

Acts: Sharing God's Good News with Everyone

Introduction

The Book of Acts reveals a vibrant, growing, witnessing Christian community. The book also reveals a Christian community that had some things to learn as it went along. Christians in the days of the Book of Acts did mighty and wonderful things through God's Spirit, but they were not perfect. They had some growing to do. Wouldn't you agree that we do, too?

As you study these Bible lessons, you will see particularly that the early Christians had to grow in their understanding that the gospel was for all people, not just for people like them. The disciples heard Jesus commission them at the time of his ascension. They evidently failed to understand and do immediately all Jesus was commanding them to do, though, when he said, "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, NIV).

From their actions following Acts 1:8, the disciples apparently considered initially that Jesus' command meant that they were to be Jesus' witnesses only to the Jews in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Only as they grew in their understanding of the gospel did they come to see that Jesus had something larger, much larger, in mind. The disciples' background was Jewish. They had to grow to understand that Jesus was sending them to share God's good news with everyone, not just the Jews. The Spirit led them to see that Jesus was sending them to be his witnesses to all people everywhere—Gentiles (that is, all non-Jewish people) as well as Jews.

The Book of Acts tells the story of how God inspired, challenged, empowered, and even pushed the early church to cross barriers to share God's good news with everyone. God would not allow the early Christians to use their culture and "the way we have always done it" as excuses for failing to reach out to all people with the gospel.

If we study this book with discerning eyes, we will see that the Book of Acts challenges Christians and churches in our day who tend to be turned in on themselves. Many churches talk about reaching out, but in practice they find it difficult merely to welcome and include people who come to them and who are like them. So, beware: Studying and applying these lessons could bring about a revolution in the way some Christians approach other people and some churches "do church."

Unit 8: Crossing Barriers for Christ

These five sessions deal with how God led the early church to cross barriers to reach out beyond itself and its Jewish culture and follow Jesus' instruction to be witnesses to all people. The sessions deal with Philip's witnessing to the Samaritans and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:4-8,25-38), with Paul's conversion and call to carry the Lord's message to all people (9:1-22, 26-29), with Peter's experience in sharing the gospel

with Cornelius, a God-fearer (10:1-5, 9-17, 23-48), with how the Jerusalem and Antioch churches were led to cross barriers (11:1-4, 15-26), and with the decision of the Jerusalem council that God wanted the church to reach out to all people without requiring them to become Jews (15:1-22).

Session 5	Sharing the Gospel with "Different" People	Acts 8:4-8,25-38
Session 6	Chosen to Carry the Lord's Message	Acts 9:1-22, 26-29
Session 7	Opening Our Eyes to a Widening World	Acts 10:1-5, 9-17, 23-48
Session 8	Gathering Courage to Change	Acts 11:1-4, 15-26
Session 9	Receiving People As God Does	Acts 15:1-22