



Acts: God in Action through Us

Background to the Book of Acts

Acts is the second volume of a two-volume book. The first volume is the gospel of Luke. Both volumes-- Luke and Acts-- focus on the same person, Jesus Christ.

Traditionally the book was called 'The Acts of The Apostles', but perhaps a better title might be 'The Acts of Jesus Christ through his Apostles by the Holy Spirit's power'.

5 minute 'warm up' discussion:

What else does your group know about the Book of Acts? What parts of the book are you looking forward to discussing?

Times. Dates. We all want to know when Jesus will return. So did the Apostles. In Acts 1 they were asking, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus replied, in effect, that there was a mission to be completed before his return-- *whenever* that might be. Most importantly, their active engagement in this mission-- in ever-widening circles, even to the ends of the earth-- would be the mark of their 'waiting' for Jesus' return.

Read Acts 1:1-11

Here are some questions to stimulate your group's discussion

1. Luke introduces the second part of his account of Jesus in verses 1-3. What is the importance of the word 'began' in verse 1? In what ways did Jesus prepare and equip his apostles* to continue his ministry on earth?
2. In what ways has Jesus prepared and equipped you to continue his ministry on earth? To what extent would you like to be involved in Jesus' ministry on earth?
3. What evidence is there that the disciples did not fully understand the Kingdom that Jesus set up? How would you explain Jesus' promised kingdom to the disciples?
4. Jesus promises that his disciples will bear testimony to him in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and even to the ends of the earth. Why do you think Jesus might mark out these four areas in describing the

spread of the gospel? How might someone like the apostle Peter feel about the gospel of Jesus crossing each of these boundaries?

5. Are you committed to the idea that the gospel is for every person, in every place, in every culture-- first of all in Avalon/Palm Beach, then The Northern Beaches, then Sydney, Australia, and every other country? If so, how do express that commitment? How might this commitment change your focus at church, Sunday by Sunday?

Having discussed these questions in your group, consider which part of your life God has identified as a growth area. With others in your group, pray for your growth in this area.

Further Notes on Acts 1:12-26

The second half of Acts chapter 1 gives us an interesting insight into the life of the disciples in the days immediately following Jesus' ascension to God the Father's right hand. The community is marked by a commitment to prayer and to understanding the scriptures. The apostles are set apart within the community as authoritative leaders-- once again they are individually named. Reflection on the Scriptures led them to the view that Judas' place among the Twelve must be filled by another suitably qualified 'apostle'. According to Old Testament tradition, two nominees are prayerfully brought before God and his will is determined by the casting of a lot.

* What qualifies a person as an Apostle? Peter makes this clear in verses 21-22. They must be one of the men who had been with Jesus throughout the whole time of his earthly ministry. Particularly, they must be eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection. They bring authoritative testimony to all that Jesus taught, did and accomplished. Later in Acts, we will meet another divinely appointed apostle named Saul/Paul-- a man who does not fit this criteria exactly, but whom the Lord Jesus sovereignly appoints for this ministry.

The stage is now set for the Day of Pentecost. The apostles have received Christ's commission and seen his ascension. The apostolic team is complete again. Only one thing is missing: the Spirit has not yet come to empower their mission. So we leave Luke's first chapter of Acts with the 120 waiting in Jerusalem, persevering in prayer with one heart and mind, poised, ready to fulfil Christ's command just as soon as he has fulfilled his promise.