

## **The Promise of the Father**

### **Acts 1:1-3**

We have all heard the desire expressed: “I wish our church was like the church in the Book of Acts!”

This desire reflects a sincere interest in experiencing God’s power in our life today, like the early Christians did at the beginning of church history.

However, it also reveals a lack of understanding of the historical significance of the events described.

Although we would enjoy the demonstrations of God’s presence and direction with us, as it was seen by the apostles, we would NOT enjoy going back to the same circumstances they lived in – even spiritually!

For example, when people say they want to experience the same conditions which existed in the early church, first we have to ask ourselves, “Which early church?”

Do we want to go back to the church as it was in Acts 2? Although we might wish we could, we couldn’t. The majority of us would have been excluded that day, because Gentiles weren’t allowed in!

Gentiles weren’t admitted until Acts 11.

Many changes had to take place in the church before that could happen.

This is only one minor problem among the many that would have existed.

Therefore, we need to study carefully the background and message of Acts before trying to imitate the church presented to us as an example in it.

Numerous errors found in the Evangelical church today have grown out of the failure to understand how the message of Acts is developed.

To understand correctly the implications of the things it teaches, we have to be able to relate it to Old Testament principles, the gospels, and the epistles, and not just analyze them independently.

Neither should we interpret a passage in isolation from the development of the message of the book as a whole. That's why we want to look together at the whole book, along with the circumstances that gave birth to it.

### **Author and date**

Parallel introductions affirm that the same person wrote Luke and Acts.

The "we" passages, compared to the historical comments in the epistles, would confirm this view (16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16).

Lucan authorship is also attested to by the external evidence of tradition.

The historical references at the conclusion of the book place it in the early sixties.

Dates are suggested of about A.D. 61-63.

## **Historical Background**

Acts picks up the story where Luke concludes.

Messiah has come.

When He came, Israel's leaders did not want to hear the good news of His arrival.

They were more interested in protecting their interests than in participating in God's program.

Only the outcasts of society were interested in following Him.

Therefore, God began a new program with the outcasts who wanted to follow Him.

Luke explains WHY God began a new program.

Acts explains HOW God formed His new program with the remnant of faithful Old Testament saints, as well as those who had been excluded from God's program previously.

After the death and resurrection of Christ time passes.

The church continues to grow.

However, Christ has not yet come.

**The apostles are beginning to die.**

Luke wants to leave an accurate record of the early development of the church.

Acts bridges the gap between the life of Christ and the early church.

Paul had already completed his three missionary journeys (A.D. 48-57)

The message of the gospel, and of the church, was known throughout the whole Roman world.

Those who had trusted Christ were suffering persecution because of their faith, both from the Jews and the Romans

### **Purpose and theme**

If these suffering believers were to stand firm in the midst of the continual barrage of opposition, they had to understand their roots.

Luke writes to tell the suffering church where we have come from.

Gospel – **why** the new people of God was necessary.

History – **how** God went about forming it.

Luke's purpose is **to describe the way in which God formed the early church.**

He presents the change from life under Judaism in a national context, to life in the church as the body of Christ.

The book serves as an apologetic for the church because it demonstrates that God was at work in its formation.

**The evidence of God's participation in the formation of the church, as well as the evidence of His protection of those who form part of it, serve to encourage those who are suffering for their faith in Christ.**

*This is God's work and He will care for them.*

The content of the book traces the historical development of the church.

**Attention is directed to the different groups that came to form part of that church and to the way in which God brought each group into it.**

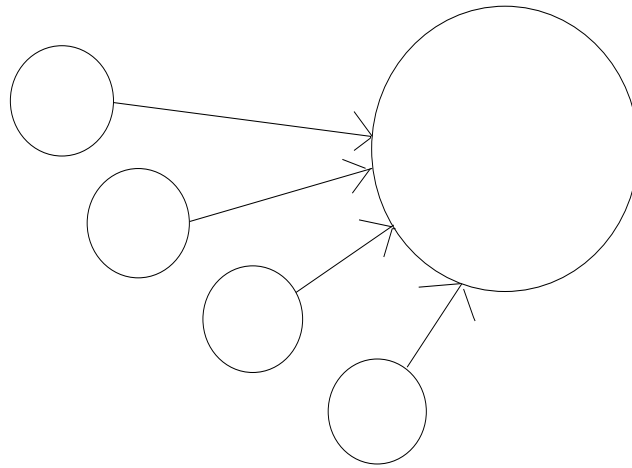
The problems faced are handled wisely as the Spirit of God directed them.

These decisions set the pattern for the future life of the church as well.

Acts is a transitional book. It describes the change from God's program for Israel to God's program for the church. It demonstrates the way different groups of people began to participate in the church. Who were these people? Look at the following passages. Describe the group added. Write the most significant characteristics mentioned about each group added.

<i>Passage: Acts 2</i> <i>What group do these people represent?</i>	<i>Description given?</i>
<i>Passage: Acts 8:4-25</i> <i>What group do they represent?</i>	
<i>Passage: Acts 10-11</i> <i>What group do they represent?</i>	
<i>Passage: Acts 18:24-19:7</i> <i>What group do they represent?</i>	

From the preceding study, try to explain this diagram by filling in a name for each circle:



Acts is an historical book, not a doctrinal book.

It wasn't written to teach us theology, nor to establish norms for a model church.

The changes that occurred within the early church itself demonstrate that it isn't supposed to be used as a pattern for the church today.

Luke wrote to the members of that early church, whom God had united from all the nations, to explain to them their roots, and to stimulate them in the midst of their afflictions.

### **Organization**

The book is organized according to the major theological and geographical movements revealed in Acts 1:8.

First the book looks ahead to the coming of the Holy Spirit (1:1-26).

Then attention is given to the testimony of the early church in Jerusalem (2:5-8:3).

Next the church moves into all Judea and Samaria (8:4-12:25).

Finally, its expansion is traced into the corners of the earth (13:1-28:31).

### **PREPARATION FOR THE COMING OF THE SPIRIT 1:1-26**

The story of the church's formation begins with the coming of the Holy Spirit.

However, the book of Acts begins with the preparation for His coming (1:1-26).

### **FINAL INSTRUCTIONS OF CHRIST 1:1-11**

#### **Review of Luke's conclusion 1:1-3**

The account begins where Luke ends.

Luke relates this book to the other in his introduction to Theophilus (1:1-3).

He first describes the things Jesus *began* to do and teach (1:1).

By implication, Luke describes the things He *continues* to do.

After Jesus' death and resurrection, He remained on the earth with His followers for 40 days.

During that time, He confirmed their faith with many evidences to convince them of the reality of His power and His resurrection.

At the end of that time He gave them instructions to continue His ministry and He promised them God's provision to fulfill it (1:2-3 cp. Luke 24:36-49).

The ongoing ministry of the church depends on the fulfillment of that promise

*We get nowhere without it!*