

Study of Acts

I. How the Holy Spirit helped Jesus to promote His kingdom.

See John 14:16; 15:26; 16:12-14.

- A. The Holy Spirit's work with the apostles and the Jewish church in Jerusalem.
 1. Jesus commanded the apostles to stay in Jerusalem until power came (Luke 24:49).
 2. Promise of Spirit. 1:6-8.
 3. Holy Spirit came. 2:1-4.
 4. Jesus proclaimed king. 2:36.
 5. Indwelling of the Spirit with each believer. 2:38; 5:32.
 6. Some leaders in the church were filled with the Holy Spirit. 6:10.
- B. Samaritan converts received the Holy Spirit by the hands of the Apostles. 8:15.
- C. Jesus appeared to Paul in person. 9:5. He was filled with the Holy Spirit. 9:17.
- D. Gentiles receive the Holy Spirit. 10:44, 45.
- E. The Holy Spirit directed the evangelism mission according to the strategy of the king. He also cooperated with the churches and individuals. 13:2; 16:7; 19:2; 20:28; 21:11.

II. The exegetical approach to Acts of the Apostles.

- A. Read Acts as a narrative by using the three level method:
 1. Read the individual narratives.
 2. Major moves of God with Jesus Christ as king and priest (Prince and Savior, 5:31).
 3. The ultimate level. (How this move promoted God's purpose in the creation of mankind. See what was in the mind of God before He created the world and started time).
- B. We need to ask, "What was Luke's intent?" And "What was his purpose in selecting and shaping the material in Acts, as he did?"
 1. See Luke's summary statements in Acts 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:4 and 19:20. Note that after each of these statements Luke narrated Jesus' evangelism program as He moved it into a different geographical location.

2. In light of this, Acts can be viewed in six panels or sections that give the narratives a "continually forward" movement from a Jewish background church in Jerusalem to a Gentile background church in Rome. The story in Acts is Luke's structure into which he put the content. We need the content for our faith.

C. The historical setting in each of the aforementioned panels:

1. Acts 1:1 - 6:7. Everything was Jewish. Those receiving the message of the kingdom and those who were converted (the church) were Jewish. The promises God made in the Old Testament Scriptures were used as a base points for preaching the gospel of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. The preachers were Jewish, as well as the opposition (Sadducees and Pharisees).
2. Acts 6:8 - 9:31. The geographical expansion of the kingdom in Judea, Galilee and Samaria. The preachers from the Hellenists cultural background joined the apostles. (Hellenistic. Diaspora - Jews who had accepted the Greek language and culture). The martyrdom of Stephen, one of the Seven (all Hellenistic), and the special calling of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, are key points in this section. Stephen's martyrdom may be the pivotal point on the Gentile evangelistic path to Rome. Luke included the point that this movement had the blessing of the apostles from Jerusalem (6:2). It was not a "break-a-way" movement.
3. Acts 9:32 - 12:24. Expansion of God's kingdom to the Gentiles. God used Peter, a non-Hellenistic Jew, to preach to the Gentiles, starting with Cornelius and his family.
4. Acts 12:25 - 16:5. Into the Gentile world of Asia Minor! Jesus' orders were to the Jew first, who for the most part rejected the message of Christ and His kingdom, and then to the Gentile, who held the majority membership in the church.
5. Acts 16:6 - 19:20. Westward into Europe! The same results as in Asia.
6. Acts 19:21 - 28:31 Destination Rome!

The results were the same as in Asia and the previous preaching in Europe. Speaking to the Jews Paul said, "Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!"

Was this Luke's intent for writing the Acts in the way he did for the first century church? That is, did Luke want to show how the Holy Spirit directed the building of the Lord's church from Jewish Jerusalem through Hellenistic Jewish Samaria to Rome? Rome was the Gentile center of the world.

- D. A "statement of purpose" of the author of Acts must include:
1. The Holy Spirit's role in the first century mission of Jesus.
 2. Let us note that Luke did not have much interest.
 - a). Acts of the Apostles is not a biography of the apostles.
 - b). It does not fully inform us about the government of the early church.
 - c). It is not a treatise on the geographical expansion of the church. No mention is made about Crete (Tit. 1:5) or Illyricum (Rom. 15:9) and many others (I Pet. 1:1).

III. Concerning Hermeneutics of Acts and the problem of historical precedent.

- A. Assumption: Unless Scriptures explicitly tell us what we must believe, how to behave, or to practice a certain thing, it is not a Biblical normative. What is merely narrated, or described, can never, on that basis only, function in a normative way.
- B. The reasons for this assumption is that doctrinal statements fall into three categories:
1. Christian theology (What Christians believe).
 2. Christian ethics (How Christians ought to behave).
 3. Christian experience or practice (What Christians do).

Therefore, within the foregoing categories we can further distinguish between two levels of statements we call primary and secondary:

Primary level: On this level there are those doctrinal statements derived from the explicit propositions or imperatives (what scriptures intend to teach).

Secondary level: Here we find those statements derived only incidentally; that is, by implication or by historical precedent.

See the foregoing principles in the book entitled, "How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth" by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart. Pp 107-125.

Questions for Discussion

1. The Apostle John recorded the details of Jesus' final instructions about how He, the king, would work with the apostles in His evangelism

strategies. Please read the scriptures listed from John. How did Jesus plan to communicate His teachings and instructions for the apostles after He returned to God's throne?

2. List some other ways your answer to question one would assist Jesus in evangelism and the building of His church?
3. What is meant by reading a narrative with the three level method?
4. How did "geographical locations" appear to have a bearing on Luke's intent for writing Acts?
5. Why would we expect the promises from the Old Testament would be used as the base for evangelism of the audience in the first panel of scriptures (Acts 1:1- 6:7)?
6. How might we arrive at the dimensions (the beginning and ending of the block of scripture) of these six panels that have been suggested as a proper exegetical approach for reading Acts?
7. How did the persecution of Christians by Saul and Stephen's martyrdom play a role in the expansion of Jesus' evangelism?
8. Describe a Hellenist.
9. What was the king's standing sequential order for preaching the kingdom to all the people in the world?
10. After an intense effort of evangelism for the Jews only, who received more of Paul's time and energy in relation to Jesus' sequential order for worldwide evangelism?
11. In our attempt to determine Luke's intent (Statement of Purpose) for recording Acts, what are some things in which he did not show much interest?
12. Why must the Holy Spirit be included in any discussion of the story in Acts?
13. What is a Biblical normative?
14. The Apostle Paul was careful to follow Jesus' sequential order of evangelism when he arrived in Rome. In what way was the results about the same as it had been in Asia and other European cities?