

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Part Three in a Series of Ten



3. The Fire Spreads

THE CHURCH SPREADS OUT

'caring for **PEOPLE** for **PEOPLE** matter to God' Romans 5:8

A USEFUL OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

THE DIVINE INTENTION

1. In **Luke 24:47** we're told that Jesus said the good news of 'repentance and remission of sins' should be preached in **his** name to 'all nations' beginning at Jerusalem. The gospel was never meant to be the privilege of a select few or even one race of people.
2. In **Acts 1:8** Jesus assured the disciples that the Spirit would empower them and they would be witnesses 'in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth'. In some ways this is a useful outline of the book of Acts. God intended to take the gospel to the ends of the earth and he does it by beginning in Jerusalem and Judaea. It then goes to Samaria and from there to the ends of the earth. **Not by accident!** By divine intention.

THE FIRE TAKES HOLD IN JERUSALEM & JUDAEA

3. The Church began with a handful in **Acts 2** and before we know it, the Spirit has convicted about 3,000 who take on them the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (**2:37-41**). In **Acts 3** we find Peter and John back at the temple where they heal a man who had been crippled from birth (**3:1-8**).
4. The response of the multitude was amazement (**3:10-11**). Peter quickly removes himself and John from the picture by giving glory to the Lord Jesus (**3:12,16**). He proceeds to link what Jesus was doing through the apostles to the Old Testament promises made to the fathers (**3:13,21-26**). It's very important for us to understand that the miracles wrought by the apostles were the work of the Christ these men said was very much alive.

The miracles were proof that Jesus hadn't been defeated by death! Note **3:12,15-16**. The authorities grab the apostles but they were too late – another 2,000 people gladly received the thrilling truth (**4:4**).

PROOF THAT JESUS HAD DEFEATED

5. The high priest who had led in the murder of Jesus Christ demanded to know by what power or name the apostles had worked this miracle (**4:5-7**). There was no denial that the miracle had been done (see also **4:14-16**). Peter, once intimidated by a servant-girl, now speaks boldly to the supreme court of his land about Jesus the Christ, whom the leaders had crucified. The leaders had rejected him and said so by brutally killing him but God overturned their decision by electing him and raising him from the dead (**4:8-12**).
6. The nation's high court had a hurried meeting and then ordered the men not to preach any more in the name of Christ (**4:15-18**). But they were wasting their breath! The two men insisted they had higher orders, orders which out-ranked the Sanhedrin's and orders they would not disobey (**4:19-20**). The jurists threatened them some more and the apostles left – not fearful, bold and unrepentant!
7. Back with the fellow-believers they had a fervent prayer session and trusted themselves to the sovereign Lord who created all and who foretold of this rejection by the pagans and the priests (see **4:24-30**). They realised what was happening –the rejection of the message by the leaders – was not unexpected. They ask for boldness and for God's continued testimony to the truth about Jesus, the holy servant of God (**4:29-30**). The shaking of the building was the proof that their prayer had been heard and they spoke with boldness by the Holy Spirit (**4:31**).

ANOTHER SPIRIT, SATAN, SOUGHT TO CORRUPT IT

THE TWO SPIRITS

8. What motivated this new Community? Were the leaders and prominent people in it making a name for themselves? Were they after money? No! The new Community was stirred by the Spirit of God which empowered Jesus to go about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil (Acts 10:38). In this newly established Church we find people joyfully and freely sharing what they had with those who didn't have. One of them was given the name Barnabas (4:32-37). This new people didn't only speak as the Spirit moved them, they shared because they were motivated by that same Spirit.

9. External persecution was doing more for the Church than against it so another spirit, Satan, sought to corrupt it from within. Ananias and his wife Sapphira conspired with Satan against the Spirit of God (5:3, 9). It's my guess that these two were prominent people and their prominence helps explain the need to deal with them in this forthright fashion.

10. When Israel just arrived in Canaan and were in the midst of her enemies, Achan took what had been devoted to God and God dealt with it severely. (See Joshua 7.) Israel learned early that God was just as opposed to high-handed transgression in his own people as he was to sin outside his people. The early Church and those looking on were to learn the same. (See 5:11,13). This pair didn't have to devote their money to God (5:4) but once they did – it was no longer theirs! Swift surgery at a crucial point can save the health and life of the whole body. Obviously this is what happened here. Luke makes it clear that the Church grew in spite of attack from outside or inside (5:11,13-14).

SWIFT SURGERY AT THE CRUCIAL MOMENT

MORE PAIN AND MORE GAIN

11. The risen Lord worked more miracles among the people just as he had done in his earthly ministry and more and more people turned to the Lord (5:12,14-16). It wasn't long before the apostles were imprisoned. An angel frees them and orders them out to preach the gospel which brought new life (5:17-25). More threats and more refusals to be silenced follow (5:27-29). The apostles remind the leaders that they had led the nation astray by murdering their Messiah and the infuriated judges plan to kill them (5:29-33). One of their leaders talks them out of it and the apostles are let off with a flogging and another command not to preach in Jesus' name (5:34-40). They rejoice that through pain they have found gain!

12. The needy were being taken care of but preferential treatment was being given to Aramaic speaking widows (6:1) so seven qualified men were chosen to see to it that fairness prevailed (6:2-7). This not only blessed the inner life of the Church but it affected outsiders who turned to the Lord (6:7). This incident introduces us to Stephen and Philip who were important figures in the spread of the gospel beyond Jerusalem and Judaea. And Stephen leads us to meet Saul (Paul)!

THROUGH PAIN THEY FOUND GAIN

THE MESSAGE AND MURDER OF STEPHEN

13. Stephen was a man full of the Spirit and he spoke with the wisdom of the Spirit (6:3,8,10 & 7:55). His message to those leaders who rejected and continue to reject Jesus was plain.

He told them they were like their fathers who had rejected Moses and the prophets (7:9,25-27,35, 38-43,51-53). He told them also that as the tabernacle of Moses had given way to Solomon's temple because God didn't dwell in houses made with hands (7:44-49), so Herod's temple (the one they now revered and worshiped in) should give way to the temple which is God's people! This drove them wild and they stoned him to death while he prayed for their forgiveness (7:60). Standing by and approving of the killing (8:1) was Saul, the bitter enemy of the Christ. Saul would later become his servant!

14. The killing of Stephen set off a widespread persecution of the Church in Jerusalem (8:1) and the disciples were scattered. But as they went and wherever they went, they spread the news about Jesus Christ (8:4). Often in trying to beat out a fire we send sparks flying everywhere and they begin new flames elsewhere. This is what happened (see 11:19).

THE LORD HAD INVADED SAMARIA

THE FIRE BURNS IN SAMARIA

15. Philip carries the gospel of Christ to the despised Samaritans (see John 4:9). The Jews held them not only to be heretics but because of foreign elements in their ancestry, they regarded them as half-breeds (see 2 Kings 17:24-41). But the gospel was for all and Philip shared it! The response was overwhelming! They gladly received the word of Christ and took his name on them by being baptised into that name (8:6,7,16). The Master himself had led the way in this outreach toward the outcasts (see John 4:1-42).

16. Two apostles are sent from Jerusalem to see what has happened at Samaria and to give the work apostolic approval (8:14). This they did and prayed that the Spirit might add his **public** blessing which is exactly what happened (8:15-17). The apostles preached to other Samaritan towns before they returned to Jerusalem (8:25). The Lord had invaded Samaria. Other fields were to follow!

The Fire Spreads

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED IN PART THREE

- The Gospel was never meant to be the privilege of a few or even of one race of people!
- The miracles of the early Church were Christ's miracles. They were the visible proof that Jesus was very much alive, well and reigning!
- The Spirit behind the new Community led them not only to speak but to live unselfishly. The spirit behind Ananias and Sapphira was the spirit of corruption, Satan himself!
 - Persecution does not destroy the people who have God as their God!

EVALUATION SHEET

Please go ahead and fill in the evaluation sheet attached.

CONTACT DETAILS

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EVALUATION SHEET

Acts LESSON 3

(Please type or write your answers within the lines provided)

Name:

Home Address or Email address:

TRUE OR FALSE? (If the statement is true write T, if false write F.)

1. Achan was a devoted servant of God! _____
2. The Jewish council denied that the disciples had worked miracles! _____
3. Stephen told his accusers they were like their rebellious fathers! _____
4. The rejection of Jesus Christ by the Jewish leaders was unexpected! _____
5. The Sanhedrin was the Jewish supreme court! _____
6. External persecution was helping the Church to grow! _____
7. Ananias and Sapphira conspired against God's Spirit! _____
8. The miracles worked by the apostles were really miracles Jesus was doing through them! _____
9. In Acts 3 Peter and John healed a man born blind! _____
10. The early Church grew because the leaders were power-hungry! _____

WHO?

1. Who once intimidated Peter? _____
2. Who stood by approving of Stephen's murder? _____
3. Who went to Samaria to preach the gospel? _____
4. Who stole something which belonged to God? _____
5. Who was sent to Samaria to give the work there the approval of the apostles and the church at Jerusalem? _____
6. Who freed Peter from jail and ordered him to preach? _____
7. Who viewed Samaritans as heretics and half-breeds? _____
8. Who demanded to know by what power or in what name Peter & John worked miracles? _____
9. Who taught that Jews should make way for a new temple? _____
10. Who were being neglected during food distribution? _____

CIRCLE THE CORRECT SCRIPTURE:

1. The scripture which deals with the behaviour of Achan and how it was handled:
Psalm 2:7-10 2 Kings 17:24-41 Joshua 7
2. The scripture which says Jews had no time for Samaritans:
Acts 4:24-30 Acts 8:6,7,16 John 4:9
3. The scripture which says Jesus went about doing good for people because God was with him:
Acts 8:1 Acts 10:38 Acts 7:60
4. The scripture which deals with Samaritan origins:
Joshua 7 John 4:1-42 2 Kings 17:24-41

PUT A TICK NEXT TO THE SCRIPTURES WHEN YOU'VE READ THEM:

1. Luke 24:47 with Acts 1:8 _____ 2. Joshua 7 _____ 3. Acts 8:6-25 _____ 4. 2 Kings 17:24-41 _____
5. Acts 7 _____

COMPLETE THIS STATEMENT: (As found in the booklet.)

1. Swift surgery at a crucial point _____

2. The gospel was never meant _____

SENDING YOUR ANSWERS

Once we have received your evaluation sheet we will send you the next study in this series.

Please return your completed evaluation sheet as an email attachment to info@the-scriptures.co.uk