

Xenos Christian Fellowship
Christian Ministry 2
Week 4 - Interpreting and Applying Acts

Editors' note:

- *Italics (lower case or ALL CAPS) show what students should write in their student outline.*
- **Bold (including bold italics and bold ALL CAPS) shows what appears in the student outline.**
- Regular text is used for lecture notes; ALL CAPS are used for emphasis.

Introduction to Acts

Acts records the birth and expansion of the early church. It is filled with interesting historical information that provides the background of the apostles' letters in the rest of the New Testament.

There is much to learn from the example of the early church. But Acts has also been improperly interpreted by many groups. This has, in some cases, led to misplaced emphases and suspect teaching. Our goal is to help you benefit from reading this book without falling into some of those errors.

Main theme: *The expansion of the Gospel, orchestrated by the Holy Spirit*, from Jew to Gentile, from Jerusalem to Rome. Several features of the book of Acts reveal Luke's emphasis on this expansion directed by the Holy Spirit.

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 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 the Gospel’s progress.

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 driving force behind the early Christian movement.¹

“The Acts of the Apostles” could be re-titled “The Continuing Acts of Jesus through His Followers by the Power of the Holy Spirit.” At each stage of the church's expansion, Luke shows how the Holy Spirit provided early Christians with everything they need to fulfill Jesus’ mandate. They experienced the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit as long as they were willing to cooperate with him.

- *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*

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

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 was the key to the early church’s dynamism? *The empowering of the Holy Spirit!* This same Holy Spirit, and his power, is available to us today. Although the apostles played a unique role,, the Holy Spirit is still alive and well and ready to empower us today —if we are willing to cooperate with him.

What can we do to be empowered by the Spirit? (Discuss)

By walking in the spirit. Remind students of the three elements of walking by the Spirit covered in Christian Growth (sowing to the Spirit, setting your mind on the things of the spirit, keeping in step with the Spirit).

By stepping into roles of ministry that you know are beyond your natural ability (scary steps of faith).

By asking the Spirit to teach you as you read his word.

In light of our summary of the main theme of Acts, here are some **good 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 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?”

Discussion: When students came to **Acts 10** in their homework, they were asked to answer these questions. Take some time to discuss the answers that they came up with.

Acts and the Question of Historical Precedent

Christians who read the book of Acts can’t help but be inspired by the expansion of the early church. Thousands of people were coming to Christ, the Holy Spirit arranged meetings between Christians and non-Christians, people were being healed, speaking in tongues, escaping from danger, and preaching the gospel boldly to anyone who would listen. Doesn’t that sound appealing? Wouldn’t any Christian desire a life like that?

God wants to see the same exciting, joyful, forward-moving expansion of the Gospel in today's church that he engineered in the book of Acts. But to what extent should the church today imitate the practices described in Acts?

There are stories in the Old Testament that few Christians feel the need to imitate (e.g. Joshua's conquests, Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal, etc.). But when people read Acts, they often see what they are reading as a precedent, an example for the church of all ages to follow. Almost no church believes they should imitate *everything* Acts, but most try to follow some of it.

Should the narratives in Acts, or any other biblical narrative for that matter, function as a precedent—an example for us to follow today? 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.

Should things like this occur in the church today? Is there something wrong if nothing like this is happening in your church? Is there something wrong with you if you aren't experiencing this in your own life?

Descriptive and Prescriptive/Didactic

Much of the material in the New Testament falls into two categories:

Descriptive: *narration of what took place.*

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: *commands about how to live the Christian life (prescriptive) and direct teaching on spiritual truths (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

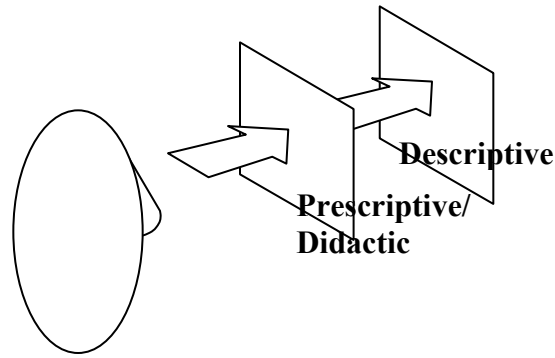
Instructors: Check for comprehension here. Ask students to say what Stott has said in their own words.

We interpret the *descriptive* in light of the *prescriptive/didactic*.

We don't imitate what the bible DESCRIBES unless it is PRESCRIBED in DIDACTIC portions of scripture!

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

There are many practices and experiences described in Acts. Should the church engage in all of them today? To what extent should they be emphasized in our church?

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).

Restorationists see the New Testament narrative (the gospels and Acts) as a paradigm for normal Christianity. After surveying miraculous activity in the book of Acts, a well-known restorationist author concludes:

(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

Restorationists seek to *restore* today's church to the same level of the miraculous that we read about in the Gospels and Acts.

Churches that approach the Gospels and Acts in this way may not use the term “Restorationist” to describe themselves. Our use of the term encompasses a diverse range of movements and denominations that emerged during the last century and continue on today.⁴

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. Examples can be found in Acts 2:22, 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 8:6,18; 14:3; 15:12. In Restorationist churches, the phrase “signs and wonders” encompasses a wide range of phenomena including healings, visions, being slain in the spirit, speaking a word of prophecy, raising people from the dead, speaking in tongues, etc.

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...”

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

⁴ There have been 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.

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.

- *Miracles were proof that Jesus was the messiah.*

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

- *Miracles were the distinguishing feature of a true apostle.*

In some of the more extreme wings of the Restorationist movement, individuals call themselves apostles, and speak a prophetic word from God with great authority. We would argue that **there are no “A”postles today in the same sense as original Apostles of Christ (the twelve plus James and Paul).**

The original Apostles were witnesses of the resurrection (Acts 1:21,22). Paul says in 1 Cor. 15:8 that he was the "last of all" to witness the resurrected Christ. Therefore, there are no more Apostles after Paul.

The New Testament makes a distinction between "Apostles" and "a_postles." "Apostles" are the ones described above and ended in the first century (contra Roman Catholic doctrine of papal authority through Apostolic succession). Small "a" apostles, if you will, are messengers (see “messengers” in 2 Cor. 8:23) or perhaps itinerant church-planters (Rom. 16:7).

2. The uniqueness of the times

Acts records a watershed event in salvation history. The era of the New Covenant begins with the arrival of the Holy Spirit and the church is born. Like other key phases of God’s plan (the Exodus, the ministry of Christ, etc.) we shouldn’t be surprised to see a heightened degree of miraculous activity.

The Old Testament psalmists frequently look back on the Exodus as special because of the outpouring of miracles (Psalm 105:27ff), and Old Testament prophets look forward to the coming of Messiah as a period of special miraculous activity (see Isa. 35, 61). This implies that they were not experiencing the same level of miraculous activity in their own day.

3. The nature of the book of Acts itself

It’s also helpful to remember that Acts records 30 years of church history (e.g. HIGHLIGHT FILM). What is recorded in Acts are God’s powerful works to propel the church forward. What we don’t see recorded are the everyday illnesses and problems that are normative for this world. History tends to record the unusual.

The position that miraculous healings were the norm in the New Testament church is erroneous. Acts is a highly selective account of the church covering a vast geographical area, hundreds of thousands of people over a stretch of thirty years.

4. The epistles do not emphasize performing signs and wonders

Paul and the other apostles performed signs and wonders in their ministry (Romans 5:18,19; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:4) There were and still are gifts of miracles, healings, and tongues (1 Cor. 12:9,10). But these don't seem to be a central consideration when the apostles instruct churches on how to conduct their affairs. Emphasis is placed on loving others, moral character, sound doctrine, and walking by the Spirit. That's where our emphasis should be as well.

Experiences and practices emphasized in restorationist churches

Let's consider practices described in Acts that are common in many restorationist churches. As we look at each one, we will apply the principle of interpreting descriptive passages in light of prescriptive/didactic passages.

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.**

Should we ever expect healing when we pray for it? What does the rest of the New Testament teach about healing?

- **Sickness is a product of the fall and it will only be completely eradicated when Christ returns (*Rom. 8:18-23*).**

The world as we know it is abnormal, not the way God designed it. It has been changed by man's revolt against God. Therefore, we do not have to accept sickness as normal (as do Eastern religions and atheism); we can abhor it as abnormal and fight it without fighting God (see Jn. 11:33).

In the end, all Christians triumph over sickness and death by receiving new bodies. But in the meantime, all people ultimately succumb to sickness and death. In this age, all healings are temporary. The people that Jesus healed during his ministry became sick again later in life and eventually died. So did the people he raised from the dead.

Therefore, while we affirm God's ability to heal, we shouldn't expect total deliverance from all sickness in this life.

- **God can and sometimes does choose to heal people miraculously.**

Who are we to say that God cannot or will not heal in this way today? As an apostle, Paul was gifted to heal and sometimes was used spectacularly in this way (Acts 19:11,12). He also teaches that God has given "gifts of healings" to some members of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:9,28). There is no scriptural evidence that God has withdrawn this gifting from the church.

Therefore, to think that God can't heal or to declare that God doesn't heal miraculously today is unbiblical. We should beware of the pervasive naturalism of our age which denies the possibility of the miraculous. Are we "Bible believing Christians" yet practicing naturalists? We should be willing to pray for healing, believing that God does work miracles (Gal. 3:3) and can heal. (James 5:16)

- **God often chooses not to heal people for his own good reasons.**

The same Paul who was able to perform spectacular healings in Acts 19:11,12 was evidently unable to heal Trophimus. He was forced to leave him sick in Miletus (2 Tim. 4:20). He may also have been unable to heal Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:27).

God's "no" to a requested healing is often connected to his concern for our sanctification. Because God is sovereign and because we are fallen, it is sometimes best for God not to heal sickness. Paul knew that God refused to heal his own "thorn in the flesh" in order to spare him from a more terrible problem—spiritual pride (2 Cor. 12:7-9).⁵

God cares more about forming our character than he does preserving our comfort. God cares more about reaching others for eternity than making us comfortable in time. The truth is that suffering often exposes our self-sufficiency and makes us aware of our need for God when nothing else can get our attention.

Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that God knows best when we pray for healing, and to submit in advance to his will in this area. It is not a cop-out to say "If it is your will..." We should

⁵ Certainly a recurrent and tormenting illness could be considered "a messenger of Satan," for it might bring Paul within the shadow of death (cf. 2Cor 1:8,9) or hinder the advance of the gospel either by arousing the contempt of his hearers (cf. Gal 4:13, 14) or by frustrating his travel plans. – Expositors Bible Commentary.

ask God to heal believing that he can, and also ask for the wisdom to see what he wants to do when he doesn't heal.

To teach that it is always God's will to heal is unbiblical and cruel. It is unbiblical because it binds God to something he has not promised in his word. It is cruel because it accuses those who are sick and not healed of not having enough faith, which puts them under even greater distress.

- **The Bible endorses medical attention to bring healing or relief from physical illness.**

Paul has no problem whatever advising Timothy to “drink a little wine for your frequent ailments” (**1 Tim. 5:23**). Notice that he does not advise him to exercise more faith, or rebuke him for his sins and unbelief!! The same Paul who was healed miraculously in Acts 9:18 and Acts 14:19,20 had "Luke the beloved physician" as his traveling companion, possibly to care for his "thorn in the flesh!!" (Col. 4:14)

Therefore, there is no contradiction between praying for God to heal and using all the medicinal provisions available. Physical restoration that comes from medicinal treatment is no less biblical than miraculous healing. The same God who heals miraculously gave us creative minds and natural resources that we can use to heal or bring relief to sickness.

Therefore, the view that says using medicine is unspiritual is unbiblical and brings needless shame to Christ.

- **Biblical healings were almost always *visible to all, instantaneous, and complete.***

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

In those rare cases when Jesus healed gradually or by using physical materials, this was to make a point to his audience. For example, in Jn. 9:1-12, Jesus forms a mud ball and tells the blind man to walk to a well to wash his eyes. Both of these actions violated the Pharisee's Sabbath laws—which precipitated a confrontation between Jesus and them. In Mark 8:22-26, Jesus heals a blind man in two stages. The context of this healing is the training of the disciples, and the following context suggests that the man was a picture of the disciples' gradually growing understanding of who Jesus was and what his mission was.

God may indeed heal today like this at times (see Rodney Clapp, "Faith Healing: A Look At What's Happening" Christianity Today, Dec. 16, 1983, pp. 16,17), but Restorationists' healing claims do not fit this profile. (See "Power Evangelism" critique, pp. 8-12.) Most of their "healings" have to do with invisible maladies, gradual healings—areas in which the placebo effect is well-known. They also often reject requests for documentation as unspiritual.

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

Some (not all) Restorationists teach that after Christians receive Christ, they receive a second blessing called “the baptism of the Holy Spirit.”

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.”⁶

Description in Acts: The book of Acts describes three situations where people who are ALREADY Christians receive the Holy Spirit. In these passages, there is a delay between conversion and reception of the Holy Spirit. In some cases, the reception of the Spirit is marked by the presence of tongues. Let’s review these passages along with other conversions in the book of Acts and see what they actually describe:

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.

⁶ See <http://www.christian-faith.com/bible-studies/baptismintheholyspirit.html> for a typical Restorationist definition of this term.

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

Based on this data, it is difficult to establish a norm for when Christians receive the Holy Spirit. There was a delay in three cases. In one case there was no delay. And in three other conversions, the reception of the Spirit is not mentioned. Tongues are only directly mentioned in three cases. For more information on when Christians receive the Holy Spirit and whether or not the reception of the Spirit is always evidenced by tongues we’ll have to look to the Epistles to see what they teach.

Prescription 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? Why the delay in the reception of the Spirit and the presence of tongues Acts 2:1-12?

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—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 Jews that non-Jewish believers could be equal members of God's people.

Acts 8:14-24?

We're not sure why there was a delay. The apostles sent James 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" 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

Apart from Acts 2, 8, 10, and 19, there is no evidence that the thousands of other converts in Acts spoke in tongues or experienced a delay between belief and receiving the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, while there is no evidence that the gift of tongues has been withdrawn (see below), it is unbiblical to teach that we must speak in tongues to be saved (old line Pentecostalism) or that we must have a second filling with the Holy Spirit after we are saved attended by tongues. It is also unbiblical to assume that there is normally a *delay* between belief in the gospel and receiving the Holy Spirit.

All Christians are indwelt by the Spirit and can choose at any time to walk in the Spirit (Rom. 8:1-17) or be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18-20). We do not need a “second baptism” to demonstrate that we are spirit-filled Christians (Charismatics and more recent Pentecostals) or to show we can enjoy deeper fellowship with God (Third Wave). Seeking such a second experience is never commanded anywhere in scripture.

Tongues in the Epistles

What exactly is the gift of tongues and how should it be practiced? Here is a summary of what the Epistles teach about the gift of tongues. .

Definition: *A self-edifying (1 Cor. 14:4); non-cognitive (1 Cor. 14:2b,14); LANGUAGE that aids prayer (1 Cor. 14:2a).*

- *Real language*

Paul associates tongues with speaking and says that men and angels have different tongues (1 Cor. 13:1). Recall Acts 2:6: When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.

- *Given to some, not all*

(1 Cor. 12:30) All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?

This is not an experience all Christians should have at least once, as restorationists often claim. Nor is the

ability to speak in tongues required proof of being “spirit filled.”

- *Primarily used in private*

See 1 Cor. 14:18,19. Tongues can be used in meetings if it they are interpreted (14:27).

Paul lays down several **restrictions for tongues in a corporate setting** so that edification of others remains the primary focus (vs 12,26b, and in context, 12:7,25,26). Paul was not advocating its corporate use, but rather regulating it (1 Cor. 14:20-40):

- *Exercise care when non-Christians or new Christians are present* (1 Cor. 14:16,23).
- *Only a few* (2 or 3) may speak in tongues (v. 27). I.E. - it should not be center-stage of corporate meetings.
- *They must speak in an orderly way, taking turns.* NOT all speaking together, interrupting one another (v. 27).
- *All public tongues must be interpreted* (vs 27b,28).

Paul tells them *not to forbid it* (v. 39) but certainly *regulates* it (above).

In Xenos, a fair number of people speak in tongues. Most do this in private and report that it helps them express themselves to God, refreshes them, and motivates them for ministry and sanctification. The proper corporate setting for tongues would be in a home group, study group, or prayer group—following Paul's restrictions.

Why aren't our home group meetings just like what Paul describes in 1 Cor. 14:26?

- *Paul does not prescribe this. He describes* what was going on in Corinth—and then moves into heavily critiquing and regulating it so that it can be edifying.
- The principle of group participation is valid, and *we should make room and extend freedom for this (sharing, group prayer, etc.) as long as it's practiced as Paul prescribes.* We don't want to be guilty of "quenching" the Holy Spirit.

C. “Prophecy”

In the book of Acts, the word prophet is most often used to refer to an Old Testament prophet. But there are a few examples of prophets who

ministered in the early church. Philip the evangelist “had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses” (Acts 21:9). Agabus is also called a prophet. He correctly predicted that the Jews would deliver Paul over to the Romans when he reached Jerusalem (Acts 21:10-14).

Definition: *Prophets receive and relay God's message to his people.*

Old Testament prophets are known for predicting the future, (FORETELLING) but they also called the Jews to repent and turn back to God (FORTHTELLING). Sometimes they expounded on existing doctrine and called for a response; sometimes they introduced new revelation. Once in a while, they demonstrated SPECIAL KNOWLEDGE—knowing information about someone that God revealed to them (e.g. Daniel’s knowledge of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream).

In the New Testament, people who regularly exercise the gift of prophecy (1 Cor. 12:10) are known as prophets. In one case we know of, a New Testament prophet predicted the future (Agabus in Acts 21), but usually prophets spoke to edify and instruct people in their house church (1 Cor. 14:3,4,31).

The chart below summarizes the role of Old and New Testament prophets:

	Old Covenant	New Covenant
Forth-telling (new doctrine)	Yes	Yes , but stopped with the Apostles.
Forth-telling (applying existing doctrine)	Yes	Yes (1 Cor. 14:3,4,31; Acts 15:32)
Fore-telling	Yes	Yes (Acts 11:28)
Special knowledge	Yes – Daniel with Nebuchadnezzar	No clear examples described or teaching prescribed on this.

Unlike OT prophets, under the New Covenant, prophets do not write new revelation from God. They primarily apply the written Word (see “instruct” in 14:31) both individually and corporately (see Packer, *Keep In Step With The Spirit*, pp. 214-217). We do have prophecy, and we exercise it often (e.g. a good sharing in home church)! We just don't make a big deal of it.

Examples

Preaching, extemporaneous sharing; Francis Schaeffer-like application of the Word to the church today; shared burdens; interpreted tongues (1 Cor. 14:5,6).

Guidelines

- *The content must be evaluated by other Christians* (1 Cor. 14:29): predictions and sharings should be evaluated for accuracy and fidelity against apostolic doctrine (see 1 John 4:1-6. Note that the "we" in verse 6 refers to the Apostles).

Third Wave churches often encourage "experimentation," not judging false predictions, and not exposing or reproving inaccurate predictions.

- *We should not rely on these predictions for personal guidance at the exclusion of other key decision-making principles.* See week 3 of module 2 of Christian Ministry 3 for more on this. Paul in Acts 21 is a good example of applying other key principles to his decision making.

D. "Slaying in the Spirit"

Definition: This is said to be *an intense encounter with God through the agency of another Christian.*

Phenomena: *Falling back, fainting, uncontrollable laughter/ sobbing; animal noises; paroxysms.*

Claimed Results: Results vary and can include inner healing; spiritual renewal; physical healing; demonic deliverance; hearing a call from God.

Description in Acts and the rest of the Bible: There are several instances in Acts and the rest of the Bible where people fall down. But none that we're aware of match the description of slain in the spirit given above.

Acts 5:5 Ananias falls down dead.

Acts 9:4 Paul falls down before Jesus on the road to Damascus.

Acts 16:29,30 The Philippian Jailor falls down before Paul and Silas and asks how to be saved.

Acts 20:9 Eutychus falls down from a three story window and dies.

In Paul's case, there was no human mediator. No one was laying hands on either Paul or the jailor, as is often the case in the restorationist practice.

Daniel 8:16-18 Daniel falls to his face frightened before an angel.
Matthew 17:6 When Jesus is transformed before Peter, James, and John they “fell on their faces much afraid.”
1 Corinthians 14:24-25 A guest enters a house church and falls down on his face to worship God.
Revelation 1:17 John falls before Jesus like a dead man.
Revelation 22:8-9 John falls down to worship an angel.

These scriptural examples of Christians fainting or being paralyzed pertain to direct encounters with God, angels, or the risen Christ -- *not* through human mediators. None of the practices associate with being slain in the spirit (falling backwards, barking, laughing, shaking, sobbing, healing) are mentioned. If they were seeking God, it was for his guidance, not an experience. And their response is falling down prostrate (in a posture of worship) and fearing God.

None of these episodes involve laying hands on anyone, which often facilitates slaying in the Spirit. In scripture, the laying on of hands was used for healing or commissioning people into ministry.

The truth is, there simply are no biblical examples of anyone being slain in the Spirit!

Meetings:

Meetings where this practice occurs often contain suggestion, group pressure, manipulation, etc. (see below).

Does it bring inner healing?

The claim that this experience brings inner healing or spiritual renewal is suspicious at best. This isn't described as ever happening in the epistles, let alone prescribed and/or emphasized. How can it be considered important?

John Stott's reply to: "What do you make of the Toronto Blessing?"

(John Stott) "I never want to criticize anything which people claim has been a blessing to them in terms of a greater awareness of the reality of God, or a profounder joy, or an overwhelming love for God and for others, or a fresh zeal in evangelism. It's not for me to doubt any of these things. My major questions concern three areas. First, it is a self-consciously anti-intellectual movement. I listened on tape to the first person who brought the Toronto Blessing to Britain. This person said: "Don't analyze, don't ask

questions. Simply receive." I think that is both foolish and dangerous. We must never forget that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. Secondly, I cannot possibly come to terms with those animal noises, and it grieves me very much that-- as far as I know-- no charismatic leaders have publicly disassociated themselves from them, as they should. The whole Bible tells us that we are different from the animal creation; it rebukes us when we behave like animals and calls us to be distinct. Nebuchadnezzar's animal behavior was under the judgment, not the blessing, of God. My third problem concerns all the falling. Even charismatic leaders have pointed this out, that on the few occasions in the Bible when people have fallen over, they have all fallen forward on their faces, and they have all done so *after* they have been granted a vision of the majesty, holiness, and glory of God. In the Toronto experience, however, people fall backwards without any previous vision of God. Those three things trouble me."⁷

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.**

Christians should affirm that God is at work among us (Rom. 1:16, Col. 1:29; Phil. 2:13, Romans 15:13). God is changing people's lives, drawing people to himself, and growing his church. This should be part of what we talk about with each other and share with non-Christians.

"When the people of God begin to speak about the acts of God then receptivity to the Gospel rises."⁸

- **Their focus on evangelism and missions.**

What we disagree with:

⁷ John Stott, "Basic Stott," by Roy McCloughry of *Christianity Today*; Jan 8, 1996; p. 32.

⁸ Martin Robinson & Dwight Smith, *Invading Secular Space* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Monarch Books, 2005), p. 165.

- **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?

Yes! There are reliable modern-day accounts of miraculous healings at the hands of ordinary Christians. Paul says that some (not all) Christians are gifted in this area. (1 Cor. 12:28,29).

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

No! The fact that frequent and intense miracles were a distinguishing mark of a true apostle (2 Cor. 12:12) suggests that they are not a common part of every Christian's ministry.

Conclusion

The purpose of Acts is not to serve as a model in every area of practice or experience for what individuals or the church should do now. Acts shows the outward movement of the church as the Holy Spirit moved it out across geographic, cultural, and racial barriers.

That said, there is much to learn from the experience of the early church. What we read in Acts DOES serve as a model for us in areas that are mandated in the rest of the New Testament (e.g., evangelism and missions; prayer; sacrificial giving; etc.).

Acts, properly understood should challenge us to be sacrificial risk-takers for the sake of a lost world. What do you look for from your relationship with God? Dramatic personal experience or impact on the harvest (recall Luke's summary statements)? If we go for impact we'll get the experience God thinks we need. If we seek experience first, we'll get neither.

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 the Epistles Inductive Overview Assignment.