

Xenos Christian Fellowship
Christian Ministry 2
Week 7 - Interpreting and Applying Acts

Introduction to Acts

Main theme of Acts:

1. Acts 1:8* serves as a rough outline for the entire book.

Acts 1:8	Chapter	Geographic/ Cultural Expansion	Key People/ Events
"You will be my witnesses in JERUSALEM, and in all JUDEA and SAMARIA, and to the ENDS OF THE EARTH."	1:1-6:7	Jerusalem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The arrival of the Spirit and conversion of thousands.
	6:8-9:31	Galilee & Samaria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persecution moves Christians out of Jerusalem. • Samaritans come to Christ.
	9:32-16:5	Gentiles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cornelius (the first Gentile) is converted. • The church at Antioch sends out missionaries. • Jerusalem council: Gentiles do not have to embrace Jewish culture.
	16:6-19:20	Europe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The gospel expands into Macedonia and Greece.
	19:21-28:30	Rome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journey to Jerusalem leads to Paul's imprisonment. • Paul tried and sent to Rome.

2. Summary statements show the forward movement of the gospel.

(Acts 6:7) "the word... kept on spreading... the disciples continued to increase..."

(Acts 9:31) "the church... continued to increase."

(Acts 12:24) "the word... continued to grow and to be multiplied."

(Acts 16:5) "the churches... grew daily in numbers."

(Acts 19:20) "the word... was growing mightily..."

(Acts 28:30-31) And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters, and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.

3. The opening and closing scenes of Acts emphasize_____.

Setting at the beginning of Acts	Setting at the end of Acts
• Jerusalem, center of the Jewish world.	• Rome, center of the Gentile world.
• Jewish believers.	• Gentile believers.
• Peter is the leading figure.	• Paul is the leading figure.

4. Repeated references to the Holy Spirit show how He was (and still is) the _____ behind the early Christian movement.¹

Four ways the Holy Spirit empowered early Christians to carry out Christ's mission.

- *He guided them to people who were ready to hear about Jesus* (Ethiopian eunuch in 8; Cornelius in 10, vision of the man from Macedonia in 16).
- *He guided the selection of individuals for specific ministry tasks* (missionaries in 13).
- *He empowered them to communicate the message boldly and effectively* (2:4; 4:8; 4:31; 7:55; 9:17; 13:9-11a; 13:52).
- *He empowered them to perform miracles* (2:43; 4:30; 5:12, 6:8; 8:6,13; 14:3).
- *He transformed the hearts of people so they could fulfill God's unique role for their lives* (men full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom – 6:3; a good man, full of the Holy Spirit – 11:24).

What can we do to be empowered by the Spirit?

Questions to ask when reading Acts:

“Which individuals are being focused on? What role do they play in the expansion of the gospel?”

“What cultural barriers impede the spread of the Gospel? Who objects to / is

¹ These points about the mandate and the promise are from Gary DeLashmutt's central teaching outline.

uncomfortable with the expansion of the gospel? What are their objections and how are they overcome?"

"What role does the Holy Spirit play in this story? How is he involved in moving the gospel forward?"

Acts and the Question of Historical Precedent

1. Should the narratives in Acts, or any other biblical narrative for that matter, function as a precedent—an example for us to follow today?
2. How do we know which practices to imitate and which ones to avoid?

Consider these events:

(Acts 19:11,12) God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.

(Acts 15:37-39) Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, 38 but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. 39 They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company.

(Acts 5:9) Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also." 10 At that moment she fell down at his feet and died.

(Acts 2:2,3) And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.

Descriptive and Prescriptive/Didactic

Descriptive:

e.g. (Acts 10:45,46) The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. 46 For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Prescriptive/Didactic:

e.g. (2 Tim. 4:2) Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction.

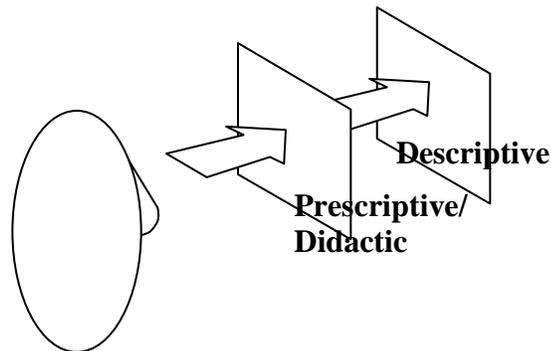
e.g. (Col. 2:9) For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form...

Readers must be careful to identify the type of passage they are reading, especially in the book of Acts.

(John Stott) "*What is described* in Scripture as having happened to others *is not necessarily intended for us*, whereas what is promised to us we should appropriate, and what is commanded us we are to obey . . . What is descriptive is valuable (in determining what God intends for all Christians) only in so far as it is interpreted by what is didactic . . . *We must derive our standards of belief and behavior from the teaching of the New Testament . . . rather than from the practices and experiences which it portrays.*"²

THEREFORE: We interpret the _____ in light of the _____.

Here's a useful maxim: Interpret descriptions in the Gospels and Acts in light of what the Gospels and the epistles teach.



² John R. W. Stott, *Baptism and Fullness* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1975), pp. 15-17.

Examples of interpreting the descriptive in light of the prescriptive/didactic.

Narrative: Acts 2:42	Apostles' teaching	Fellowship	Breaking of bread	Prayer
Prescriptive/didactic scripture	Col. 3:16 1 Pet. 2:2	Heb. 10:24,25	1 Cor. 11:23-34	Eph. 6:18 1 Thes. 5:17

Narrative: Acts 2:43	Wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles (2 Cor. 12:12).
Prescriptive/didactic scripture	The phrase "signs and wonders" is used in connection with the apostles and their close associates to validate the truth of their message.

Narrative: Acts 2:44,45	Those who believed were together and had all things in common. They began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.
Prescriptive/didactic scripture	The New Testament never prescribes communal living. Rather it affirms the legitimacy of private property (1 Thes. 4:11,12; 2 Thes. 3:11,12) and teaches us to be generous (1 John 3:16,17).

Practices and experiences in Acts and their role in the church today

Definition of Restorationism: A movement emphasizing the belief that God's miraculous working in the Gospels and Acts describes the *normal* Christian life today (individually and corporately).

(John Wimber) "What conclusions can be drawn from my brief survey of the book of Acts? First, the early church – particularly the Twelve – carried on Jesus' ministry, and this included signs and wonders. They were trained by Christ in how to do them and they did them well. Second, not only the Twelve healed the sick, cast out demons, and experienced visions. Other Christians did too. *Signs and wonders were a part of daily life*, expected by the church. Paul, Stephen, Cornelius, Ananias – none of them members of the original Twelve – all practiced signs and wonders."³

Our use of the term "Restorationism" encompasses a diverse range of movements and denominations that emerged during the last century and continue today.⁴

³ John Wimber, *Power Evangelism* (New York, New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1986), p. 119.

⁴ There were three "waves" of Restorationism in the 20th century:

A. Pentecostalism (started early 20th cent.): Many early Pentecostals believed that speaking in tongues was a necessary evidence of personal salvation (Apostolic Church) and that physical healing can always be appropriated by faith. They have since softened their stance in these areas. They tend to be concerned about doctrine, and are somewhat sectarian.

Signs and wonders

Definition: Restorationists use the biblical term “**signs and wonders**” to refer to the *overt displays of the power of the Spirit* mentioned throughout the New Testament and especially in the Gospels and Acts.

If “signs and wonders” are so prevalent in the Gospels and Acts, why aren’t they a normal part of the church today?

1. The uniqueness of Jesus and the Apostles

(Acts 2:22) “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man *attested* to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know...”

•

(2 Corinthians 12:12*) The *signs of a true apostle* were performed among you with all perseverance, by *signs and wonders and miracles*.

•

There are no _____ today in the same sense as original Apostles of Christ (the twelve plus James and Paul).

2. The uniqueness of the times

3. The nature of the book of Acts itself

B. Charismatic Movement (started mid 20th century): They believe a second act of grace of being "Spirit-filled" or Spirit-baptized" is necessary after conversion, and tongues are evidence of this; more focused on experience than doctrine. Charismatic renewals have spread through dead, ritualistic, liberal Protestant denominations (Episcopalians) as well as the Catholic church.

C. "Third Wave" (started late 20th cent.): "Signs and Wonders" movement (e.g., Vineyard); goal is to bring the full power of the Spirit as they see Him working in the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, into mainstream evangelical churches. They don't hold to a second act of grace, tongues as evidence of salvation, or healing in the atonement.

4. The epistles do not emphasize performing signs and wonders

Experiences and practices emphasized in Restorationist churches

A. Healing

Description in Acts: Dramatic healings are described frequently in the book of Acts. See Acts 3:1-10; 4:7,14,16,22, 30; 5:15,16; 19:11,12; 28:9.

- Sickness is a _____ and it will only be completely eradicated when Christ returns (*Rom. 8:18-23*).
- God can and sometimes does choose to heal _____.
- God often chooses not to heal people for his own good reasons.
- The Bible endorses _____ attention to bring healing or relief from physical illness.
- Biblical healings were almost always _____ to all, _____, and _____.

See Acts 3:2,7,8,16, John 5:1-9, and Mark 1:40-45 for examples.

B. Being “baptized by the Spirit” and “speaking in tongues.”

Restorationist definition of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit:

“The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is an experience that can only happen to a Christian. It is the Holy Spirit coming upon believers and filling them in order to energize and empower them for service... This experience is distinct from, and subsequent to, the New Birth, is received by faith, and is accompanied by the manifestation of speaking in tongues as the Spirit gives utterance, as the initial evidence.”⁵

Description in Acts:

Passage	Christians already?	Delay in arrival of the Holy Spirit	Tongues and other supernatural phenomena
Acts 2:1-4	Yes	Yes	Yes
Acts 2:37-41	No	Not enough info	None mentioned
Acts 8:5-8;14-18	Yes	Yes	Maybe (vs. 18)
Acts 8:26-39	No	Not enough info	Spirit “snatched Philip away” (v. 39); no tongues mentioned.
Acts 10:34-48	No	No	Yes
Acts 16:11-17 (Lydia)	No	Not enough info	“the Lord opened her heart” (v. 15); no tongues mentioned
Acts 16:25-34	No	Not enough info	earthquake in the Jail; no tongues mentioned
Acts 19:1-7	Yes – although they may not have been aware of the significance of Jesus’ death.	Yes	Yes

⁵ See <http://www.christian-faith.com/bible-studies/baptismintheholyspirit.html> for a typical Restorationist definition of this term.

Prescription/didactic material in the Epistles:

- All Christians have been baptized by the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). This baptism occurs when we are indwelt by the Spirit and put into Christ. This is the true definition of the “baptism of the Holy Spirit.”
- The norm is for Christians to be put into Christ and receive the Spirit at the moment of belief (Eph. 1:13,14).
- While some Christians enjoy the gift of tongues (1 Cor. 12:10), not all Christians have this gift (1 Cor. 12:30) and not all are able to speak in tongues (1 Cor. 14:5).

How do we reconcile what is described in Acts with what is taught in the Epistles?

1. Why the delay in the reception of the Spirit and the presence of tongues
Acts 2:1-12 – The Day of Pentecost

The New Covenant began with the arrival of the Holy Spirit. Prior to Pentecost, God’s people were not indwelt by the Spirit (Jn. 14:15-17). So the delay was inevitable—these Old Covenant believers had to wait until God allowed this new way of relating to him through the Spirit.

Tongues were given as visible proof of Jesus’ promise that the Spirit would come (Acts 1:5) and to make the gospel message understandable to people from all over the Roman empire who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost (Acts 2:5-12). Tongues may have also persuaded Jewish believers that non-Jewish believers could be equal members of God's people (Acts 10:46,47).

Acts 8:14-24 - The first Samaritan Christians

We’re not sure why there was a delay. The apostles sent Peter and John to investigate a report that Samaritans were receiving the Word of God (Acts 8:14). It’s clear from the rest of Acts that the apostles didn’t initially understand the scope of God’s forgiveness (Acts 1:6) and were skeptical when they heard of non-Jews accepting the Gospel (Acts 11:1-3). Seeing people in Samaria receive the Holy Spirit first-hand may have persuaded them that God would accept the Samaritans.

Tongues are never mentioned in this passage, but there was some visible way of seeing that the Samaritans had received the Holy Spirit (“Simon saw” – Acts 8:18).

Extra: Additional explanations for the delay: Peter had the "keys of the kingdom" (Matt. 16:18,19); by making it necessary for the apostles to arrive and lay on their hands, God may have been consolidating the apostle's authority in order to prevent a Samaritan Christian faction.

Acts 19:1-7 – The disciples of John the Baptists in Ephesus

The “disciples” that Paul encountered in Ephesus were followers of John. It's not clear that they fully understood what Jesus had accomplished on the cross. Once Paul reminded them that John's baptism prepared them to believe in Jesus, they agreed to be baptized in his name. They may not have been believers in Christ prior to this. Because they were operating like Old Covenant believers, they had not yet received the Holy Spirit.

Tongues probably confirmed to John's disciples that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, and that Paul had apostolic authority.

Final thoughts on the baptism of the Holy Spirit:

For more Restorationist practices and experiences evaluated in light of the Bible, see the handout: “Tongues, Prophecy & Slaying in the Spirit.”

For more teaching on the purpose of the gift of tongues, see 1 Cor. 14**.

Final thoughts on Restorationism

What we agree with:

- Their desire to restore today's church to New Testament-style Christianity.
- Their enthusiasm for the things of God.

“I'd rather cool down an enthusiast than heat up a corpse!”

- Their expectation of God's supernatural involvement.

“When the people of God begin to speak about the acts of God, then receptivity to the Gospel rises.”⁶

- Their focus on evangelism and missions.

What we disagree with:

- The Restorationists’ use of DESCRIPTIVE portions of Acts to PRESCRIBE the norm for Christians today.
- The EMPHASIS that is placed in Restorationist churches on some of the practices and experiences described in Acts.

Can Christians today perform miracles in the absence of the Apostles?

Should we expect to perform miracles with the same frequency and intensity as the Apostles?

Conclusion

Memory Verses

Acts 1:8* – The Holy Spirit empowered early Christians to take the gospel out from Jerusalem to the world.

1 Corinthians 14** – Explains the primary purpose of the gift of tongues and provides regulations for its use in Christian meetings.

2 Corinthians 12:12* – The apostles were uniquely authorized to perform signs and wonders and miracles.

Acts 2,8,10,19** – Instances of delay between belief in Christ and receiving the Holy Spirit; also instances of speaking in tongues

Assignment

Complete assignment on the Joseph narrative.

Complete inductive paragraph study of Titus 3:1-8

⁶ Martin Robinson & Dwight Smith, *Invading Secular Space* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Monarch Books, 2005), p. 165.