**ACTS OF THE APOSTLES**

FORWARD:

FAITH and ZEAL are the two words that characterize the New Testament Church and First Century Christianity as recorded by Luke**. It is the purpose of this study to reproduce both the First Century kind of FAITH in our hearts, and the kind of unique ZEAL in our lives.** In God’s eternal wisdom he has not left himself without witness. This record of LUKE is filled with evidence that will build our faith. The early church was composed of men and women who were fearful, timid and uncertain. Peter denied the Lord and many of the Twelve forsook him at the crucifixion, yet with their wavering and faltering faith became the fire that consumed the Roman Empire.

It is our goal to recognize the power that turned these timid and fearful disciples into a force that could not be quenched. Luke records in 24:32, “Did not our hearts burn within us…”, then in the second letter to Theophilus he seeks to demonstrate that the power which caused the fire to burn was the **gospel of the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the dead.** The central theme of Luke and this work will be the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The resurrection produced the **faith** and then the **faith** produced the zeal. **Our goal is to return to this form of New Testament Christianity.**

**CLASS STUDY OUTLINE:**

**INTRODUCTION**

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Section 7. Acts 10:1-16:5 OBJECTIVES: THE GREAT TRANSITION

Section 8. Acts 16:5-19:2 OBJECTIVES: THE NEW ENEMY: PAGANISM AND HUMAN WISDOM

Section 9. Acts 19:21-21:6 OBJECTIVES: HISTORICAL CONFIRMATION & DOCTRINAL CERTAINTY

Section 10. Acts 21:17-28:30 OBJECTIVES: “LO, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS EVEN UNTO”

Section 11. Acts 26:1-32 OBJECTIVES: PAUL BEFORE AGRIPPA

Section 1. Part 1…..OBJECTIVES: ACTS IS WRITTEN AS AN HISTORICAL APOLOGETIC

1. Our first objective is to understand the historical context. Too often the charge that the New Testament is a myth or legend goes unanswered.
2. Our second objective is to see that not only can the New Testament documents be vindicated from the charges of myth or legend, but they can be shown to be not theological philosophies but rather historical records of actual events from which various doctrines are drawn. Our source material illustrates the charge that ACTS is a theological document drawn up by the early church.
3. Our third objective is to accept the challenge of Luke and check out the facts to see if these things are so. Theophilus had enough courage to accept the challenge. Now it is our turn.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Here we find a typical example of a critic’s view of the mythology found in the gospels….

“with the birth stories of Jesus and of John the Baptist also, we pass directly from the world of sober reality into the world of fairy tale…

1. “There was nothing peculiar about the birth of Jesus. He was not God incarnate and no Virgin Mother bore Him. The church in its ancient zeal fathered a myth.”
2. Is Christianity based on philosophy or history?
3. How can we establish the truthfulness of any alleged event in History?
4. What verse is a good example of the degree of historical detail with which Luke wrote?
5. Define “eye-Witnesses” Luke 1: 1-4; Acts 1: 1-11

Section 1. Part 2…..OBJECTIVES: ACTS IS WRITTEN TO SHOW THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION

1. The first objective of this lesson is to show the effect the resurrection had on the disciples and the early church. Not only do the New Testament documents affirm this affect, but so do unbelieving historians.
2. Christianity arose out of Jewish apocalyptic…It gained strength from the belief in His resurrection and the promise of eternal life…..
3. Secondly, once we see the effect the resurrection had on the early church, we know more how to channel our efforts in the church today. We need to instill bone-deep and conviction-stabilized faith in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead today. We need to preach about it and teach on it in Bible classes from the cradle to the aged. Until members believe, really believe, that Jesus arose from the dead; we will never cure the problems of indifference and unconcern.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Compare the two disciples on the road to Emmaus with the condition of the church today.
2. How did the event on the road affect them?
3. What kind of teaching do we need to do to restore the zeal, the burning passion, and the enthusiasm?
4. Why does the subject of the resurrection change people?
5. What does the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the deal imply?
6. What was one of the purposes for writing the Book of Acts?

Section 1. Part 3…..OBJECTIVES: ACTS IS WRITTEN TO SHOW THE WITNESSING OF THE RESURRECTION

1. In this day when so much is said about “witnessing for Christ” we need to understand New Testament witnessing as our first objective.
2. After we define “witnessing,” the next important point is to know who the witnesses are? How does the New Testament answer the question, “Who are the witnesses?”
3. After we understand the definition of witness, and who are the witnesses, the last point is “what was the purposes of the witness?”
4. What application can we make of this material to us?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was the purpose of the testimony of the early disciples?
2. What was the primary subject of 1St century preaching?
3. Is this the primary subject of our preaching today?
4. What will motivate us to stand for god’s truth and be faithful to His cause?
5. What affect will a firm conviction of the historical reality of the resurrection have on us today?

Section 1. Part 4…..OBJECTIVES: ACTS IS WRITTEN TO SHOW THE PERSECUTION FROM SATAN AND THE

 VICTORY FROM GOD WHEN THE GOSPEL OF THE RESURRECTION IS PREACHED

1. Our first main point of consideration in this lesson is the fact that at the conclusion of every crisis which faced the early church there is a statement of victory.
	1. After the crisis in Jerusalem—Acts 6:7
	2. After the crisis of the persecution of Saul of Tarsus—Acts 9:31
	3. After the crisis of Herod’s persecution—Acts 12:24
	4. After the crisis of legalistic Jews—Acts 16:5
	5. After the crisis of Paganism—Acts 19:20
	6. After the crisis of roman imprisonment—Acts 23: 30-31
2. Our second objective is to see the victory of the gospel as well as its struggles. We can become so discouraged, depressed, and pessimistic that we will limit the gospel by our attitude. Of course, there are problems, but Acts is written to demonstrate the victories over every power that stood in the way of salvation’s message.
3. This lesson should show us as clearly as possible the message taught by the first century preachers. It was the message of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Until we begin to preach this message, we will not have their results.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Are internal problems new to the church? How should the answer affect us?
2. What was the promise of the Lord to His disciples in the Great commission? What is the application of this promise today?
3. What was the heart of every New Testament sermon preached in the Book of Acts? Do you feel this is the heart of our preaching today?
4. What is the most important point that we can glean from this lesson?

Section 2. ACTS 1 & 2 THE BEGINNING

OBJECTIVE:

1. Our first objective is to see Acts 2 as the fulfillment of all redemptive prophecy in the Old Testament. The Old Testament was looking forward to a day when the “sword would be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks” and a time when the lion would lay down with the lamb and Luke’s record in Acts 2 shows us the culmination of all Old Testament prophecy in the church of Jesus Christ.
2. While it is also important to understand that chapter 2 is the beginning for New Testament Christianity, it is equally as important to understand that it is also the end of another era. Actually, to be technically correct, it is the “beginning of the END.” The end, of course, is the end of the Levitical system and political state of Israel.
3. Also, we are introduced in chapter 2 to the word of the Holy Spirit and His influence on the early church. A great deal of misunderstanding has come from a failure to study the spirit’s work properly so our aim will be to concentrate on what Luke teaches concerning the work of the Holy Spirit.
4. We need to analyze Peter’s sermon in this chapter so that we might use it to construct our sermons and our teaching. The heart of the sermon is the divinity of Jesus Christ as proven by:
	1. His Miracles
	2. Fulfilled Prophecy
	3. The testimony of the resurrection

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the main thrust of Peter’s sermon in Acts 2?
2. What three ways does Peter use to prove this point?
3. Name three functions of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2
4. What are the “last days”?
5. When did the church of Christ begin? (Dan. 2:44 and Matt 3:1)
6. Where did the church begin? (Isaiah 2:3)
7. How would the church begin? (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:16; Acts 11:15)

Section 3. ACTS 3 PETER’S MESSIANIC SERMON

OBJECTIVE:

1. The messianic sermon by Peter serves as a divine definition and scheme which was promised to Abraham by God. No small controversy has been caused over the question of how Abrahamic promise was to be fulfilled. Premillennial thought has always claimed that the Abrahamic promise is to be fulfilled in some future age when the Jews will return back to the land and Jesus Christ will rule on the throne of David. On the other hand, the amillennial camp claims that the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise has taken place, and we are living in the age of fulfillment. That fulfillment is the forgiveness of sins and the scheme of redemption found in Christ and in the church.

Here Peter takes “sides” on this question as he gives the divine definition that the promise is fulfilled in Christ and in the forgiveness of sins.

1. We will see Peter’s three-fold appeal to the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth: (1) He is the suffering servant of prophecy, (2) He is the Great Prophet of the Old Testament, (3) He is the Seed of Promise to Abraham. Remembering these appeals are keyed to the Jewish mind and all rest on the Old Testament scriptures, we can feel the power of His great sermon.
2. Now, finally to those present at that time and those who read today, the conclusion is “HEAR YE HIM.” Because of who He is, we had better believe and obey this one sent for our redemption.

DISCUSION QUESTIONS

1. From this lesson and from other references in the Old Testament, does it seem likely that the reign of Christ was to be an utopia on earth?
2. Did the Old Testament predict earthly glory for the Messiah or earthly suffering?
3. What scriptures show us the suffering of Christ as a part of God’s plan?
4. How does the premillennialist view the church?
5. How can Premillennialism harmonize Old Testament prophecy concerning the rejection, suffering & finally the death of Jesus with their concept of an earthly Messiah ruling from the throne of David?
6. What was predicted by Isaiah 52: 13-53:13?
7. Compare Acts 2:38 with Peter’s statement in Acts 3:19.

Section 4. ACTS 4 & 5 THE IDENTIFYING MARKS OF THE EARLY CHURCH

OBJECTIVE:

1. We know there are many characteristics of the church that we may utilize in establishing its identity. We can describe the worship of the New Testament church and then compare what we see around us today and if it does not worship in the same way we know, it is not the original. The same can be said in regard to doctrine and organization.

The purpose of this lesson is to note three identifying characteristics found in Acts 4 & 5 which are the three major points in this lesson. These are identifying marks just as certainly as the points of doctrine, organization, and worship. Therefore, we need to recognize them as our first objective.

1. After we have recognized that bold preaching, divine withdrawl, and honorable shame are three characteristics of the early church, we now want to examine the condition of our hearts today. Are we today what they were in the first century?
2. After the comparison is completed between the early church and the church today, our third objective simply asks one question: “If we fail in any one of these areas, are we the true church.”? We demand of those in the denominational world that they have the New Testament organization, doctrine, and worship or they are not the true church. Ought we demand more from them than we demand from ourselves?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you feel we have restored the early church in name, doctrine, and worship? What about in spirit or in commitment?
2. Do we have a right to demand identity to the early church from the denominations if we make no attempt to identify our spirit or commitment of the early church? Do you feel there is a danger of a double standard?
3. Where is the church today in regard to withdrawl?
4. Do you feel that most members really believe in the power of preaching the gospel? Is there a danger in being too negative…..”it won’t work” attitude?
5. What is the most important point of this lesson?

Section 5. ACTS 6 & 7 STEPHEN’S DEFENSE

OBJECTIVE:

1. We must see the need for men like Stephen in the Lord’s church today. He was chosen when there was a problem in the Jerusalem church and when that was solved he was ready to take a gospel to a hostile Jewish audience. His commitment and boldness should be the subject of our imitation.
2. Luke records for us the divine pattern showing us how the church is to deal with its benevolent problem. The issue here is care of the needy, the widows in particular. The church cared for its own without any human institutions or centralized brotherhood works. If such were the practice today, the division well known to all would be nonexistent.
3. Stephen’s sermons show us the penalty for the rejection of a divinely revealed message. Israel rejected the message of deliverance every time it was sent to them, teaching us that the greatest mistake men can make is not the violation of god’s justice (as bad as that may be) but is rather the rejection of god’s mercy when a message of deliverance is offered. The punishment promised by Stephen here was the destruction of the nation, the temple, and the city.
4. The nature of God is the final lesson learned. He does not dwell in the temples made with men’s hands because of His spiritual nature. We, therefore, need to conclude that large, beautiful, and expensive buildings do not impress God and are carnal works of man’s flesh. These types of edifices do not impress God because they are not in harmony with His nature. If He did not dwell in the magnificent structure which Solomon built, there is little chance that we will be able to entice Him with our cheap imitations.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you feel the situation in Acts 6: 2-3 gives us any insight as to how we ought to handle our problems today?
2. Should we be careful about the “mission” of the church?
3. Where is the dwelling place of God today?
4. What is our attitude toward God destroying America?
5. Could we be like the Jew of old to some degree? Is it a real possibility? What can we do to prevent it or to endure it?

Section 6. ACTS 8:4-11:18 MIRACLES AND CONVERSION-SIGN AND SALVATION

OBJECTIVE:

1. Our first objective will be to investigate the spirit of the early church. At first, the Apostles and leaders were threatened and evidently lost their lives. Stephen has been martyred, James will die in acts 12, and Saul is now breathing threats against all believers. What was the force that that saw the early church through a blood bath of persecution? What was the drive that propelled them to teach and preach everywhere even at the face of death? Our first objective will be to see that this force was their faith based on the miraculous signs and wonders worked in their midst.
2. Secondly, we need to realize that we are not forsaken by God because we don’t have the miracles of the early church. We need to understand that their miracles are our miracles today.
3. The third objective is to establish an unshakeable faith today, not by present day miracles but by understanding the miracles of the early church in the first century. We need not feel “left out” or “sorry for ourselves” because we don’t have the miraculous element to prove the deity of Christ or the necessity for baptism. Those miracles over 2,000 years ago confirm the word today just as they did then. The death of thousands of Christians confirms the miracles because without the great signs and wonders worked by the Holy Spirit, there would be no reason for the early church to suffer in such a severe persecution as they did. Remove the reason for the early church to suffer in such a severe persecution as they did. Remove the miraculous and you remove the only factor that explains the motivation for their faith.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you feel that sometimes Christians have an “inferiority complex” when dealing with the gospel?
2. Do we really believe romans 1:17? Should this be the case?
3. How do we get faith?
4. Do we spend enough time seeking to ground our faith?
5. Do you feel that reading about a miracle such as raising up the paralyzed aeneas in Lydda is as powerful as a miracle worked in the assembly on the very Sunday morning this lesson is being studied?
6. What do you feel the church needs today more than anything?

Section 7. ACTS 10:1-16:5 THE GREAT TRANSITION

OBJECTIVE:

1. From the beginning of the promise to Abraham, God had planned to bring the Gentile into covenant relation with Him. God told Abraham that “in His seed should all nations of the earth be blessed.” Now, as Cornelius opens the door, god in Christ is ready to receive the flood of harvest from the gentile world. Satan opposed this spreading of the gospel seeking to prevent it in every way possible, but the victory was the Lord’s. Our first objective un this lesson is to view the Great Transition.
2. Secondly, after following the entrance of the Gentiles into a new spiritual relationship with god through Christ, we must define what kind of relationship they have obtained. This great question is settled for all time in the section on the Great Transition. Would the Gentile be justified by law or would the Gentile be justified by grace? Our second objective will be to understand the nature of law and the nature of grace.
3. The plan of God as revealed in OLS Testament prophecies is the third objective we have before us. As seen in objective number one, it was the plan of God all along to bring Christ the Gentile; and now we see this fact established from Old Testament scriptures.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is there a danger of racial prejudice in the church today?
2. Contras salvation by works with salvation by faith
3. What kind of man was Barnabas?

Section 8. ACTS 16:5-19:2 THE NEW ENEMY: PAGANISM AND HUMAN WISDOM

OBJECTIVE:

1. Our first objective will be to catch the panoramic view of the new enemy. Paganism and its culture. We may observantly viewing the culture and society of Philippi, Athens, Corinth, and the three other cities discussed here compared with our society and culture today. Yet, in spite of the wickedness and immorality of the day, we find Christianity the victor over the “god made with hands.”
2. We secondly then need to feel the aggressiveness of the preachers in taking the gospel to the lost. Whether it be in Thessalonica amid persecution or Athens among intellectualism or in Ephesus confronting the occult, Paul, Silas, and Timothy were rattling the chains of sin and darkness.
3. To see the picture of God and man as Paul presented it to the Athenian in his great address from the Areopagus, we learn: (1) the origin of man, (2) the purpose of man, (3) the destiny of man. All of which is predicated on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. What a great message for a sin-sick world.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Compare society today and its culture with the type of society and its culture found by the apostle Paul. Could we say that one is better or worse than the other? Do we face a more difficult task in converting the lost than he did?
2. Are we as Christians, generally, hesitant, to take the gospel to difficult places and to difficult people?
3. What do you feel is the most important point of this lesson?

Section 9. ACTS 19:21-21:6 HISTORICAL CONFIRMATION AND DOCTRINAL CERTAINTY

OBJECTIVE:

1. One of the most important lessons in our study is seen in the next objective. Here it is our purpose to establish the principle of divine authority concerning the doctrine of the church of our Lord. The authority for the doctrine which we are to believe is not in tradition, man of reputation, or institutions, rather it is in the New Testament framed in a historical context which can be verified. This relationship between history and doctrine is most important.
2. Here we establish the nature of the historical context and follow the course of archaeology and history to watch it say “amen” to Luke’s record. At least six major portions of this text have been established for us by archaeological and historical discovery: (1) the images, (2) the theater, (3) the custom of selling images, (4) the temple, (5) the feasts, and (6) the impact of Christianity in destroying pagen-worship-related business. Luke’s record is fact, not fiction.
3. The doctrine of the Lord’s supper becomes our first example of this principle. The reason the Lord’s Supper is so important because of the historical event of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, thus the inextricable bond between the history of the New Testament and the doctrine of the New Testament.
4. Secondly, in regard to the Lord’s Supper, we see it confirmed by a miracle when Eutychus was raised from the dead. This refers back to section 6, Miracles, conversions, signs, and Salvation. The miracles confirmed the word both in Paul’s age and to us today, showing God’s approval for His doctrine. So, when Eutychus was raised by Paul, it put God’s divine stamp of approval on it.
5. The doctrine of the organization of the local church is also taught in this historical context. Not only does Paul outline how the local church is to operate, but he also prophecies how the first apostasy will come about. Thus, we have both the function of organization and the perversion of organization.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How could a forger construct a myth so that it could be passed off on gullible people as truth?
2. What is your opinion of Theophilus?
3. Who needs to answer the challenge today of Luke to “check me out,” the believer or the unbeliever? Who needs to prove anything?
4. Does Christianity merit discussion in a philosophical context?

Section 10. ACTS 21:17-28:30 “LO, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS EVEN UNTO”

OBJECTIVE:

1. First, we will see Luke establish the fulfillment of the Lord’s promise in the Great Commission, Matthew 28: 18-20, “Lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world.” Jesus made the promise that I will be with you and Luke shows that the Lord’s word is eternally true!
2. Luke gives us a classic, first-hand illustration of how the Lord uses different means such as the Roman government to accomplish His providential purposes. This providential working of God may or may not be miraculous. We observe evil men such as Felix and Festus, who thought they were serving their own interest but in reality they were serving the needs of God’s preacher.
3. As the conclusion is drawn by Luke in Acts 28:30-31, we hear the final note of victory ring out as Paul in his own house teaches unopposed, welcoming all who come in. Victory In spite of pain, persecution, and perversion has been Luke’s message; and he closes in the same note that he opened with, VICTORY IN JESUS!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you feel the church has successfully carried out the responsibility of the Great Commission?
2. If you do, what examples are evidence of this?
3. If you do not, why have we failed?
4. Do you believe in “divine providence” today?
5. What does this lesson concerning Paul teach?
6. What is your understanding now of the promise of our Lord, Matthew 28:19-20, “Go unto all the world and lo, I will be with you even unto the end of the worlds.” How does this apply to us?

Section 11. ACTS 26:1-32 PAUL BEFORE AGRIPPA

OBJECTIVE:

1. Our first objective here is to view the fulfillment of the promise of the Lord found in Acts 9:15 when it was revealed to Paul that he would stand before kings. Truly, this was to be fulfilled before Agrippa, but it would not stop until Paul stood before Nero himself. The last lesson demonstrated God’s providence in providing the fulfillment of that goal.
2. Paul’s preaching to Agrippa revealed the second objective of this lesson, the nature and purpose of the gospel. As Paul defines “the hope of Israel,” he defines by inspiration the scope of redemption. Paul told Agrippa that he was in bonds because he preached the “hope of Israel.” Of course, the Jews at that time and the premillennialist today both seek to define “the hope of Israel” as an earthly reign of Jesus Christ, yet this is not what Paul preached. Paul preached the forgiveness of sins and redemptive Christianity.
3. After giving the purpose of the gospel, Paul then establishes the evidence for believing the gospel, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In this objective, we find that the only reason possible for the conversion of Saul of Tarsus is that the resurrected Lord appeared to him, then the Lord taught him what no man or group of men could accomplish, thereby, giving us evidence which cannot be denied for the existence of the supernatural event of the resurrection.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. If Jesus of Nazareth was dead and Saul of Tarsus saw Him alive, what does this imply? Could there be any other reason for Saul’s conversion?
2. Do you see the Book of Acts of the Apostles in a different light than before?
3. What theme of Apostolic preaching comes to mind over and over in the Book?
4. How do we compare today with the early church? What were the strength and weaknesses of the early church? What are our strengths and weaknesses today?
5. What do you feel is the most important lesson of this study?