

OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

October 17, 2018

Lesson 28 – John

Seven Signs

- 2:1-11 Jesus reveals his glory and his disciples put their faith in him.
4:46-54 Jesus shows that he does not need to be physically present to heal people.
Once more his actions lead others to faith.
5:1-15 Jesus shows that it is possible to be healed at any time in our lives.
6:1-15 Jesus feeds us out of his abundance.
6:16-21 Jesus invites us to step out in faith and keep our eyes on him.
9:1-12 Jesus points out that the man born blind was not blind because of his sin.
He was blind so that the work of God might be revealed to others.
11:38-44 Jesus is Lord of the living and the dead.

Testimony of Seven Witnesses

John the Baptist proclaimed Jesus as the Son of God.
Nathanael called him the King of Israel.
Peter referred to Jesus as the Holy One of God.
Martha addressed him as Christ, the Son of God, and the one who was to come into the world.
Thomas called him his Lord and his God.
John told others that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God.
Jesus referred to himself as one with his Father.

Properties of Jesus as the Son of God

I am the Bread of Life – Jesus is the bread that nourishes our spirits.

I am the Light of the World – Light versus darkness is a predominant theme in John.
It explains his mission to light the path we are to take in life.

I am the Gate – Christ is our entrance to knowing the Father and the Spirit.

I am the Good Shepherd – In this metaphor Jesus is seen as one who protects and leads us.
It also ties in the Old Testament readings in that God is the Shepherd of Israel.

I am the Resurrection and the Life – In Christ there is life.

I am the Way and the Truth and the Life – Our lives have meaning through Christ.

I am the Vine – In the Old Testament the vine is a symbol for Israel.
Jesus is the true vine and the source of eternal life.
Only the branches that remain in Christ are able to bear fruit.

John 1

Jesus is the Word and the Word is eternal. The Father and Son are two unique entities but are of the same essence and nature (mystery of the Trinity). Jesus existed from the time of creation and took on human form (not just in appearance) but in the flesh.

Jesus as the Son of God

In John 3 Jesus has a conversation with Nicodemus. He explains that entering the Kingdom of God requires a spiritual rebirth. Jesus is ushering in a new age not bound by physical birth or death. He offers eternal life. This life is available through belief in him and through active faith and complete trust in Christ.

In John 4 Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the well. He offers her spiritual water which again refers to eternal life. Jesus alone can satisfy the thirst of our souls. Jesus not only offered life to the world, he offered his life for the world.

Old Testament Connection

Some see in John a connection between the sacrifices of the Temple and that made by Jesus.

Bronze altar: John describes Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Basin for cleansing: Jesus cleanses the temple and speaks of a new birth.

Table for bread of presence: Jesus' food is to do the will of his Father and to finish his work.

Golden lampstand: Jesus is the light and the perfect reflection of the glory of God.

Altar of incense: Obedience and humility are prerequisites for communion with God.

Ark of the Covenant and Atonement: Death of Jesus restores our relationship with God.

Gnostic Gospels

A collection of early Christian and Gnostic texts discovered near Nag Hammadi in 1945.

13 leather-bound documents (buried in a sealed jar) were found by a local farmer.

Content of all the documents was written in the Coptic language.

The best-known work out of the collection is the *Gospel of Thomas*.

Gnosticism is the term used for a variety of religious ideas from the 1st and 2nd centuries.

Material world was created by a lesser god who left a divine spark trapped in our bodies.

Divine spark could be liberated by gnosis (knowledge).

Core teachings included –

All matter is evil and the non-material, spiritual realm is good.

God is unknowable.

God established lesser spirits called Aeons.

One evil, lower spirit is the creator who made the universe.

Gnosticism does not deal with sin – only ignorance.

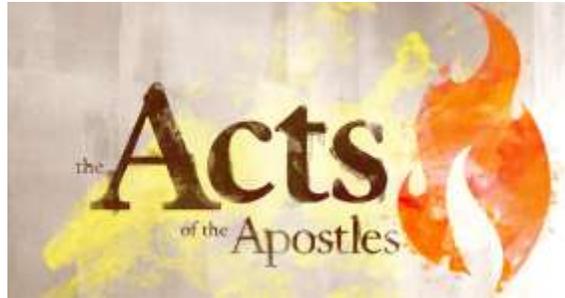
To achieve salvation, one needs to get in touch with secret knowledge.

Baptism

The question of whether Jesus baptized anyone cannot be answered definitively.

Based on John 4 it seems unlikely that Jesus himself baptized.

Plausible explanation: Jesus did not want people to feel superior based on who baptized them.



The *Acts of the Apostles* is a written conversation between a story-teller and his first reader. It is an anonymous book although tradition asserts that Luke wrote it along with the gospel. He is portrayed as an educated and well-traveled Greek and an associate of Paul.

In Acts the action starts in Jerusalem and moves into the provinces of Samaria and Judea. One-third of the book is speeches that cause responses to the gospel. His portrayal of Christian leaders underscores the authority and importance of their traditions. For example, the importance of Paul is noted by his prophetic vocation and works. Church had a missionary focus as it moved beyond the confines of Palestine. It was written to deepen the fragile faith of new believers such as Theophilus. For Luke the return of Christ inaugurated a season of universal restoration.

Main internal threat –

Those who wanted to erase anything Jewish from the core identity of the new church.

His presence and his saving activities are intimately linked to God's redemptive plan. A faithful God works through an empowered church to fulfill promises to Israel and all people. The mission of the church starts in the holy city of Jerusalem among the devout Jews. Universal scope of salvation is based on the success of the church's mission to repentant Jews. Repentant Gentiles who are added to the membership share in the blessings promised to Israel. Church is open to Gentiles not because unrepentant Jews rejected the gospel. It is because a remnant of repentant Jews accepted Jesus as the Messiah of God.

God who makes promises keeps them by orchestrating events that accomplish redemption.

Spirit of God is poured out on this community as a gift of salvation.

Spirit enables and directs members of the community in missionary activity.

In Acts there is a redemptive partnership between God and Jesus.

God takes complete responsibility for the promised restoration of his creation.

Jesus ushers in its fulfillment at the direction of God.

The ultimate confirmation of his identity is disclosed through his death and resurrection.

Christian mission and discipleship demand bold obedience.

All who hear the gospel (whether Jew or Gentile) are divided into two groups –

Repentant and the unrepentant

People cannot convert to the light if they continue to live in darkness.



Holy Spirit enabled the people to continue to do and say what Jesus started in his ministry. Return of the Lord and the outpouring of the Spirit were eschatological events. From the time of Pentecost to the end of times, we are to bear witness to Christ's resurrection.

Acts 1:1-2	Prologue
Acts 1:3-2:13	Preparing to Continue the Ministry of Jesus
Acts 2:14-15:12	A Narrative of Conversion
Acts 3:1-8:3	Jerusalem Mission
Acts 8:4-40	Philip's Mission to Outcasts beyond Jerusalem
Acts 9:1-15:12	Paul's Mission as <i>Light for the Nations</i>
Acts 15:13-28:28	A Narrative of Consecration
Acts 28:30-31	Conclusion

Prologue

Ascension of Jesus introduces the succession of the apostles to a new calling. Author understands that all Jesus did as the Messiah was through the Holy Spirit. Clear message is that what Jesus started, his successors would continue with sincere devotion. In the same light we are to continue what Jesus started in our time and in our context. Both the Spirit and the apostles are appointed for this task and this vocation. It is the very same *spirit of prophecy* that was so evident in the Old Testament. It is the instrument by which prophets are raised up, commissioned, instructed and inspired.

Preparing to Continue the Ministry of Jesus

Jesus gathers his followers after his resurrection to prepare them for their future without him. Questions arise as to whether or not they can do their job without his physical presence. Over the last three years they depended on his physical presence for strength. Discipleship is now seen as an active witness to the risen Christ.

Christ set aside 40 days to prepare them for their future. It gave them confidence that what they would announce to others was most certainly true. In addition to their shared experiences of the living Lord he continued to teach them. Lessons were taught from the lens of his passion and resurrection. Once instructed they were to wait for the Father who would send them the promised Spirit. They spent their time in prayer and in the study of Scripture. Matthias was chosen to replace Judas. Holy Spirit came in a profound and dramatic way!

A Narrative of Conversion

Outpouring of the Spirit is the inaugural event of Israel's *last days* (Joel 2:28-32).
Author now leads us to the Jerusalem Council by telling a series of conversion stories.
Two parallel verses mark the start and end of this section (Acts 2:22 and Acts 15:12).
Shift from Peter to Paul and from Jews to Gentiles corresponds to a fuller understanding of Joel.
Spirit-filled prophets proclaim the word of God to Jews first and then to Gentiles.
Promised blessings of God extend to everyone who truly repents and believes the gospel.

Conflict that arose in Antioch and Jerusalem mirror the contested nature of universal salvation.
Whatever protests were voiced at the time were silenced.
Problem that remained was whether the church would abandon Jewish legacy.
If so that was understood as a denial of God's faithfulness to historic Israel.
Issue frames the second half of Acts.

A Narrative of Consecration

Consecration derives from the Latin root for *sacred*.
Consecration denotes the act of separating someone or something for a sacred purpose.
Israel's consecration among the nations is publicly expressed by practicing purity laws.
Paul will witness to the risen Messiah in new and sometimes unconventional ways.
Author wants to confirm that Paul did not displace the ancestral heritage of the Jews.



Literary structure of this section is similar to the one we just reviewed.
James (the successor to Peter) cites and interprets the prophecies of the restored Israel.
His proclamations give the theological structure for this part of the narrative.
In 15:13 James bids the audience to *listen to me* which also ends the section in 28:28.
In this section the prophetic words of Amos are cited.
Promise of God to bless all the families of the earth is now fulfilled through the church.
James uses new words and themes to track the salvation of God to the end of the earth.
Example: *Rebuild* is a metaphor used in the stories of various households.
It provides a strategic focus to describe the urban mission of Paul.
Reference to a *tent* resonates with Paul the *tent-maker*.

James is not interested in the original question of whether or not Gentiles should be circumcised.
His concerns center on the purity of the Christian congregations.
It is a reversal of the original question: Should repentant Jews become like Gentiles?
Anxiety was felt by Jewish believers at the sudden influx of Gentiles into their fellowship.

It was also based on the movement of the gospel farther and farther away from the holy city. Spiritual crisis was the possible loss of a distinctively Jewish memory. Without it the church cannot be the church.

In response the author composes accounts of three additional missions by Paul. First mission follows the aftermath of the Jerusalem Council. It extends the scope of his urban mission into Macedonia and Greece. Second mission is centered on his mission to Ephesus that ends back in Jerusalem. He is once more before an assembly of church elders led by James. Paul demonstrates acts of ritual purification while in Jerusalem in response to their concerns. Final mission is to Rome where he awaits his court appearance. No indication of what the Emperor decides.

Conclusion

Paul spends two years in Rome confined to his lodgings but welcomed all who visited him. He boldly preaches about the *Kingdom of God* and teaches them about Jesus Christ. Author may have thought that whatever the Emperor decided was not relevant. Paul continued to live out his mission (that was the important message).

Maps on Pages 160-162

Assignment for October 24

Complete the Exercises from Lesson 28 on Pages 149-154
Read the *Book of Acts* or the portions outlined on Page 154