



ACTS

MARCH 2019

Read on your own or with others,
which ever you prefer.

This leaflet is just a brief overview of the 'big picture' of this book. If you have been reading the Bible for some time you will be aware there is much more to them than you'll find here.

If you are new to reading the Bible don't worry too much if there are details you do not quite get at the moment - focus on the 'big picture'.

INTRODUCTION

The book of Acts tells us what happened after the death and resurrection of Jesus. The events took place between about 30AD and 65AD. It was written by Luke, a companion of Paul the apostle, and follows on from Luke's Gospel.

The main theme of the book is the spread of the good news of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is summarized in the first chapter as Jesus tells his disciples:

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.' Acts 1:8 (NIV (Anglicised, 2011))

As we read through the book of Acts we see this statement of Jesus being worked out.

OUTLINE

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you

The book of Acts begins with Jesus returning to heaven. This doesn't mean that the disciples are left on their own to carry out the task of spreading the Gospel. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to give them power.

God marks this new giving of the Holy Spirit in a clear and obvious way in Acts 2:1-13. Later we find other remarkable events when the Holy Spirit was given to people. These show that his power was not only for the first disciples but for the whole church, Jew and Gentile.

You will be my witnesses

Acts 2:14-41 is the first 'Christian' sermon that we have recorded. It is a message all about Jesus, who he was, what he had done and how they should respond.

In a time when we can find ourselves very familiar with the message of Jesus is it hard to think how shocking this message, and the other sermons recorded in Acts, would have been to their hearers.

To hear that they were sinners and to be told to trust in Jesus, a humble carpenter who had been crucified, would not have appealed to the culture of the day (1 Corinthians 1:22). Yet, this is the message that the church continued to spread wherever they went.

You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem

As Jesus had said, the first place where the church spread the good news of salvation was in Jerusalem. Acts 2–7 describes these early days.

You will be my witnesses ... in all Judea and Samaria

In response to persecution in Jerusalem, Christians began to spread throughout Judea and into Samaria. In chapter 8 Philip began to share the message of Jesus with Samaritans; something that would have shocked the Jewish Christians.

Culturally, the Jews and the Samaritans did not get on. Although the Samaritans acknowledged God, they weren't considered true Israelites.

It would have been hard for somebody brought up as a faithful Jew to accept Samaritans being saved through Jesus. This seems to be the reason why the new believers in Samaria did not receive the Holy Spirit until Peter and John arrived.

You will be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth

Chapter 9 onwards describes the beginning of the spread of the Gospel to the whole world.

In chapters 9-11 we have two really key events. The first is the conversion of Saul, later known as Paul. He would become a key person in the spread of the Gospel.

The second is the clear directing of God to Peter to share the message of Jesus with someone who was a non-Jew. Cornelius' household were dramatically converted and God makes it clear that they too had received the Holy Spirit. This confirmed to the church that the salvation in Jesus was for Jew and Gentile alike (Acts 11:17).

The next chapters in Acts tell us about the spread of the Gospel to more and more places in the world. People are saved and churches are started. The focus is on the work God does through Paul and his companions, but it is clear that there he is not the only one sharing the good news of Jesus.

In the last chapter we find Paul in Rome, the center of the Roman Empire. What does he find when he arrives? A church. The book ends with a picture of Paul preaching the good news of Jesus – a mission that has been passed down through the generations and is still being carried on today.

ASKING THE QUESTIONS THE BIBLE WANTS YOU TO ASK

What does this book teach you about Jesus? (Luke 24:45-47)

What does this book teach you about yourself? (James 1:23 & 2 Tim 3:16-17)

How were you encouraged? (2 Tim 3:16-17)

How were you corrected? (Romans 15:4)

What difference do the truths of this book make in your life (Matthew 7:24-27)