

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

Introduction to Acts

Main theme:

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 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

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What can we do to be empowered by the Holy Spirit?

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 are being overcome? 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?”

Acts 10-11:18

Acts and the Question of Historical Precedent

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

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?

(Acts 19:11) 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) 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:

(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).

(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.

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

(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

We interpret the _____

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

in light of the _____.

Interpret descriptions in the Gospels and Acts in light of what the Gospels and the epistles teach.

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.
Prescriptive/didactic scripture	The term signs and wonders is used in connection with the apostles and their close associates to validate the truth of their message. We are never commanded to perform signs and wonders in the New Testament.

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

Definition of signs and wonders:

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

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

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--

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

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There are no "A"postles today in the same sense as the 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

4. The epistles do not emphasize performing signs and wonders

Experiences and practices emphasized in restorationist churches

A. Healing

Description in Acts: Acts 3:1-10; 4:7,14,16,22, 30; 5:15,16; 19:11,12; 28:9.

- Sickness is a product of the fall and it will only be completely eradicated when Christ returns (*Rom. 8:18-23*).
- God can and sometimes does choose to heal people miraculously.

- God often chooses not to heal people for his own good reasons.
- The Bible endorses medical attention to bring healing or relief from physical illness.

1 Tim. 5:23

- Biblical healings were almost always _____ to all, _____, and _____.

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

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.”⁴

⁴ See <http://www.christian-faith.com/bible-studies/baptismintheholyspirit.html> for a typical Restorationist definition of this term.

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 8:5-8;14-18	Yes	Yes	Maybe (vs. 18)
Acts 10:34-48	No	No	Yes
Acts 19:1-7	Yes – although they may not have been aware of the significance of Jesus' death.	Yes	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 8:26-39	No	Not enough info	Spirit “snatched Philip away” (v. 39); no tongues mentioned
Acts 2:37-41	No	Not enough info	None mentioned

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.

Acts 2:1-12

Acts 8:14-24?

Acts 19:1-7?

Final thoughts on the baptism of the Holy Spirit

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Tongues in the Epistles

Definition:

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(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?

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Restrictions for tongues in a corporate setting:

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

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C. “Prophecy”

Definition:

	Old Testament	New Testament
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.

Examples

Guidelines

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D. "Slaying in the Spirit"

Definition:

Phenomena:

Claimed Results:

Description in Acts and the rest of the Bible:

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 asked how to be saved.

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

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.

Meetings:

Does it bring inner healing?

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."⁵

Final thoughts on Restorationism

What we agree with:

- Their desire to restore today's church to New Testament-style Christianity.

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

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What we disagree with:

- The restorationists' use of _____ portions of Acts to _____ the norm for Christians today.
- The _____ 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?

⁵ John Stott, "Basic Stott," by Roy McCloughry of *Christianity Today*; Jan 8, 1996; p. 32.

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

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 the Epistles Inductive Overview Assignment.