



Chapter 1

Evangelization in the Context of the Church

Acts 1

UNDERSTANDING

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DISCUSSION

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UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read Acts 1

The Big Picture

The opening of the Acts of the Apostles outlines the entire book while also showing that evangelization starts within the context of the authority of the Church.

The Acts of the Apostles is a historical narrative of the work of the Holy Spirit in the early Church. From the founding of the Church to the day of Pentecost to the preaching of the apostles, the Holy Spirit is working to spread the gospel message to the entire world. This historical genre or type of literature would have been known to its first audience. The ancient world had similar works such as the "Acts of Caesar," which praised the greatness of the caesars while providing moral lessons in the process. Acts of the Apostles follows a similar pattern as it recounts the greatness of the apostles and the power of Holy Spirit.

Who Wrote the Acts of the Apostles? (Acts 1:1-2)

Despite not directly referencing himself, St. Luke is normally proposed

as the author of the Acts of the Apostles. Several pieces of evidence help us know that this is true.

- Acts 1:1 addresses the letter to Theophilus and references the author's first book about what "Jesus began to do and teach." The Gospel of Luke is also addressed to Theophilus. Similar themes and vocabulary are used in each narrative.
- Historically, several early Church Fathers such as Irenaeus (180 AD), Clement of Alexandria (200 AD), and Eusebius (325 AD) all recognized St. Luke as the author.
- Through the book, we also learn that St. Luke is a companion of St. Paul during his missionary journeys. In the second half of Acts, the St. Luke uses the words "we," "us," and "our" in the narrative (16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16).

Outside of the book of Acts, we know very little else about St. Luke. Colossians 4:14 tells us that St. Luke was a physician, and it is also believed that he was a Gentile and not a Jew.

Structure of the Book (Acts 1:3-11)

The Acts of the Apostles serves as a bridge between the Gospel and our lives today. The Acts of the Apostles is a continuation of Jesus' mission on earth, and at the same time, the book has no real conclusion. In an indirect way, this reinforces the message that Jesus' mission continues through us, the Church, today.

Jesus' words in Acts 1:8 set the scene for the entire book: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."

This passage foretells the apostles' fate. The word "witness," in Greek, means martyr. This is where the English word martyr comes from. Ten out of the eleven apostles (all but John) would be killed for preaching the gospel.

Acts 1:8 also gives a geographical roadmap for how the rest of the book will unfold:

- Jerusalem (Chapters 1-7)
- Judea and Samaria (Chapters 8-12)
- The "ends of the Earth" (Roman Empire) (Chapters 13-28)

Application to Jesus

The Acts of the Apostles is not a separate story from the gospel but just another chapter, as the apostles continue the work and teachings of Jesus.

Major Themes in Acts 1

Ends of the Earth

Jesus gives His disciple a clear goal: Preach the message of the kingdom to the ends of the earth. But this wasn't a new idea; it was a fulfillment of the prophecies and covenants of the Old Testament.

The beginning of these covenants began in the book of Genesis when God established His covenant with all of mankind through Adam and Eve. As the result of sin in Adam and Noah, God re-establishes His covenant just with Abraham and his descendants (which includes the Israelites). It was always God's plan to re-establish His covenant with all of mankind once again. Isaiah 49:6 states, "You will be my

servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”

In Acts, we see the fulfillment of this plan as Israel is restored (twelve apostles symbolizing the restored twelve tribes of Israel; see Luke 22:28-30) and told to preach salvation to the ends of the earth.

We see the apostles continue the restoration of Israel, as Acts first focuses on St. Peter’s preaching of the gospel to the Jews (Acts 1-12) and then St. Paul’s preaching of the gospel to the ends of the earth with the Gentiles (Acts 13-28).

Passing of Authority (Acts 1:12-26)

Acts 1:12-26 is a great example of how authority passes on within the Church. Let’s look at some context from the Old Testament and Gospels to see where this originated and how it applies to bishops today.

This process was set in motion by Jesus, who instructed St. Peter to lead the Church during His absence (Matthew 16:13-20). In Matthew 16, St. Peter boldly declares that Jesus is the Messiah—the anointed one or king who would re-establish God’s kingdom on earth. In Jesus’ response, He appoints St. Peter to an office in His kingdom called *al-beyit* in Hebrew or (in English, “one over the household”). This office was found in many ancient kingdoms, including Israel’s (see Isaiah 22:15-25). The fact that the position was an office was also significant, because offices are passed on from one person to another. (For more on this, see the article “The Kingdom, Authority, and the Papacy” by Kevin Cotter that goes with this chapter.)

Some of this authority was also extended to the other apostles as well. In Matthew 18:18, Jesus grants the power to bind and loose to the apostles

Understanding / Evangelization in the Context of the Church

(Note: Apostles and disciples are sometimes used interchangeably in Matthew; see Matthew 10:1-2). This model establishes the authority structure of the pope and bishops in the Church today and the way that this authority is passed on.

St. Clement, who was ordained a bishop by St. Peter himself, gives us a historical account of how authority passed from the apostles in the early Church in the year 96 AD:

Through countryside and city [the apostles] preached, and they appointed their earliest converts, testing them by the Spirit, to be the bishops and deacons of future believers.... Our apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife for the office of bishop. For this reason, therefore, having received perfect foreknowledge, they appointed those who have already been mentioned and afterwards added the further provision that, if they should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry. (St. Clement, *Letter to the Corinthians* 42:4-5, 44:1-3)

With this passing of authority at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, St. Luke makes it clear that evangelization and the movement of the Holy Spirit pour forth from the offices that Jesus established. This is why FOCUS always receives the support of the bishop of a diocese or archdiocese that we serve before our apostolate works at a campus. Evangelization within the context of the authority of the Church is the biblical model for evangelizing to the ends of the earth.

Application to Your Life

Acts has no definitive conclusion. The mission of the apostles continues to be the Church's mission today.

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Acts 1

STEP 1: OPENER

Why do you think Acts of the Apostles is important for us to study today?

STEP 2: BACKDROP

The Acts of the Apostles is a historical narrative of the work of the Holy Spirit in the early Church. From the founding of the Church to the day of Pentecost to the preaching of the apostles, the Holy Spirit is working to spread the gospel message to the entire world. Today, we are going to get an overview of the Acts of the Apostles and take a look at its first chapter.

STEP 3: PASSAGE

Today's passage is Acts 1:1-26. Let's learn a little background about the book of Acts by reading Acts 1:1-2.

STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Note that answers appear in italics.

Exploration: Questions and Answers

1. The author begins the Acts of the Apostles with, “In the first book.” What is this first book?

Answer: The Gospel of Luke

2. Read Luke 1:1-4. Who is the author of the Acts of the Apostles?

Answer: St. Luke. Both the Gospel of Luke and Acts are addressed to Theophilus.

3. Read Acts 16:10-13 and Colossians 4:14. What do we learn about St. Luke? How do you think that changes the way he writes?

Answer: He is a companion of St. Paul for some of his missionary travels, and he is a physician. Being a companion, he has firsthand experience of stories or has talked to the people directly involved. Being a physician, he might write more about healings and be able to describe them well.

4. In verse 1, what do the words “all that Jesus began to do and teach” imply for the book of Acts?

Answer: Jesus continues to work and teach through the apostles and the Church.

Read Acts 1:3-11

5. What is Jesus' plan for the apostles in verses 5 and 8?

Answer: They are to wait for the Holy Spirit and then be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

6. Use the first paragraph of the section *Structure of the Book* in "What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?" to show how Acts 1:8 is a thumbnail sketch of the entire book.

7. Read Luke 22:28-30 and Isaiah 49:6. How is Acts 1:8 a fulfillment of this prophesy about a restored Israel and a message for the nations?

Answer: See the passage "Ends of the Earth" in "What Do I Need to Know about This Passage."

Read Acts 1:12-26

8. Read John 20:19. What changed between that event and what we see here in Acts 1:12-14?

Answer: They had a living encounter with the resurrected Jesus.

9. Despite their fears and failings, why do you think God still trusts the apostles to be the leaders of His Church?

Allow the group to discuss.

10. In verse 20, St. Peter refers to Judas' position as an office. From what you know about an office, why is this significant?

Answer: Offices are passed on from one person to another. Think of offices like a president or king; they don't end with the death of that person.

11. What background do we have regarding the passing of an office in God's kingdom for the Gospels and Old Testament?

Allow the group to discuss. Note to the Leader: Your group may have an expert understanding of papal and episcopal succession, or this might be their first time looking at this issue. This question can serve as a good gauge for where they are in their understanding. Use the section "Passing of Authority" from "What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?" and the accompanying article "The Kingdom, Authority, and the Papacy" to fill your group in on any gaps that might exist. The quote by St. Clement is particularly helpful in conveying how this process relates to our bishops today.

12. When most Christians think of the Acts of the Apostles and the Holy Spirit, they most likely don't first associate it with Church offices or authority. Why do you think St. Luke puts this section at the beginning of the Gospel?

Allow the group to discuss.

Discussion / Evangelization in the Context of the Church

13. Why do you think that someone might believe that evangelization within a Church structure might reduce the effectiveness of evangelization?

Allow the group to discuss.

14. Why do you think that evangelizing within the context of the Church's authority is important?

Allow the group to discuss.

