

# The Acts of the Non-Apostles

by Nancy Kuhlman

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## Leader's Guide

### Lesson 4 – God's Plan is People

*Aim: to help class participants see God's purpose for their lives and to become involved in active service to God.*

#### Review:

- Who has been empowered and instructed by God to carry out His work?
- What "resource" has God provided for bringing the message of salvation to the world?

*God's plan is to use people to spread His word. He has equipped and empowered us by sending His Holy Spirit to us and He has given us His Word that is filled with His power. But look deeper at this whole thing - His plan IS to use people and He connects us together in a very special relationship to one another. That relationship is the church. That's our corporate identity as people of God. So when we say God's plan is people, we need to expand our thinking beyond ourselves as individuals. We ARE individuals. God uses us individually. But we are more than a gathering together of individuals into an organization called the church. The church - all believers together - is the body of Christ. Scripture goes into quite a bit of detail trying to get across to us this concept. Starting with Acts 2:42-47, we see a sort of "all for one and one for all" idea developing among the early believers. This is the beginning emergence of their corporate identity. In Colossians 2:19 and Ephesians 4:16 we read that this entire body is supplied and held together by joints and ligaments and grows with a growth which is from God. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul goes into detail. He talks about the various spiritual gifts that we have, but he emphasizes that we individuals, with our individual spiritual gifts, are part of a whole. The whole is the body of Christ. The body of Christ is the church. God has given the responsibility of spreading His message of salvation to the world to His church. His church is people. So come back to the statement that God's plan is people. He gave His powerful Word to people to use to accomplish His desire to proclaim salvation to the world. But "people" has both an individual and a corporate meaning, and we need to understand and view ourselves as a part of that corporate entity.*

#### Acts 2

1. Look at Peter's quotation of the Old Testament prophet Joel in Acts 2:17 - 21. What does Peter want the audience to understand?

*The prophecy is being fulfilled among them.*

Why does he use an Old Testament (Joel 2:28-32) prophecy to make his point?

*The audience that day was made up of Jews. They would have been familiar with the OT and the promises of the Messiah and the New Covenant to come. Peter is showing them how Jesus is the fulfillment of these prophecies and the clear proof is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.*

Remember the timing here. It is only a matter of weeks since Jesus was crucified, buried, and rose again. His empty tomb gave rise to rumors that became rampant. See Matthew 28:11-15. How might the people whom Peter addressed have been dealing with the empty tomb rumors?

*They undoubtedly heard the government spin and probably were struggling to sort out fact from fiction.*



3. In light of the context of the timing and the people's familiarity with Old Testament prophecy, why is Peter's emphasis in verse 24 and verses 31-32 particularly important?  
*The resurrection of the Messiah was foretold by God. Peter and the other disciples were eyewitnesses to the fact that Jesus rose from the dead. It's a clear sorting out of fact from fiction.*
4. Peter explains to a spiritually convicted crowd what they must do in verses 38-39. Explain *in your own words* how a person receives salvation and becomes a Christian.  
*Confess, repent, be baptized.*
5. What does God promise in verse 38 & 39, and to whom does He promise it?  
*He promises the gift of the Holy Spirit for them, for the next generation, and on and on through both time and distance - those who are far off in time or in geographic location or in culture. When the Gospel is proclaimed, God is calling them through the power of His Word. People hear God calling them when they hear the Gospel and their hearts respond.*

What does this say about our individual and corporate places in Joel's prophecy today?

*It's as real and true now as it was then. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit to individually and corporately proclaim the Gospel.*

6. Following Pentecost, as we saw in previous lessons, the Jews were dispersed as they fled persecution, and they proclaimed the Gospel wherever they went. (Acts 8:4) How does this dispersion show that the prophecy in Joel 2:28-32 is being fulfilled?  
*God had given his Spirit to these believers and, despite persecution, they were sharing God's Word with others wherever they went.*

Persecution and hardship do not usually look like opportunities for great blessing. How can remembering what has been promised in Joel, and restated by Peter, complete with the "object lesson" of the persecution following Pentecost, help us view the difficult times in our lives differently? What can we do with those times?

*Difficult circumstances do not prevent God from using us to accomplish His purposes.*

7. In the following references, pick out the non-Apostles and tell how the Holy Spirit worked through them to advance God's mission.

Acts 9:10-17

*Ananias was asked to go and help Saul - his and his friends' absolute worst enemy. Ananias was not asked to go proclaim the Gospel in foreign lands. He was asked to overcome his fear and bring God's message and God's healing to the eyes of Paul, the man who was asked to proclaim the Gospel in foreign lands!*

Acts 9:25

*Paul's friends protected and helped him. I wonder if at the time they were thinking they were doing a mighty work for God? Probably not. Were they?*

Acts 10:3-8, 23

*Cornelius obeys the words of an angel and sends three men to Peter. Through them, Peter understands the message of the vision (10:9-22)—that God's message is for the Gentiles, too. Simon the Tanner (10:6) and the "brothers from Joppa" (10:23) also played roles in this event*



Acts 11:20-21

*Telling the good news to people in Antioch. Keep that one in mind for next week!*

How do these seemingly small actions fit into God's very large plan?

*When we see it from God's perspective, everything is working together toward the same purpose - reaching people with the Gospel of salvation. What would the world have seen here? It's a little like a Richard Scarry illustration (see notes for question 4, Lesson 1 Leader's Guide). There's a whole lot of activity; each page a different story. Unless you look very closely, you don't always see the common denominator - the Holy Spirit (Goldbug in the Scarry book. ).*

8. Trace the unfolding of God's plan presented in Acts for getting His message of salvation to the world. *What have you seen so far? How would you describe it?*
  
9. What is *your* place in that plan today?  
*This is not a rhetorical question. You ARE a part of the body. Who and what you are is needed for the body to function properly. No part is insignificant. How do you "help the whole"?*

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