

## New Testament History

Series: The Bible

June 5, 2022

Thank you again for being part of worship today.

We are over halfway through our series “The Bible” as we look at the entirety of the Canon, recognizing the overarching themes and message of Scripture. I hope you have enjoyed this highly unusual series as much as I have.

Here is our graphic representation of the Bible. Like a bookshelf, the Bible has many sections: Law, History, Poetry, the Prophets (both Major and Minor) are in the Old Testament. In the New Testament are the Gospels, a single book on Church History, then the Letters written by Paul, followed by General Letters, and concluding with the Book of Revelation.

Today, we are going to take a 30,000 foot look at the sixth section, New Testament History. We will ask three questions: What are the mega themes of the section? What is the key verse of that section? And how does it point to Jesus, the Son of God? I am so glad you have joined us on this spectacular journey!

It is fitting that today, on Pentecost, we look at New Testament History. Well, to be perfectly honest, I scheduled it that way.

The New Testament History section consists of a single book: the Book of Acts, also called the Acts of the Apostles. Written by Luke as a sequel to his Gospel, Acts is a historical record of the early church. It begins with Jesus’ ascension, then 10 days later to Pentecost and the birth of the Church.

Acts is the connecting link between Christ’s life and the life of the church, between the Gospels and the Letters.<sup>1</sup>

It can be divided into 2 sections. Chapters 1-12 focus on Peter’s leadership and ministry. Chapters 13 through the end of the book focuses on Paul’s ministry, including the account of his 4 missionary journeys. The book covers the first 30 years of church history.

But Acts is also a theological book, with lessons and living examples of the work of the Holy Spirit, church relationships, organization, and yes, conflict, the implications of grace, and the law of love.

Finally, Acts is an apologetic work, building a strong case for the validity of Christ’s claims and promises.<sup>2</sup> There are 11 sermons or accounts of testimony in the book, where the speaker defends or argues for the acceptance of Jesus as the promised Messiah.<sup>3</sup>

What are the Mega Themes of this section?

### **First, Church Beginnings.**

Acts is the history of how Christianity was founded and organized and solved its problems. The community of believers began by faith in the risen Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, who enabled them to witness, to love, and to serve. New churches are continually being founded. By faith in Jesus Christ and through the power

---

<sup>1</sup> Life Application Study Bible, Acts

<sup>2</sup> Life Application Study Bible, Acts

<sup>3</sup> Peter (2:14-40; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 10:34-43); Stephen (7:2-53); Paul (13:13-41; 17:22-31; 22:1-21; 23:1-6; 24:2-21; 26:1-29)

of the Holy Spirit, the church can be a vibrant agent for change. As we face new problems, Acts gives important remedies for solving them.<sup>4</sup>

### **Second, Holy Spirit.**

The church did not start or grow by its own power or enthusiasm. The disciples were empowered by God's Holy Spirit. He was the promised Advocate and Guide sent when Jesus went to heaven. The Holy Spirit's work demonstrated that Christianity was supernatural. Thus, the church became more Holy Spirit conscious than problem conscious. By faith, any believer can claim the Holy Spirit's power to do Christ's work.<sup>5</sup>

### **Third, Church Growth.**

Acts presents the history of a dynamic, growing community of believers from Jerusalem to Syria, Africa, Asia, and Europe. In the first century, Christianity spread from believing Jews to non-Jews in 39 cities and 30 countries, islands, or provinces. When the Holy Spirit works, there is movement, excitement, and growth. He gives us the motivation, energy, and ability to get the gospel to the whole world.<sup>6</sup>

### **Fourth, Witnessing.**

Peter, John, Philip, Paul, Barnabas, and thousands more witnessed to their new faith in Christ. By personal testimony, preaching, or defense before authorities, they told the story with boldness and courage to groups of all sizes. We are God's people, chosen to be part of His plan to reach the world. In love and by faith, we can have the Holy Spirit's help as we witness or preach. Witnessing is also beneficial to us because it strengthens our faith as we confront those who challenge it.<sup>7</sup>

### **Finally, Opposition.**

Through imprisonment, beatings, plots, and riots, Christians were persecuted by both Jews and Gentiles. But the opposition became a catalyst for the spread of Christianity. Growth during times of oppression showed that Christianity was not the work of humans, but of God. God can work through any opposition. When persecution from hostile unbelievers comes, realize that it has come because you have been a faithful witness and you have looked for the opportunity to present the Good News about Christ. Seize the opportunities that opposition brings.<sup>8</sup>

The key verse of this section is Acts 1:8:

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.<sup>9</sup>*

It is similar to the Great Commission in Matthew 28, which reads:

*Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.<sup>10</sup>*

Matthew gives us the "what" we are to do: go and make disciples, and as we are doing that, baptize and teach. Acts gives us the "where" we will do this.

---

<sup>4</sup> Life Application Study Bible, Acts

<sup>5</sup> Life Application Study Bible, Acts

<sup>6</sup> Life Application Study Bible, Acts

<sup>7</sup> Life Application Study Bible, Acts

<sup>8</sup> Life Application Study Bible, Acts

<sup>9</sup> Acts 1:8 (NLT2)

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 28:19-20 (NLT2)

Look at this graphic of Acts 1:8.

### ACTS 1:8 CIRCLES

Our final question is this: How does New Testament History point to Jesus?

#### **First, the reality of His existence.**

A dozen times, the book tells of persecution the apostles endured.<sup>11</sup> James, the brother of John, was beheaded, the first to be martyred. All the apostles were flogged. Stephen was stoned to death. And Paul? Listen to his account in 2 Corinthians 11:

*... been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm.<sup>12</sup>*

These men were not fools. They would not give their lives for a lie, for a feeling.

You do not go through that kind of persecution unless you are absolutely certain that what you believe and preach is the truth. They believed Jesus was Who He said He was, and we should too.

#### **Second, the power of His ambassadors.**

As these witnesses went out from Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, they went with the power promised by Jesus through the Holy Spirit. Acts records 5 specific miracles performed by Peter, including healing of a lame man, exposing the lies of Ananias and Sapphira, healing the sick, as well as Aeneas, and raising Dorcas from the dead. Before Stephen was stoned to death, he “performed amazing miracles and signs among the people.”<sup>13</sup> Likewise did Phillip. And Paul? Acts records 9 times of him performing miracles, including raising from the dead a boy who fell asleep during his sermon, fell out of an upper floor window. In Acts 19, we have this verse:

*God gave Paul the power to perform unusual miracles. When handkerchiefs or aprons that had merely touched his skin were placed on sick people, they were healed of their diseases, and evil spirits were expelled.<sup>14</sup>*

God gave His ambassadors power to heal as proof of the truth of their message.

#### **Finally, the universality of the message.**

Jesus spoke almost exclusively to one group of people: Jews. But He told His followers to go out from Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

At first, the new believers huddled in Jerusalem. But when persecution came, they began to scatter, talking the message of Christ with them. Phillip, one of the 7 deacons who were selected to help with the ministry, was the first to go to the

---

<sup>11</sup> Acts 4:3; 5:40; 8:1; 9:29; 13:50; 14:5, 19; 16:22; 18:12; 21:36; 22:22; 23:10

<sup>12</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 (NLT2)

<sup>13</sup> Acts 6:8 (NLT2)

<sup>14</sup> Acts 19:11-12 (NLT2)

Samaritans with the Gospel. Peter and John followed up to be sure Phillip's work was of the Lord. Then Peter himself, through a vision and experience, realized the message was for Gentiles as well. He said in Acts 10:

*I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism. In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right. This is the message of Good News for the people of Israel—that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.*<sup>15</sup>

There were attempts to compel non-Jews who became Christians to conform to Jewish traditions and ways of life, but the leadership of the church rightfully did not force that. Christ's message was for everyone, as it is still to this day.

In closing, I want us to understand this. The Early Church was from the very beginning a church of power, witness, and growth. Listen to Acts 2 and the day of Pentecost:

*On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability... Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation!" Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.*<sup>16</sup>

The power was supplied by the Holy Spirit. The witness by the believers. The growth by the Holy Spirit through the faithfulness of the believers.

This is still true today. Despite the challenges, despite a society that is less Christian every day (in fact, more and more like the days of Pentecost, pre-Christian), despite the powers of Satan fighting against us, this church has the potential to be an Acts of the Apostles church. If we come together and are united in prayer,<sup>17</sup> then the power of the Holy Spirit will come. We will witness to the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ, and together, we will grow. What happened on Pentecost and following can happen again in our corporate lives. I read it Scripture. I believe it with everything in my being. I can see it beginning even right down. We will be an Acts of the Apostles church. Amen, and Amen.

---

<sup>15</sup> Acts 10:34-36 (NLT2)

<sup>16</sup> Acts 2:1-4, 40-41 (NLT2)

<sup>17</sup> See Acts 1:14