

THE  
DISCIPLESHIP  
PLACE

Telling the New Testament  
Story of God



**SESSION 10**

The Gospel to the Nations

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# The Gospel to the Nations

## SESSION OVERVIEW

**The Development of the Earliest Church**

**The Missionary Efforts of the Early Church**

**Application**

**Exam**

**Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

## LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- gain an understanding of the author, audience, date, and place for Acts.
- see how Luke constructed his history of the Church by looking at the main sections and paralleling the lives of Peter and Paul.
- gain an appreciation of why Acts was written.

# The Gospel to the Nations

## INTRODUCTION



The first two verses of Acts read: “In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.” Acts, therefore, is the continuation and expansion of a story begun in the Gospel of Luke. It picks up where the Gospel of Luke leaves off.

After a treatment of introductory issues, we will survey Luke’s story of the development of the Early Church and its mission to the nations of the world. We will highlight the lives of two individuals of particular importance in this period, namely Peter and Paul. In so doing we will use the exegetical questions presented in session five involving Who, What, Where, When, and Why.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EARLIEST CHURCH

### NOTES

#### WHO IS THE AUTHOR? WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT HIM?

- Technically, Acts is anonymous since Luke does not give his name.
- Tradition, since the AD 100s, has always suggested Luke, the Greek physician who accompanied Paul (Col. 4:14). Luke is also mentioned in Philem. 24 and 2 Tim. 4:11.
- Eusebius, an Early Church historian, wrote in his *Ecclesiastical History* that Luke was from Antioch and he was the author of Luke and Acts.
- The “we” passages in Acts which begin in 16:10 and go through 20:4-6 eliminate Paul’s other companions as the possible author. The “we” sections are portions of Acts where the author uses the personal pronoun we placing himself in the narrative. However, we is sometimes used in narratives of that time by authors who were not present, but wished to give a more dynamic, immediate feel to their story, so this evidence is not conclusive, but adds to the other evidence we have.
- The medical terms used are also not definitive, but suggestive of Luke, the physician. Also the cultured, Greek writing style points to Luke. Howard Clark Kee says, “The complexity of the sentences, the acknowledgment of predecessors in the field, the expression of purpose by the writer, and the address to the patron are all literary conventions of the time. Luke is making a bid to have his books regarded seriously by the sophisticated of his day.”
- Virtually all scholars agree the same author wrote Luke and Acts since the style and language are identical in Luke and Acts and the addressee is the same—Theophilus. However, they do not all agree it was Luke.

#### TO WHOM WAS IT WRITTEN?

- Theophilus: In Acts 1:1, Luke addresses Theophilus and reminds him of Luke’s first book about Jesus, the Gospel of Luke.
- Luke 1:3 refers to “most excellent Theophilus” while Acts 1:1 uses the simple name as if he is continuing a story.
- Theophilus can be translated: lover of God or friend of God since *philus* is the Greek word for friendship love. So some suggest Luke may be


**NOTES**

referring to someone or anyone who loves God. Most scholars, however, see Theophilus as an actual person.

- The term used in the Gospel of Luke, “Most excellent,” would ordinarily be used of a Roman of High Rank.
- It is generally recognized that the Gospel of Luke was addressed primarily to a broader Gentile audience (as indicated in session 5) due to his explanation of Jewish practices, geography, and the use of Greco-Roman names for locations. Acts would share in this audience as a continuation of this story.

### WHEN WAS IT WRITTEN?

Three suggestions from Drane are:

*AD 95-100 or later:* Position of PHEME PERKINS

- Acts 5:36-37 refers to Theudas and Judas and 21:38 mentions an Egyptian troublemaker. Josephus’ *Antiquities of the Jews* 20.5.1 seems to describe the same events and it was not published until AD 93. So this section of Acts could not have been written until after AD 93. Drane’s argument against this position is that there is no evidence that Luke read Josephus as his description is different from Josephus’.
- Acts may have been written in the second century to counteract the heretic Marcion who thought Paul was the one true interpreter of Jesus. Drane’s argument against this is that Acts does not seem to have second century concerns.

*AD 62-70:* Position of AJITH FERNANDO, F. F. BRUCE, J. A. T. ROBINSON, and T. W. MANSON

- The fact that Acts ends abruptly with no mention of Paul’s death is the strongest argument for this date (Acts 28:30-31). The question is, “If Acts was written after Paul’s death, then why no word of it?” Drane’s argument against this is simply that Paul is Luke’s hero and he wants to portray him triumphantly.
- There seems to be a generally favorable attitude toward the Roman government in Acts. We know this changed in AD 64 with Nero’s persecution and other organized persecutions of the Christians. Drane’s argument against this is that Acts is simply remaining true to the spirit of the age in which the events took place.


**NOTES**

- There is no hint of the Fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. It seems Luke would have wanted to include this, as it would have been a vindication of his position on Judaism. Drane's argument is that we cannot know what would be in the mind of an ancient author or what he might be expected to write in a given situation.
- There is no mention of the books of Paul, so Acts must have been written before they were collected and circulated as a group. Acts must have been written earlier than 2 Peter.

**AD 80-85: Position of John Drane and Norman Perrin**

- If we date Mark's gospel AD 60-65, then Luke must have been written after that as he incorporates Mark's material. In Acts 1:1 he refers to Luke as the book he wrote first. The argument against this is that the prologues to Luke and Acts could have been added later and so the main body of the books were originally written and circulated earlier.
- Acts seems to reflect an early catholicism that sought to give the impression that the Early Church had a largely uncontroversial existence, indicating that Gentile Christianity was dominant. Paul's letters reveal much controversy in contrast. The argument against this is that if Luke is writing a counter history to Roman history, then he would recount the battles as they were won. He is showing the development of the Church as God designed it.

**WHERE WAS IT WRITTEN FROM AND TO WHOM?**

- Place: (Anyone's guess and has been) Ancient traditions: Achaia, Boeotia, Rome. Modern attempts: Caesarea (H. Klein), Decapolis (R. Koh), Asia Minor (K. Löning)
- Destination: (Even more unknown) Written to Gentiles in a Gentile setting.

**WHAT IS ACTS? HOW IS IT COMPOSED?**

The key verse and major outline of Acts is found in Acts 1:8.

- Witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria is found in Acts 1:1-12:35
- Witnesses to the ends of the earth is found in Acts 13:1-28:31

There are 10 major sections, with five in each of the two halves of the Book of Acts.



### *First half*

- Prologues and account of the Ascension (1:1-11)
- Founding of the Jerusalem Church (1:12-2:47)
- Work of Peter and the apostles (3:1-5:42)
- Persecution of the Hellenist Jewish Christians and the first missions (6:1-8:40)
- Preparation for the Gentile mission: the conversion of Paul and Cornelius (9:1-12:25)

### *Second half*

- First missionary journey of Barnabas and Paul: the Jerusalem conference (13:1-15:35)
- Paul's second missionary journey: evangelizing Greece (16:1-18:21); Silas and Timothy are among those present with him.
- Paul's third missionary journey: revisiting Asia Minor and Greece (18:22-20:38)
- Paul's arrest in Jerusalem and imprisonment in Caesarea (21:1-26:32)
- Paul's journey to Rome and his preaching to Roman Jews (27:1-28:31)

## **PETER AND PAUL: PARALLEL STORIES**

Not only does Luke divide the book into two parts, describing the Church's witness to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and the ends of the earth. He also has a main character or hero for each of these sections: Peter for the witness nearby and Paul for the witness faraway. Notice how carefully Luke tried to parallel these two giants of the Early Church. The careful writing is part of what scholars are referring to when they talk about Luke's style as cultured Greek.



## THE MISSIONARY EFFORTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH



### NOTES

#### WHY WAS ACTS WRITTEN? WHAT IS ITS PURPOSE?

A variety of reasons has been given for Luke's writing of Acts. Ideas from Drane, *Introducing the New Testament* are as follows:

- To show that Christianity is a faith with the potential to change the world.
- To show that Christianity can have a good relationship with the Roman government. In this way (supplementary to Drane's comments), Luke's Gospel serves as an apology or defense of Paul and the Early Church to a broader world setting. Luke defends Christianity before Rome.
- Luke claimed to be the first historian and tells his story in the style of the first-century, Greek historians. The speeches we find are typical of ancient methods of telling history. The Church was a developing institution that needed to know its origins and history. Luke provided this in an orderly and well-researched manner.

Ideas from Perkins, *Reading the New Testament* include:

- Acts is not just a Church history in the sense of a collection of events that happened to Christians in the past.
- Acts is a story in the sense that it tells of how God's providence worked through apostles Peter and Paul to bring into being the church and traditions that Luke and his readers have inherited.
- Acts as salvation history: The Gospel of Luke told the story of how the Savior came to earth, died, and was resurrected. Acts shows the role of the Church in salvation. It begins with Pentecost, when people from different nations hear the good news and accept it. They join in a fellowship to hear the teaching of the apostles, share fellowship meals, and pray together. Emphasis on the Holy Spirit would confirm to Luke's readers that the history of the Church is God's doing.
- Acts is also a counter history. Luke goes to great pains to emphasize the connections between the Christian story and the larger world of events in Roman history. His references to various Roman governors in different provinces, the death of Herod (Gospel of Luke), and the famine under Claudius are part of this pattern. Roman historians would have argued


**NOTES**

their own history was divinely guided, that they had been destined to rule the civilized world. Luke presents the Christian reader with a counter history. The Roman world is the larger context within which God's providence is working to spread the news of salvation to all peoples. According to Luke, the Church, not the Roman Empire is the divine event.

## HOW THE STORY OF ACTS DEVELOPS

The Church develops with a variety of emphases including:

- *Jesus as the Fulfillment of the Hopes of Israel:* In Luke 24, the risen but unrecognized Jesus encounters two discouraged travelers on the road to Emmaus. They had hoped that Jesus of Nazareth was the one to redeem or restore Israel (21). Through Scripture, the unrecognized traveler indicates that Jesus was this one, not in the expected way but rather through the path of suffering and death.

Luke continues to demonstrate his sensitivity to Jewish hopes in Acts with the story of the selection of Matthias completing the number of the Twelve (a number representative of the whole people of Israel) before the events of Pentecost, his stress on the fact that on the day of Pentecost "devout Jews from every nation under heaven" (2:5, NRSV) were in Jerusalem (a primary hope of the Jews was for the restoration of their people from the nations of the earth), and "Peter standing with the eleven" and speaking to the "men of Jerusalem and all who live in Jerusalem" (2:14). The development of the Church is, therefore, depicted against the backdrop of God's faithfulness to his people Israel.

- *Evangelism:* In Acts 1:8, Jesus speaking to his apostles declares: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (NRSV). Acts presents the progression of the gospel from Jerusalem (heart of the Jewish world) to Rome (heart of the Greco-Roman world). Witnessing signs of God's power, people from different nations hear and accept the Good News.
- *Nurture:* Members of the Christian community shared all things. This trait of the early Christian community is demonstrated in Acts 2:44-45 that reads: "All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need" (NRSV). Social concerns were not divorced from spiritual concerns in the early Christian Church.


**NOTES**
**PETER DOMINATES CHAPTERS 1-12**

- He is the preacher at Pentecost who interprets the significance of what is taking place (2).
- He heals, speaks before the Sanhedrin, judges Ananias and Sapphira, is miraculously delivered from jail twice, and is the first one to preach to the Gentiles when he preaches to Cornelius and his family.
- He is prominent at the Jerusalem Council (15) and sides with Paul and Barnabas.
- Other leaders during this time include: Stephen the first martyr (6 and 7); Philip the evangelist to Samaria (8); and James, the patriarch of the Jerusalem Church, head of the Jerusalem Council and half-brother of Jesus (15).

**PAUL DOMINATES CHAPTERS 13-28**

- Paul's initial appearance takes place as he persecutes the Church in Acts 8:1-3, but he has the Damascus Road experience and begins his ministry in Acts 9.
- His first missionary journey was with Barnabas (13-14). They went to Cyprus, Pamphylia, Pisidia, Galatia, and Antioch in Syria. It ends with their participation in the Jerusalem Council (15).
- The reason for the Jerusalem Council was the ongoing debate on whether or not circumcision was necessary for the Gentiles' salvation (15:1-2). James as the head of the Jerusalem Church is the spokesperson at the council and summarizes the feelings of the Jerusalem church as follows (15:19-20):
  - We should not make it difficult for Gentiles who have become Christians.
  - But they must follow ancient Jewish rules for Gentiles who live among the Jews (Lev. 16-19). He summarized these rules as:
    1. Abstaining from food polluted by idols
    2. Abstaining from sexual immorality (follow Jewish sexual standards)
    3. Abstaining from meat of strangled animals and from blood

 **NOTES**

The rationale for these rules is that with them Jewish Christians can have table fellowship (Communion) with Gentile Christians who keep them and not be condemned by their leadership for leading unclean lives.

- Paul and Barnabas split company over a disagreement on taking John Mark with them on the second missionary journey (15:36-18:21) because he had deserted them on the first journey. Paul takes Silas with him to Syria, Cilicia, Pisidia, Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, Achaia, and Jerusalem in Judea. They strengthened the churches in Syria, Cilicia, and Pisidia and established the church in Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia.
- Paul's third missionary journey (18:22-21:16) begins at his home church in Antioch of Syria, then he goes on to Cilicia, Pisidia, Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, Achaia, and Judea. Paul encourages the churches he has already visited and collects the money for the needy Christians in Judea. But he spends two years in Ephesus, his longest continuous ministry in one place.
- When he returns to Jerusalem to bring the offerings from the Gentile churches for the poor church in Jerusalem, he is arrested. After two years in jail in Caesarea Maritima, he eventually travels as a prisoner by boat to Rome, where the story of Acts leaves him under house arrest while still continuing his ministry (21:7-28:31).

## APPLICATION

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### NOTES

1. Read Acts in two different translations and look for answers to the five hermeneutical questions Who, What, Where, When, and Why. How do your findings correspond with those presented in this session? Any new insights?
2. Using information from this session and study Bibles, Bible dictionaries, or Internet websites (Biblical Studies Foundation <http://www.netbible.com>; Blue Letter Bible <http://www.blueletterbible.org>; or Crosswalk.com Bible Study Tools <http://bible.crosswalk.com>), create a map of Paul's three primary missionary journeys. Indicate cities and regions through which he traveled.

## EXAM



### NOTES

1. Luke wrote to demonstrate how Christianity stands in sharp opposition and contrast to Roman power and rule.
  - A. True
  - B. False
2. After Paul's second missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas split company over a disagreement concerning \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. the need for Gentiles to be circumcised in order to become Christians
  - B. the geographic direction for their next journey
  - C. whether or not to take John Mark with them on the second missionary journey because he had deserted them on the first journey
  - D. the best methods to present the gospel to the Gentile populations
3. In Acts, Luke makes clear his theological understanding that God no longer has a concern for the Jewish people and has shifted His attention to the Gentile world.
  - A. True
  - B. False
4. \_\_\_\_\_ is presented as the first martyr for his faith in Christ.
  - A. Stephen
  - B. Philip
  - C. Paul
  - D. James
5. Silas and Timothy were among those who accompanied Paul on his \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. first missionary journey
  - B. second missionary journey
  - C. third missionary journey
  - D. journey to Rome as a prisoner
6. Concerning Gentiles, the Jerusalem Council decided that circumcision was not necessary for the Gentiles' salvation (15:1-2).
  - A. True
  - B. False

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7. \_\_\_\_\_ was the preacher on the day of Pentecost who interpreted the significance of the events that were taking place.
  - A. Stephen
  - B. Philip
  - C. Paul
  - D. Peter
  
8. At the Jerusalem Council, Peter sides with those who believe that Gentiles should accept Jewish practices in order to become Christians.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
9. According to Perkins, Luke presents the Christian reader with a counter history. The Roman world is the larger context within which God's providence is working to spread the news of salvation to all peoples. According to Luke, the Church, not the Roman Empire is the divine event.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
10. Paul's place of longest continuous ministry was in the city of \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. Corinth
  - B. Ephesus
  - C. Philippi
  - D. Antioch of Syria
  
11. Acts was written simply as a church history in order to preserve a recollection of events that happened to Christians during the development and growth of the Early Christian Church.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
12. Early Christians were concerned with spiritual not social concerns.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
13. \_\_\_\_\_ is the first one to preach to the Gentiles when he preaches to Cornelius and his family.
  - A. Stephen
  - B. Paul
  - C. Philip
  - D. Peter

**NOTES**

14. During Paul's third missionary journey, he revisits Asia Minor and Greece.
- A. True
  - B. False
15. \_\_\_\_\_ is known for his evangelistic work in Samaria.
- A. James
  - B. Paul
  - C. Stephen
  - D. Philip



## DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT

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**NOTES**

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. If you were going to tell the story of the beginning of the Church, how would you do it? How is Acts similar to and different from the Gospels?
2. Would knowing the date of the writing of Acts affect how you would interpret it? Why or why not? Which dates do you see Acts best fitting in?
3. What principles do we find coming out of the Jerusalem Council that we can apply to the Church today?
4. Why do you think it was important for Paul to revisit the churches he had started?
5. Do you agree with Luke that the best way to tell this story is to focus on two major characters? Why or why not? How would you tell the story?
6. Why would Gentiles have been interested in God's faithfulness to Israel? Why should we?