FIVE-DAY THEOLOGY COURSE

ACTS

The Spirit of God in Mission

TAUGHT BY

Lec SK. KIERU

Chapter 1: Introduction to Acts

Definitions of terms, the purpose of the study, facts about Acts, issues of interpretation, and the focus of Acts

Day 1: Understanding Acts and Preparing for Pentecost · Day 2: The Spirit-Empowered Church in Jerusalem and Beyond · Day 3: The Gentile Mission and Paul's Missionary Expansion · Day 4: Paul's Missionary Journeys, Jerusalem and Rome

Day 5: Final examination (2026-10-09)

Based on Acts: The Spirit of God in Mission by Denzil R. Miller. Africa's Hope, 2017.

CHAPTER 1 · UNIT 1 · DAY 1

Introduction to Acts

Definitions of terms, the purpose of the study, facts about Acts, issues of interpretation, and the focus of Acts

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Source: Acts: The Spirit of God in Mission - Denzil R. Miller (Based on Chapter 1)

Chapter purpose. This chapter introduces the book of Acts: who wrote it, why we study it, how it must be interpreted, and the missions focus that runs through the whole book.

This is the first lesson of the course. It lays the foundation for everything that follows, especially the meaning of Acts 1:8.

Bible reading: Acts 1-28 (the whole book, in one sitting)

The author strongly recommends that at this point in your study you read through the entire book of Acts in one sitting. This takes about two-and-one-half to three hours and gives you a broad overview of the book.

Learning Objectives

• Explain why "The Acts of the Holy Spirit" is a more fitting title for the book than "The Acts of the Apostles".

• Distinguish between mission and missions as the author uses these words.

• Give reasons why it is important to study and teach the book of Acts.

• Explain how Acts 1:8 serves as the interpretative key to the book of Acts.

• Identify the missions focus of Acts.

Before This Lesson, Read Your Bible

Acts 1-28 (the whole book, in one sitting)

Read the entire book of Acts in one sitting, about two-and-one-half to three hours. As you read, note recurring themes: the work of the Holy Spirit in giving power and direction to believers, the proclamation of the gospel, the triumph over

persecution, and the kingdom of God.

The Big Idea

In the book of Acts the Holy Spirit is revealed as the Spirit of missions.

A Better Name for the Book

• The title "The Acts of the Apostles" is not the best name for the book.

• A better name would be "The Acts of the Holy Spirit", since He is the central character and champion of the book.

• The human main characters change as the story progresses: Peter, Stephen, Philip, Paul.

• The divine Hero, the Holy Spirit, remains constant. Throughout Acts He takes center stage, filling, giving power, enabling, and directing the work.

• Because the Holy Spirit is revealed as the Spirit of missions, the author subtitles this book "The Spirit of God in Mission".

Mission and Missions

Mission

• Mission means God's mission or purpose, sometimes called the missio Dei, from a Latin term.

• God's mission is to bless all the peoples of the earth through the seed of Abraham, that is, through Jesus Christ (Genesis 12:3; 22:18; compare Galatians 3:16).

• Stated another way, God's mission is to redeem and call unto himself a people from "every tribe and language and people and nation" on the earth (Revelation 5:9; 7:9).

• Jesus gave the Great Commission to direct the church in fulfilling that mission (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47-48; John 20:21-22; Acts 1:8).

Missions

• Missions means all the church does to fulfill the mission or purpose of God.

• This includes such things as giving, going, and praying for missionaries.

The Orientation of This Study

• Some Christians read Acts only as history and do not expect the Spirit to work the same way today.

• Others ask, why not today? Why can the twenty-first century church not receive the same Spirit in the same way, and so experience the same power, glory, and guidance as the early church? The author believes it can, and should.

• This study is a vocational commentary: it is purposely targeted toward those actively involved in gospel ministry.

• Again and again we ask, "How should their ministries impact and influence our ministries today?"

• The goal is more than knowledge about the early church. It is to have the same spiritual experiences those first believers had, and to put their practices into our own lives and ministries.

Why Study Acts?

• First, a proper understanding of Acts greatly helps our understanding of the rest of the New Testament. Acts serves as an essential bridge between the Gospels and the Epistles.

• Second, Acts helps us see what the early church looked like, and gives us a model of what the church should look like today.

• Third, Acts gives us a strategy, or plan, for missionary outreach.

Questions Acts Answers About the First Believers

• What were the central or core values and priorities of the first believers?

• How did they minister, and what moved them to do as they did?

• What were the secrets of their great evangelistic and missionary successes?

• What were the essential experiences and common practices of the first church?

• What challenges did they face, and how did they meet those challenges?

Acts as Missionary Strategy

C. Peter Wagner calls the book of Acts "God's training manual for modern Christians". He says that Acts "is intended to be a pattern of how the kingdom of God would be spread worldwide through the centuries until Jesus returns.... The Gospel of Luke tells what Jesus did, and Acts tells us what He expects His followers to do both then and now".

Acts not only tells how the early church preached the gospel and evangelized the then-known world, it gives us an enduring strategy of how we can effectively do missions today.

Background: Authorship, Date and Purpose

Authorship

• Most New Testament scholars identify Luke as the author of Acts, the same Luke who wrote the Gospel bearing his name.

• External evidence includes the Muratorian Canon (A.D. 170) and the writings of Irenaeus (A.D. 180).

• Internal evidence: both Luke and Acts are addressed to the same person, Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1).

• The famous "we" passages show Luke was a fellow traveler and missionary associate of Paul (Acts 16:10-12; 20:5-16; 27:1-28:16).

• Paul called Luke his "dear friend" and identifies him as a medical doctor (Colossians 4:14), and one of his "fellow workers" (Philemon 24).

• Luke is the only Gentile writer in the New Testament and, for that matter, the entire Bible.

Date and Purpose of Writing

• Acts was written around A.D. 65, about 37 years after the Spirit was first poured out on the Day of Pentecost.

• Luke was therefore writing to a second generation of Christians who were not present at Pentecost.

• He possibly wrote from Rome, where the book of Acts ends and where he spent considerable time with Paul.

• His readers were probably Gentiles and Greek-speaking Jews living far from

Jerusalem, undergoing persecution, and had lost their missionary vision and zeal, with less emphasis on the empowering work of the Spirit.

• Luke certainly wrote to teach history, but his primary intent was to call the church back to its pentecostal and missionary roots.

• He further wrote to teach that the empowering presence of the Spirit comes from a powerful spiritual experience he calls "the baptism in the Holy Spirit" (Luke 3:16; Acts 1:5; 11:16), which he presents as separate from salvation, accompanied by speaking in tongues, and given to empower believers for effective witness.

Interpreting Acts: Three Insights and Two Tools

To interpret Acts properly, one must understand that it belongs to the literary genre of historical narrative. Each of the four New Testament genres, Gospels, Epistles, apocalyptic writing and historical narrative, requires its own interpretative approach.

Three Important Insights

• The literary unity of Luke-Acts. Acts is the second part of a two-part work. Acts 1:1 calls the Gospel of Luke Luke's "former book".

• The theological character of Acts. Luke wrote not only as a historian but as a Spirit-inspired theologian, so Acts, properly interpreted, is a legitimate source for normative doctrine.

• The theological independence of Luke. We must not impose Paul's teaching on Luke without first letting Luke speak for himself. Only then can we harmonize the two and get the New Testament's full teaching on the Holy Spirit.

Two Important Tools

• Biblical theology. The biblical theologian approaches Scripture diachronically, that is, across time, seeking how God has progressively revealed himself, and allows each biblical author to speak for himself.

• Narrative theology. An orderly approach to interpreting the historical portions of Scripture, using the literary principles and rules an author employs in composing historical narratives.

The Interpretative Key

Many Bible commentators have cited Acts 1:8 as the key verse of the book. We call it the interpretative key to Acts, because this verse helps to "unlock" our understanding of the entire book. It does this by introducing two key concepts.

1. The Empowerment-Witness Motif

• The first and most important concept is in the first half of the verse: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses..."

• A motif is a pattern of words, concepts, or events repeated throughout a work.

• This pattern is repeated again and again as we progress through Acts.

• This pattern reveals Luke's primary intent in writing the book: to call the church of his day, and ultimately the church of every day, back to its pentecostal and missionary roots.

2. A Table of Contents for the Book

• The second part of Acts 1:8 serves as an outline, a sort of table of contents, for the book: His followers would be His witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth".

• It also reveals the book's missionary orientation. Luke wrote Acts to record the missionary advance of the church to the ends of the earth.

The Holy Spirit Pattern

Figure 1.2. The empowerment-witness motif: the pattern Luke repeats throughout Acts.

• Holy Spirit: The Spirit comes on believers

• Power: "You will receive power"

• Witness: "You will be my witnesses"

• Mission: The gospel advances to the nations

Acts 1:8 as the Outline of the Book

Using the second part of Acts 1:8, the book of Acts can be outlined in three movements.

Passage · The Witness of the Church · Period

• Passage: Acts 1:1-8:1. The Witness of the Church: In Jerusalem. Period: The Jewish mission

• Passage: Acts 8:1-12:25. The Witness of the Church: In Judea and Samaria. Period: The transitional period

• Passage: Acts 13:1-28:31. The Witness of the Church: To the ends of the earth. Period: The Gentile mission

Eight Guidelines for Interpreting Acts

• All Scripture, including the historical portions, is inspired by God and is useful for doctrine (2 Timothy 3:16).

• Luke's writings belong to the literary genre of historical narrative.

• Luke wrote as a Spirit-inspired historian, a Spirit-inspired theologian, and a Spirit-inspired missiologist or student of missions.

• The disciplines of biblical theology and narrative theology must be employed in interpreting Acts.

• Luke had his own Spirit-inspired agenda and purposes in writing Luke-Acts.

• Luke, like any biblical writer, must first be understood on his own terms, and only then should his teachings be related to those of other biblical writers.

• In writing his histories, Luke, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, was selective and subjective in his choice of material.

• Luke's primary intent for writing Acts is revealed in Acts 1:8.

The Missions Focus of Acts

• Luke wrote as a Spirit-inspired missiologist, a student of missions. Missionary themes dominate the book.

• Luke has much to say about the Gentile nations, mentioned forty-four times in Acts, and the church's responsibility to reach them (Acts 1:8; 13:46; 26:20; 28:28).

• He structures the entire book of Acts around Jesus' strategic missionary

pronouncement in Acts 1:8.

• In chapter 19 he summarizes Paul's missionary strategy, a strategy the apostle used throughout the Roman Empire.

• Understanding the missions focus of Acts is essential to understanding the message of Acts.

Conclusion

Acts can therefore be properly viewed as a missions manual. In it you can find methods and strategies to guide you in fulfilling the Great Commission of Christ. It is more than the simple story of the missionary advance of the first-century church; it is a divinely-inspired guidebook of how that advance was accomplished in the first century and how it should be accomplished today.

Important Terms

Mission. God's own purpose: to call a people to himself out of every nation.

Missions. Everything the church does to carry out God's mission.

Missio Dei. Latin for the mission of God.

Hermeneutical issues. The problems we run into when working out what a Bible passage means.

Literary. To do with books and writings.

Genre. A kind or type.

Literary genre. A type of writing, such as history, poetry or letters. Each type has its own rules of interpretation.

Theological. To do with the study of God and God's dealings with people.

Historical narrative. A true story told as history. Acts belongs to this type of writing.

Biblical theology. Reading the Bible across time, letting each writer speak for himself.

Narrative theology. An orderly way of interpreting the story parts of the Bible.

Normative doctrine. A teaching that applies to everyone, in every time.

Subsequence. The teaching that Spirit baptism comes after, and is separate from, being born again.

Initial evidence. The teaching that everyone baptized in the Spirit will speak in tongues.

Motif. A pattern that keeps repeating through a book.

Interpretative key. The verse that unlocks the meaning of the whole book. For Acts, this is Acts 1:8.

Key People

• The Holy Spirit: The central character and champion of the book, revealed in Acts as the Spirit of missions.

• Luke: The author of both the Gospel of Luke and Acts. A medical doctor, Paul's dear friend and travel companion, and the only Gentile writer in the Bible.

• Theophilus: The man to whom Luke addressed both volumes. The name means "lover of God". Probably a Greek believer of wealth and influence, and Luke's literary patron.

• Peter, Stephen, Philip, Paul: The human main characters, who change as the story of Acts progresses.

Key Places

• Jerusalem: Where the witness of the church begins: the Jewish mission (Acts 1:1-8:1).

• Judea and Samaria: The second stage of witness: the transitional period (Acts 8:1-12:25).

• The ends of the earth: The ultimate scope of God's mission: the Gentile mission (Acts 13:1-28:31).

• Rome: The capital city of the Roman Empire, where the book of Acts ends.

Key Event

The writing of Acts, around A.D. 65, to call the church back to its pentecostal and missionary roots.

Luke wrote to a second generation of believers who were under persecution and had lost their missionary vision and zeal. By telling them how the church began, and how it triumphed in the power of the Spirit, he hoped to encourage them to do the same.

Key Verse

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Acts 1:8

Remember This

• The Holy Spirit is the divine Hero of Acts. He is the Spirit of missions.

• Mission is God's purpose. Missions is what the church does to fulfil it.

• Acts 1:8 is the interpretative key to Acts.

Life Application

The author states the aim of this study plainly: the goal is more than simply to gain knowledge about the early church. It is to have the same spiritual experiences those first believers had, and to put into practice in our own lives and ministries the same practices they put into theirs.

• Ask the question the author asks of every passage: how should their ministry influence my ministry today?

• Do not read Acts only as history. Expect the Spirit to work in the same way today.

• Treat Acts as a missions manual, and look for methods and strategies for fulfilling the Great Commission.

Textbook Review and Application

• 1. Why would "The Acts of the Holy Spirit" be a more appropriate title for the book of Acts than "The Acts of the Apostles"?

• 2. Give three reasons why it is important to study and teach the book of Acts.

• 3. How can the book of Acts serve as a book of missionary strategy for the church today?

• 4. How does Acts 1:8 serve as the interpretative key to the book of Acts? How can you use this concept in your study of the book of Acts?

Quick Review

1. Who wrote the book of Acts?

Answer: Luke, the same author as the Gospel of Luke. He is the only Gentile writer in the Bible.

2. To whom is Acts addressed?

Answer: Theophilus, whose name means lover of God.

3. What is the difference between mission and missions?

Answer: Mission is God's own purpose, the missio Dei. Missions is all the church does to fulfil that purpose.

4. What literary genre does Acts belong to?

Answer: Historical narrative.

5. Which verse is the interpretative key to Acts?

Answer: Acts 1:8.

Chapter Summary

The Holy Spirit is the central character of Acts, and Acts is the story of His work in the mission of God.

• Luke wrote Acts around A.D. 65 to call the church back to its pentecostal and missionary roots.

• Acts belongs to the genre of historical narrative and must be interpreted using biblical theology and narrative theology.

• Acts 1:8 gives both the empowerment-witness motif and the outline of the whole book.

Acts is a missions manual. Study it to find the methods and strategies God uses to advance His mission through a Spirit-empowered church.

ONE-SENTENCE MEMORY

Acts is the Spirit-inspired story of the Spirit-empowered mission of the church, and Acts 1:8 is the key that unlocks it.