (v.35)
The Apostles “and many others” taught and preached God’s Word. God’s Word unified them, strengthened them, and defined their common purpose.
16. In your opinion, how is the church today both the same as and different from the church in Acts?
Answers may vary, but our hope is that people would see that the Church is the same in its identity as the body of Christ, its mission of spreading the Gospel, and its empowering by the Holy Spirit. The Church today is simply at another point on the same continuum as the Church in Acts.
17. As a non-apostle member of the church today, what challenges you as you look at the early acts of the non-apostles?
Help class to be as specific as they can about the challenges they see.

Concluding remarks:

Just as Goldbug was a theme in the Richard Scarry book, we’ve seen a theme of the Holy Spirit’s work in our study of the book of Acts from the perspective of the non-Apostles. First we see individuals with a common belief and faith; large numbers of individuals, thousands even, at Pentecost. Then we see small groups of these people working and praying and encouraging one another together. Disputes and disagreements arise and are settled and the unity grows. The corporate church at Antioch understands their mission and intentionally seeks to undertake God’s work through fasting and praying and listening to teachers of the Word. They didn’t just talk about what they could or should or would do “if...” They put it into action. They sent out Paul and Barnabas at the direction of the Holy Spirit. They continued their involvement by actively supporting those whom they sent out. Paul and Barnabas were sent out but not gone from this church in spirit. There were no “Lone Rangers” here - the senders and the sent were a team.

When people see the “organized church” as an impersonal and uninspiring entity, those people do not understand and accept their individual role in God’s plan for the salvation of people through the spread of the Gospel. The church in Acts saw its organizational structure as a means to an end.

We ARE the church in Acts! The Holy Spirit is in us—calling us, equipping us, filling us—to continue to do the work of spreading the Gospel. WE are living the next chapter of the record of the Acts of the Holy Spirit.

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