

Synthetic Bible Studies

Containing an outline study of every book of the Bible
with suggestions for Sermons, Addresses and
Bible Expositions

By

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LESSON FIVE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

We shall divide the book of the Acts along historical lines, following the growth and development of the church from Jerusalem to Judea, Syria, Asia Minor and the continent of Europe.

I. Jerusalem Period, Chapters 1-7

(1) Under this head we treat first, of the preface or introduction to the book covered by verses 1 and 2 of chapter 1. In this preface we notice a reference to a former treatise which the writer has made, addressed to a person named Theophilus, and purporting to contain a record of the sayings and doings of JESUS up until the time of His ascension - declarations of fact which at once bring to mind the Gospel of Luke, suggesting, if not altogether proving, that he, as well, was the author of the Acts of the Apostles.

(2) We have, secondly, the account of the ascension of CHRIST (1:2-11). The facts associated with this event and leading up to it are, first of all, the testimony of Luke to His resurrection (v. 3). Then follows the allusion of CHRIST to the forthcoming baptism of His disciples by the HOLY SPIRIT (vv. 4, 5). The inquiry of the disciples concerning the kingdom and our Lord's reply thereto, (vv. 6-8), substantiates the teachings heretofore insisted on, that the kingdom expected by the former, and promised by the latter, was a literal kingdom to be set up on this earth.

If they had been mistaken as to this, or if our Lord's rejection and crucifixion had changed the divine purpose, this would have been the opportunity, one would think, for our Lord to have indicated that fact. But instead of doing so, He permits His disciples to continue in their expectation, only promising that the time for its realization was not to be made known.

In further corroboration of this the circumstances of the ascension itself bear witness (vv. 9-11). Especially observe the carefully chosen language of the angels to the disciples (v. 11).

- who shall come again?
- how shall He come?
- where is He in the meantime?

Let us take every opportunity to emphasize the fact to others that our Saviour is alive, not dead; and that He is now existing as a glorified God-man in the heavens, whence He is coming again in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not GOD and obey not His Gospel, but to be admired in all them that believe in that day (II Thessalonians 1).

(3) We have, thirdly, the choice of Matthias by the disciples to succeed Judas (1:12-26).

(4) We have, fourthly, the baptism with the HOLY GHOST, on the day of Pentecost (2:1-47).

As we learned in our studies in Leviticus this feast of the Jews came on the fiftieth day after the Passover, which would make it in this case about ten days after our Lord's ascension. The event it now signalizes was the fulfillment of the promise in the first chapter, verse 5 - a baptism of the church which, in my judgment, was once and for all time.

I think it is to this baptism Paul refers in I Corinthians 12:13, and possibly, in Ephesians 4:5.

It seems to me that every true believer in JESUS CHRIST partakes of this baptism the moment he so believes, and that it is this which constitutes him a member of the body of CHRIST. See I Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; II Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 1:13. This is not to say that the believer may not from time to time require and obtain a renewed infilling of the HOLY SPIRIT - (later Scriptures will be found to teach this), but only that so far as the baptism with the HOLY SPIRIT is concerned it would seem to be extra-scriptural to be seeking for it after it has thus once been obtained.

It is a comfort to learn from Peter's words (vv. 37-39), on what simple conditions this baptism becomes ours, and how extensive is the promise of grace concerning it.

(5) We are now brought face to face with the early conflicts of the church (chaps. 3-7).

There are three such conflicts recorded in these chapters.

The first grew out of the miracle on the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, and the anger of the leaders of the nation that the apostles, Peter and John, should in that connection have "**preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead**" (chaps. 3, 4). Let particular

attention be given to verses 25 and 26 of chapter 3, the closing part of Peter's discourse, which afford some reason for the opinion alluded to in an earlier study that a second offer of the kingdom was made to the Jews after the ascension of JESUS, had they been ready even then to receive it by receiving Him as their Messiah.

In this instance, however, as previously, the leaders were averse to His claims, as witness their action against the apostles (chap. 4).

- why were they unable to gainsay the utterances of the apostles (v. 14)?
- what was the outcome of this first conflict between the church and the Jewish nation (vv. 18-21)?
- what was the effect upon the church (vv. 23-31)?

The second conflict seems to have grown out of the apostolic persistence in preaching the Word notwithstanding the prohibition against it.

The story is found in 5:12-42, and it will be seen that in this case as in the previous one the Sadducees were foremost in the opposition. They were the religious party in the nation which denied the future life, and who were in consequence, particularly incensed at the preaching of the resurrection (5:17).

- what supernatural interposition was made on behalf of the prisoners in this case (vv. 18-20)?
- what shows the popularity of the preaching at this time (v. 26)?
- is there any indication that the apostles were intimidated (vv. 29-32)?
- who appears on their behalf, and with what plea (vv. 33-39)?
- what different treatment was given the apostles in this case (v. 40)?
- what effect did it produce (vv. 41, 42)?

The third conflict arose around Stephen, the history of which is found in chapters 6 and 7, and which marked a crisis in the affairs of the church as we shall see in our next lesson.

(6) In our study of these conflicts of the church we have discovered also certain marks of progress.

For example, study the picture given us of the church (2:41-47), the loyalty, the power, the love, the gladness, the increase. Also that given likewise at the close of chapter 4.

Note in this connection the sharp contrast between the spirit and disposition of the many and that of the two who through pride were led into hypocrisy and falsehood (chap. 5). And note the signal and swift judgment that fell upon them and its immediate result in the discipline of the church generally.

A further mark of progress is seen in the appointment of the deacons (chap. 6).

II. Palestinian Period, Chapters 8-12

This period has to do chiefly with the work of:

Philip in Samaria, 8.
Paul in Damascus, 9.
Peter in Caesarea, 10-12.

- what explains the outspreading of the work into Samaria (8:1)?
- who were excepted from the general exodus?
- was the evangelistic work of the early church limited to the apostles, or even to them and the deacons (chaps. 7, 8)?
- what are we to understand then, by the word "preaching" in this case-sermonizing, or the simple testimony to the person and work of CHRIST?
- has the church, have we, individual believers, anything to learn from this circumstance?
- who was the divinely-chosen leader of the work in Samaria (8:5)?
- what have we learned of his character in a previous chapter?
- with what blessing did his labors meet (vv. 6-8)?
- how did Satan seek to withstand him (vv. 9, 11)?
- how does Satan's emissary himself become a witness to the superior power of GOD (v. 13)?
- what proves the insincerity of his professions (vv. 18-23)?
- is there any evidence of deeper conviction on his part (v. 24)?
- what transaction in the history of the church in Samaria shows a distinction of some kind between believing on CHRIST for salvation and receiving the HOLY GHOST (vv. 14-17)?

I am of the opinion that every believer on CHRIST receives the HOLY SPIRIT in some sense the moment he so believes, and that this is equivalent to the baptism of the HOLY SPIRIT spoken of above, and which makes us a member of CHRIST's body. But I believe there is such a thing as a deeper or fuller work of the Spirit in the believer which some receive after they believe, and that this is what is referred to in the present case.

What was the next mission on which Philip was sent (vv. 26-40)?

The interest in this mission gathers around the supernatural features connected with it (vv. 26, 29, 39), and the additional fact that it resulted in the introduction of the Gospel to the great continent of Africa.

- with whom is the history chiefly connected in chapter 9?
- what keynote to the nature of Paul's ministry is afforded in the Lord's words to Ananias (v. 15)?
- to what people was he particularly sent?
- in what city did his ministry begin? (While Damascus is not, strictly speaking, in Palestine, but Syria, yet the proximity of the two countries seems to warrant us in classifying what was done in Damascus, as well as later in Antioch, in the Palestinian period).
- who interests himself especially in Paul at this time, and for what reason (vv. 26, 27)?
- where, finally, is Paul obliged to be sent (v. 30)?
- with whose ministry are we now once more concerned (vv. 32-43)?

It would be well to familiarize one's self with these locations on the map - Lydda, Joppa, Caesarea.

- whose conversion is narrated at length in chapter 10?

- was he a Jew or a Gentile?

Observe the method GOD employed to assure Peter of His purpose to have the Gospel preached to the Gentiles (vv. 9-21).

Nevertheless, while these transactions were going on in Caesarea and Jerusalem, certain religious experiments of the same kind were being tried elsewhere.

For example, where, and by whom (vv. 19-21)?

- who again come into prominence together in connection with this work (vv. 23-26)?
- how long did they remain there?
- for what is Antioch memorable at this time (v. 26)?
- what shows that the same Spirit of love who dwelt in the Jewish Christians dwelt also in the Gentiles (vv. 27-30)?

We have seen that Stephen was the first martyr of the church; who was the second, according to chapter 12?

- what seems to have been a meeting-place for the Jerusalem church at this time (v. 12)?
- how did persecution effect the growth of the church (v. 24)?
- what "ministry" of Barnabas and Saul is referred to in verse 25? Compare 11:29, 30.
- who now comes into prominence as a Christian worker (v. 25)?

This was doubtless him whom we know as the author of the second Gospel.

III. Asia Minor Period, Chapters 13-15

At this point begins the account of Paul's first missionary journey.

- whence did it originate, and under what circumstances (13:1-3)?
- what shows the presence of the Lord by His Spirit in the administration of the affairs of the church at this time?

The query arises as to whether He does not still guide and direct as He did then, when He is permitted by the church so to do? May not the absence of His direction and guidance explain a great many things in the subsequent history of the church which are not to her credit, and which have made her a hindrance instead of a help to the world?

Trace the course of this first missionary journey on the map from Antioch to Paphos.

- what interest did Barnabas have in this direction? Compare 4:36.
- who accompanied the two missionaries on this journey (v. 5)?
- in what way did Satan seek to frustrate their work at Paphos?
- who was their first notable convert?
- in what special manner was the power of GOD manifested in their ministry?

Trace the course of their journey from Paphos to Iconium (v. 51).

- in what manner did John Mark signalize himself (v. 13)?
- how do you distinguish the Antioch of this chapter from that in the previous one?
- where and among what class of persons did Paul begin his ministry in this place (v. 14)?
- in what spirit did they receive his message (v. 45)?
- how do verses 46, 47, illustrate the special mission intrusted to Paul?
- what success was met with at Iconium (14:1-3)?
- how was the experience of Antioch repeated there (vv. 4-6)?
- what incidents, opposite in character, marked the stay at Lystra (vv. 8-19)?
- how did this first journey draw to a close (vv. 20-28)?
- what token of progress and development in the church is indicated in verse 23?

First Church Council

The fifteenth chapter of the Acts is one of the most important, historically and doctrinally, in the New Testament.

False teachers of a Judaizing tendency, i. e., those who were ever seeking to make the Gentile Christians conform to the Mosaic law, followed Paul and Barnabas to Antioch, and indeed to other places, contradicting and undermining the Gospel of simple faith they preached (15:1).

In order to silence their contention and establish the doctrine of justification by faith only, a gathering of the leaders of the church was held at Jerusalem before which Paul and Barnabas appeared. Peter also bore testimony in corroboration of their work (vv. 6-11).

Finally, the decision of the council was reduced to writing and sent forth to all the Gentile churches endorsing the position of the two apostles aforementioned, and settling the question of the way in which a man may be just with GOD for all time (vv. 24-29).

Compare Peter's words in verse 11.

This chapter deserves the closest study, that it may be fastened upon the memory because of its important bearing on the subsequent teaching of Paul, and, indeed, on all the later history of the church.

Some little time after the decision of the Jerusalem Council on the question of circumcision and related subjects, Paul and Barnabas purposed a second journey to the cities in Asia Minor where they had established churches. Their original plan, however, was seriously altered by the difference of opinion which arose between them on the subject of selecting John Mark, Barnabas' nephew, to accompany them.

The result was four missionaries instead of two, and two missionary tours instead of one.

The narrative in the Acts follows the career of Paul and Silas, beginning with what we may describe as

IV. Greco-Macedonian Period, 15:36-21:17

This period covers what is commonly known as the second and third missionary journeys of Paul.

The second journey began with an excursion through what countries (15:40, 41)?

No mention is elsewhere made of churches located in these parts, except the one at Antioch in Syria, and the fact illustrates the great triumphs with which Christianity met at the first, far beyond anything which is recorded in this brief inspired account.

- What event of importance transpired at Lystra, and how does Paul's reception there contrast with his former experience in the same place (16:1-3)?
- how does Paul exhibit his tactful disposition in this matter (v. 3)?
- As this part of the journey was apparently among the churches already established, confirmatory of their faith (16:4), what commission did the apostles execute on the way (v. 4)?
- what was the effect of these apostolic visits (v. 5)?
- what provinces did they next visit (v. 6)?

It appears that at this point in their travels the HOLY SPIRIT designed to change the nature of their service from that of overseers of the flock to that for which they were originally chosen, viz: evangelists and missionaries.

- how is this divine purpose illustrated in verses 6-8?
- how farther in verses 9 and 10?
- crossing the Aegean sea, what was the first place in Europe where the Gospel was preached, and with what results (vv. 11-40)?

This whole story of Paul's stay in Philippi should be read and re-read until it is known by heart.

From Philippi the workers passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia to the great city of Thessalonica, the location of which should be identified on the map.

- in what respect did the population of this city differ from that of Philippi (17:1)?
- how long was Paul permitted to remain here (v. 2)?
- with what success at first (v. 4)?
- under what circumstances did he leave and where did he go (vv. 5-10).
- how are the Bereans distinguished (vv. 11, 12)?
- what is the story of Paul's visit to Athens (vv. 13-34)?
- what two disciples are introduced to us in chapter 18?
- by what means does Paul support himself in Corinth (v. 3)?
- what supernatural encouragement is afforded him there (vv. 9, 10)?
- how long did he remain in that city (v. 11)?
- where did he next go (vv. 18, 19)?
- why did he remain there so brief a time (vv. 20, 21)?
- to what point did he return (v. 22)?

The third journey begins at this point with a further visit to the country of Phrygia and Galatia (v. 23), from which point we next hear of Paul at the great metropolis of Asia (19:1).

- in the meantime what other distinguished teacher has been brought upon the scene (18:24-28)?
- what extraordinary marks of the Spirit's power are evidenced in Paul's ministry at Ephesus (vv. 6, 11, 12, 19, 20)?
- what circumstance testifies in a very practical way to the spread of Gospel truth in that neighborhood (vv. 23-41)?
- where did Paul go after leaving Ephesus (20:1, 2)?
- why did he return from Greece by land rather than water (v. 3)?
- what word in verse 5 represents the author of the Acts as a companion of Paul and eye-witness of what he records? Contrast the two visits of Paul to Troas.
- did Paul visit Ephesus again on this return trip (v. 16)?
- what was the occasion of his haste? Nevertheless did he meet any representatives of the church at that place, and if so, under what circumstances (vv. 17-38)?
- how long had Paul remained in that city (v. 31)?
- what shows the strong affection entertained for him by the brethren of that church (vv. 36-38)?

It will be interesting and helpful to the memory to follow with a map the course of Paul and his companions from this point to Tyre, and thence to Caesarea and finally Jerusalem (21:1-17). What warning does Paul receive at Tyre (v. 4)?

We need to be careful here not to suppose that it was the HOLY SPIRIT Himself who sought to persuade Paul against going up to Jerusalem. If such had been the case it would have been gross disobedience on the apostle's part to have done so, and the afflictions coming on him there would have been a just chastisement for his sin. The Spirit informed him through these brethren that he would be exposed there to great suffering, but it was the brethren and not the Spirit of GOD who urged him not to go up. It was a case of human error connecting itself with the divine truth, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and suggests Peter's unholy dissuasion of his Lord in Matthew 16:21-23. How is this prophecy repeated, and with what additional particulars when the company reaches Caesarea (vv. 10-12)?

There was obscurity in the prediction at Tyre which is removed at Caesarea, according to the divine principle by which revelations become clearer as the time for their fulfilment approaches.

V. Roman Period, 21:18-28:31

Deep interest attaches to every detail leading up to Paul's visit to Rome.

Our attention is called first, to his meeting with James, and the other leaders at Jerusalem, where he rehearses "**particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry**" (v. 19).

It seems to have been his habit always to stop at Jerusalem on his homeward trips, although the real end of his journey on each occasion was Antioch of Syria, the Gentile headquarters of the church. What Jewish custom was Paul prevailed upon to observe on this occasion; and on what ground (vv. 20-26)?

A large number of the converted Christian Jews entertained a prejudice against Paul, because in his preaching to the Gentiles he insisted on salvation by faith without the observance of the Mosaic ceremonial law. It was the old story of Acts 15 repeated, and which, in one way or another, continues to be repeated even in our own time.

In this case, to disarm prejudice, the great apostle to the Gentiles is induced to engage in one of the acts of the ceremonial law - one, the performance of which involved the violation of no Christian principle, and might do much to bring about a better feeling in the church. Into what difficulty did this lead Paul (vv. 27-30)?

It is to be borne in mind that the Jews who stirred up this tumult against the apostle were not the converted Jews to conciliate whom he had taken upon himself this vow, but unconverted Jews, those who had given in no adherence to the Christian religion, and who had known of Paul and his teaching when he was in the neighborhood of Ephesus.

- by what providence was he delivered from the angry multitude (vv. 31-36)?
- in his defense before the people what circumstance in his experience does he newly dwell upon (vv. 17-21)?

It would make a deeply valuable study to consider the number of such revelations of the person of JESUS with which Paul was blessed.

- what was the immediate issue of this defense so far as Paul was concerned (vv. 22-29)?
- what second opportunity for a hearing is arranged for (v. 30)?
- into what error did Paul fall at the first (23:1-5)?
- by what tactful action on his part was he released from the critical situation (vv. 6-10)?
- what divine encouragement did he receive (vv. 11)?
- what conspiracy was entered into against him (vv. 12-15)?
- by what providence was he delivered out of their hands and into what place does he now come (vv. 16-35)?
- under what circumstances is he now accused before Felix (24:1-9)?
- what kind of person is Felix seen to be (vv. 22-27)?
- before whom is Paul now arraigned (25:1-8)?
- is it not assuring to note how GOD moved upon the mind of a wicked governor like Festus in such a way as to frustrate the plans of Paul's adversaries? - by what demand of Paul is it finally determined he shall proceed to Rome (vv. 9-12)?
- what circumstance intervenes (25:13-26:32)?
- on the sea-journey what information was divinely vouchsafed to Paul (27:9-11)? And later (vv. 21-27)?
- what indicates on the part of the soldiers an increasing respect for the words and opinions of the apostle? Compare verse 11 with verses 31, 32, 33-36.
- how again, did GOD act upon the mind of an unbeliever to spare the life of His servant and carry out His will in bringing Him to the scene of his labors (vv. 41-43)?

Have you examined the map to locate the island of Melita Of Malta (28:1)?

- what supernatural works were wrought on that island (vv. 7-9)?

- what particular consideration was shown Paul, as a prisoner, in Rome (v. 16)?
- what did he improve as an early opportunity to do in the line of his divine calling (vv. 17-20)?
- what was the result of this first meeting (vv. 21-23)? The result of the second meeting (vv. 24-29)?
- how long did the apostle remain in Rome, and under what circumstances (vv. 30, 31)?

There are reasons for believing that Paul had a hearing before Caesar as the result of which he was set at liberty, pursuing his missionary journeys further to the West. Afterwards, however, as tradition holds, he was re-arrested, tried and beheaded in Rome as a martyr to the Christian faith. We shall touch upon these subjects again when we come to the study of some of his later epistles.

It is presumable, by the way, that four of his epistles, and five, if we shall count Hebrews as one of his, were written during this imprisonment - Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, I Philemon, Hebrews.

There is little doubt also that Luke, and other of the leading disciples who accompanied Paul to Rome, or who visited him there, labored diligently in the city at this time; but as another remarks, what almost unprecedented modesty is instanced in Luke's case, the historian of these records, who is wholly silent concerning his labors and sufferings!

~ end of Lesson 5 ~
