**The Book of Acts**

Theme of Acts:

I. The work of the Holy Spirit in establishing the Church. Acts 1:2, 1:4-5, 1:7, 1:16

Acts of the Apostles could very well be called Acts of the Holy Spirit.

II. The Kingdom of God. Acts 1:3, 1:6

III. The growth and development of the Church. 1:8

IV. Fulfillment of Old Testament Prophecy 1:20

**I. Acts and the Holy Spirit**

Acts of the Apostles could very well be called Acts of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:2 Instructions through the Holy Spirit.

1:4-5 Wait for the Holy Spirit.

1:7 Power from the Holy Spirit.

1:16 The Holy Spirit spoke the prophecies

2:1-4 The Holy Spirit falls on the apostles.

2:17-18 Pouring of the Holy Spirit prophesied in Joel.

4:8 Peter spoke, as he was filled by the Holy Spirit.

4:25 He spoke through David.

4:31 They were filled with the Holy Spirit and the house was shaken.

5:32 The Holy Spirit witnesses to the resurrection.

6:3-6 Those known to be full of the Holy Spirit chosen to lead.

7:55 Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit.

8:29 The Holy Spirit tells Philip to share with the Ethiopian Eunuch.

9:31 The Church strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit.

10:19 The Holy Spirit tells Peter to go with the three Gentile visitors.

10:44-47 The Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius and his house (confirming that salvation was for the Gentiles too).

11:28 The Holy Spirit tells Agabus about a famine in the Roman world.

13:2-4 The Holy Spirit set apart Barnabas and Saul for missionary work, and sends them off.

13:52 The disciples filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

15:28 The Holy Spirit influenced the decision of the Jerusalem Council.

16:7 The Spirit of Jesus prevents them from going to Bithyia.

20:22 Paul compelled by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem.

20:23 The Holy Spirit warns Paul of danger.

20:28 The Holy Spirit makes and chooses elders.

21:11 The Holy Spirit tells Agabus how Paul will die.

Q: What does all this tell you?

**III. Acts as a story of the growth and development of the Church and the spread of the gospel.**

Acts 1:8 A scary vision. Yet, that is what they did.

Acts is not just a series of nice, unconnected stories. It is a record of a movement which, in the end, completely, absolutely, totally, forever, changed the world. It is hard for us to imagine how much they changed the future course of human (and eternal) history.

The Roman Empire was an amalgam of an ancient polytheism, local gods, Greek philosophies (Pytharorean, Epicurean, Stoic, Neoplatonist), Gnosticism, Greek, Egyptian and Persian Mystery religions and Persian dualist religions.

Logically, it makes absolutely no sense that a Jewish movement, led mostly by poor, uneducated people, from a relatively insignificant province in the Roman empire, with a world view diametrically opposed to that of the Roman/Greek world, following a leader who was executed at a young age—one who never wrote anything and who never left a 100 mile radius of his place of birth, who did not even speak Greek could do what none of the barbarians could do—conquer Rome.

This is what we need today. The only hope for this world is for us to change the world all over again. We need a new revolution like that we find in Acts.

Logically, we should not be able to do it, but they did.

Growth of the Church in Acts.

Acts 2:41 Three thousand added that day.

Acts 4:4 The number of disciples grew to five thousand.

Acts 5:14 More and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.

Acts 5:28 You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching. (Note, they have now completed the first stage of Acts 1:8)

Acts 6:7 The number of disciples increased rapidly and a large number of priests were obedient.

Acts 8:4 Those scattered preached the word wherever they went.

Acts 9:31 The Church grew in numbers throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria. (completing stage 2 and 3)

Acts 11:24 a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

Acts 16:5 the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

Acts 17:6 These men have caused trouble all over the world. (completing stage 4 o Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth)

**Acts 19-20 Paul’s 3rd Missionary Journey**

Acts 19 Ephesus

Ephesus was the most important, powerful and influential church which was planted by Paul. He spent almost three years there. It seems the principle purpose of his 3rd missionary journey was to strengthen this church in the most influential city in the province of Asia.

Acts 19:8-10 Paul starts a campus ministry at the Lecture Hall of Tyrannus. Because of this wise decision, “all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia head the word of the Lord.” What a great plan. Is this our vision? Paul is putting Acts 1:8 into practice in Asia.

Acts 18:17-20 and 23-41 Burning of the sorcery books and a little riot in Ephesus. When Christianity comes to town, it will shake things up and certain sinful activities will lose their market. We should be having this effect and we should anticipate this, as well as some push-back.

**Acts 20 Paul addresses the Ephesian elders.**

Acts 20:17-38 is Luke’s most careful and thorough description of Paul’s ministry. It is Paul’s farewell address to the church he held most dear. It is a bit like Matthew 28:18-20 or Acts 1:3-8 for Jesus. We should pay very careful attention to this passage, which is one of the most important in the book.

20:18 You know how I lived in the province of Asia…. Q: How did Paul live? Let it challenge you.

Imagine, at the end of your life being able to say to those who knew you well, “You know how I lived.”

Could you say this?

How did Paul live his life?

v. 19 I served the Lord with great humility… Imagine having served with such humility that you could look at those you had ministered to in the eyes and make this bold statement.

Is this what your ministry is like?

v. 19 and with tears…. Note the passion of Paul for those he ministered to. Have you cried for them? What were these tears about?

Are you passionate like Paul?

v. 20-21 What did Paul preach? Repentance and faith. Which is harder to call people to????? Repentance or biblical faith?

Another glance at Paul’s ministry is in 1 Thess 2:1-12. Let us be challenged by this. Paul gave himself to those he was ministering to. Like a mother….. Like a father…. Sometimes we must minister like a mother, sometimes like a father.

v. 22-24 Q: Why to Jerusalem? (because the Holy Spirit told him) What was he expecting there? (v. 23 prison and hardships)

Paul’s attitude: If that is where God is sending me, then so be it.

v. 24 I consider my life worth nothing. What was Paul holding on to? Nothing. All of his value came from God. How did it affect Paul to feel this way? Imagine how freeing it is to put your life totally in God’s hands. If only we could do this!!!!!

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

Q: How can you move in a direction to be more like Paul in this?

v. 25-27 How could Paul feel “innocent of the blood of all men.”? Had he literally shared with everyone? No! But he had made the most of every opportunity “to proclaim to you the whole will of God.”

Can you look at your family and make this declaration?

Can you look at your classmates or co-workers or neighbors and declare yourself before them to be “innocent of the blood of all men.”?

What part of God’s will do you hesitate to preach?

v. 28-35 advice to shepherds….

v. 28-31 Protect against false teaching and false Christians.

You are not in it for selfish ends.

v. 33-35 Do not seek financial gain, and do not only hang out with the “sharp” but help the weak and the vulnerable.

v. 36-38 A final extremely emotional farewell.

**Acts 24 Paul preaches to Felix—to a pagan ruler.**

Paul before Felix, Festus and Herod Agrippa reminds of Matthew 10:17-20 “they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”

Felix the Governor was procurator of Judaea from A.D. 52 -58 or 59 but had been a military prefect in Palestine before. The date of these events was about AD 57 or 58

Acts 24:1-9 Ananias behind all this. The lawyer Tertullus makes his case.

What a hypocrite!!! He gives totally insincere sucking-up sycophantic praises to Felix. “We just want to help you and make your job easier” Liar!!!

**Context**: Marcus Antonius Felix was the Roman procurator of the Judaea Province from 52-60 AD. Felix’s cruelty and licentiousness, coupled with his accessibility to bribes, led to a great increase of crime in Judaea. Tacitus on Felix: he “indulged in every kind of barbarity and lust.”

His charges are a mixture of

a. lies tried to desecrate the temple

b. half-truths stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world and

c. truths made to look worse than they really were. The “ringleader of this sect”

note the word sect had very negative connotations to the Romans as an unauthorized, rebellious and seditious religious group.

Now Christianity is being called a sect of the Nazarene. The word “sect” is the Greek word *haerisis*, translated into English would be heresy. What is the Jews basic argument? That Paul is teaching a heresy that is not allowed under Jewish and therefore Roman law.

This is how we will be treated by the likes of Tertullus.

Acts 24:10-21 Paul’s defense before Felix.

Q: What would you say if you had the opportunity to share and defend your faith before the governor of Judea?

Notice how different his defense is from that of Tertullus. His is a model of our sharing our faith with blatant non-believers, even in the face of persecution from hypocritical religious people.

a. His is respectful and thankful but does not give insincere praise.

b. He refutes the false charges by simply relating the facts, but not in an inflammatory style. He avoids all temptation to cut down Tertullus and Ananias, but prefers to let the truth speak for itself.

c. Where the charges are half-truths, he gives a more accurate description. (v. 14I follow a way, not a sect, for example)

d. Where the charges are true, he comes fully clean. There was nothing they could charge him with that he did not fully reveal himself.

e. He shows that what he is doing is fully in line with the Old Testament, and therefore the charge of heresy is totally false (v. 14-15, Daniel 12:2-3)

f. Most importantly, he shares the gospel with Felix!

v. 22-23 Always the politician (and hoping for a bribe, v 26), Felix refuses to give a decision.

Q: What does Felix think about Tertullus and Ananias versus Paul?

He presumably has nothing but contempt for the suck-up Tertullus but he has to be profoundly impressed with Paul’s sincerity, openness and honesty. People are not stupid.

24:24-27 Paul shares the gospel with Felix.

Drusilla was the daughter of Herod Agrippa I (Acts12:1 who died in AD 44) and sister of Herod Agrippa II. She had married King Aziz of Emesa but Felix had recently seduced her from him.

Is it any surprise then that Felix would fear the teachings about righteousness and also was waiting for a bribe? In the end, Felix never released Paul even though he had concluded that Paul was innocent. Thus was the state of affairs in Judea at the time - corruption at the highest levels. Felix was more content with comfort, pleasure, power and appearance than righteousness.

v. 25 Will there ever be a “convenient time” to repent of our sins and put our faith in Jesus? We need to point this out to people. 2 Cor 6:2 “Now is the day of salvation.”

“Indecision is a decision.”