

ACTS - A STUDY GUIDE

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

This question may be broken down further as follows:

- a. Why did God do it/allow it?
 - b. Why did He record it for our study?
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1. What does the book of Acts add to your understanding of God? Who wrote the book? (Acts 1:1; compare Luke 1:1-4) Where did he get his information? Why do you think the book ends so abruptly?

Tentative Chronology of the Early Christian Church

(Modified from 6SDABC p. 101,102)

A.D.

- 31 Crucifixion, Ascension, Pentecost (Luke 23; John 19; Acts 1,2; 5BC, pp. 251-254)
 - 34 Stephen stoned; church persecuted; gospel carried to Samaria (Acts 7:1-8:25)
 - 35 Paul converted (Acts 9:1-19)
 - 35-38 Paul at Damascus, Arabia, and back to Damascus (Galatians 1:17)
 - 38 Paul escaped from Damascus during reign of Aretas; visited Jerusalem "after three years" (Galatians 1:18); went to Tarsus (Galatians 1:21)
 - 44 James the apostle and brother of John martyred; Peter imprisoned at Passover time; Agrippa died (Acts 12)
 - 44-45 Barnabas took Paul to Antioch; Paul remained there "a whole year" (Acts 11:26)
 - 45 Barnabas and Paul took famine relief to Jerusalem (Acts 11:25-30)
 - 45-47 Paul's first missionary journey; on return, Paul remained at Antioch "no little time" (Acts 14:28, RSV) (**James written**)
 - 49 Jerusalem Council, "fourteen years after" (Galatians 2:1)
 - 49 Paul started second missionary journey; preached in Phrygia, Galatia, and entered Europe (Acts 15:36-16:40)
 - 50-51 Paul arrived at Corinth; stayed one and one-half years (**1 & 2 Thessalonians written**)
 - 52 End of second missionary journey; Paul "some time" at Antioch (Acts 18:23)
 - 53-58 Paul's third missionary journey: traveled through Asia Minor, stayed three years at Ephesus (**1 & 2 Corinthians written**), traveled through Macedonia, stayed three months at Corinth (**Galatians and Romans written**); left for Jerusalem (Acts 19&20)
 - 58-60 Paul arrested in Jerusalem; imprisoned at Caesarea "two years" (Acts 24:27); left in autumn
 - 60-61 Paul's journey to Rome; arrived in spring (Acts 28:11-15)
 - 61-63 Paul a prisoner in Rome "two whole years" (Acts 28:30); (**Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, Philippians written; Hebrews may have been written at this time also**)
 - 63-66 Paul released from Roman prison; traveled in Crete, Asia Minor, Macedonia (**1 Timothy, Titus written; 1 Peter probably also written; Jude likely written**)
 - 66 First siege of Jerusalem; Paul re-arrested; (**2 Timothy written; 2 Peter written**)
 - 67 Death of Paul and Peter; (**Acts written-or at least finished**)
 - 70 Destruction of Jerusalem
 - 90-96 John arrested and sent to Patmos by Domitian (ruled A.D. 89-96) (**Revelation written**); John released from Patmos (**the Gospel of John and the three letters written**)
2. **In the book of Acts, we come to the time in history when God was forced to abandon His people, the Jews, as His special messengers to the world because they rejected Him. (See John 1:11; Acts 8:1,4; Matthew 23:38) Thinking back over their history, what had God accomplished with and through the Jews? Should God have just ignored the Jews and instead, sent His Son to Tibet or Australia or the Incas?**

3. Look at Acts 1:6. What was it that the disciples were still expecting as Jesus was on His way to heaven? Compare Luke 24:21. "We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel." (NIV) Would you have entrusted the work of spreading the gospel throughout the entire world to such a group with that type of thinking? What happened in the upper room and at Pentecost that changed things?
4. What was it about the life and message of Jesus that most offended the Jews? Think of what the disciples and the crowds did at the feeding of the 5000 and at the triumphal entry. They were determined, if there was any way possible, to fulfill their version of the "gospel." Why do you suppose it was that the Jews, who should have been God's best friends, seemed to be the ones who opposed the spread of Christianity the most wherever it went? (Acts 13:50-14:5; 18:12-14)
5. Is the first mention of the work of the Holy Spirit in Acts? What about Genesis 1:2; 6:3; 41:8; Exodus 31:3; 35:31; Numbers 11:29; 24:2; Judges 3:10; 6:34; 14:6,19; 15:14,19; 1 Samuel 10:10; 16:13; 2 Kings 2:9; 2 Chronicles 36:22; Ezra 1:1; Psalms 51:11; John 14:15-27; 16:5-15? Where is the clearest explanation of the work of the Holy Spirit? Why did Jesus say, "But I am telling you the truth: it is better for you that I go away, because if I do not go, the Helper will not come to you. But if I do go away, then I will send him to you." (John 16:7, GNB) Has not the Holy Spirit been here all along? Even if He had not been, why would it be good for Jesus to go? Was it necessary for Jesus to be at the "right hand" of His Father? If so, why? Could it be that the Father was unable to handle things in heaven by Himself?
6. What do you think actually happened to the disciples when they received the "gift of tongues"? Or, was it the "gift of ears"? (Acts 2:1-13)
7. What is the meaning of Acts 4:12? Does this mean that the only way we can "come to the Father" is through Christ? Would this mean that we must come pronouncing the right "name" because if we pronounce the wrong name, the "Father" will not listen? If that is true, what language does God require?
8. If we are supposed to pray in the name of Jesus, would that suggest that if we had prayed a wonderful prayer such that God was already planning how He would answer, but we forget to say, "in Jesus name we pray," that God would have to cancel out the whole prayer? Or does that mean that only through Jesus, as He is manifest both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, are we able to understand anything about God? Or, might it mean that someone could approach God and just as he is about to speak, God hastens to say, "That is no good! Go back! You did not come to Me in the right way, and I can accept only those who come to Me in the right way"?
9. Did Jesus come to this earth in order to bring a revelation of God down to us, and then return to heaven in order to take the truth about us back to God? If so, how would He do that?
10. What did Stephen say was God's response when the people at Sinai turned from God to worship and celebrate around a fertility cult symbol? (Acts 7:42) Where do you suppose he got that understanding? Compare this with Romans 1:18,24,26,28. Is this God's wrath?
11. Is it possible that some people who have died as "examples" are actually savable and will be in heaven? Achan's children? Some of the firstborn of Egypt? Some people who died in the flood? Ananias and Sapphira? Will not the behavior of each person at the time of the third coming clearly demonstrate that God's judgment was correct? If, by some mistake some arise in the wrong resurrection and see the panoramic view of the history of our world and of the great controversy, and respond, "Hey, we like that!" would God say to those people, "Sorry, but it's too late now, we cannot let anyone else in"?
12. Why were Ananias and Sapphira struck dead for falsifying their report? (Acts 5:1-11) Shouldn't Peter have worked with them to get them to repent and reform their ways? Why doesn't God use more of the "early church methods" now? If someone who had cheated on their tithes or offerings dropped dead on the church floor, don't you think the offerings would increase? Why doesn't God perform a few miracles to improve attendance and participation?
13. What should the experience of the choosing of deacons (Acts 6:1-7) tell us about church organization today? Did the handing over of a portion of the work to lay people hinder the work? In light of this experience, are we being reasonable in what we expect of our church pastors and leaders today?

14. Can you imagine a “conference committee” at the time of the “Damascus road experience” appointing Saul/Paul as the church’s main evangelist to the Gentiles? How long did it take Paul to get from his “Sinai experience” to the “mouth of the cave” experience? (1 Kings 19:11-13) Does it need to take a long time to “grow up spiritually”?
15. What was it about Paul’s theology that changed on the Damascus road and immediately thereafter? (Acts 9:1-31) Did he change “gods” or even the name of his God? Did he change his Bible, his Law, or his Sabbath? What made the difference in Paul that caused him to stop killing and imprisoning the “saints” and finally to write, “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind”? (Romans 14:5) Had Paul gone “soft” on all doctrine? (See Galatians 1:8,9)
16. How should we handle apparent contradictions in Scripture such as Acts 9:7 and 22:9? Did the companions of Saul hear the voice? Or, did they not hear the voice?
17. Does the vision which Peter saw on the rooftop in Joppa (Acts 10:9-23; compare 1 Corinthians 10:25) mean that we are now “free” to eat whatever we like? Compare Mark 7:19; Romans 14:14,20.
18. At the conference on evangelism of the Gentiles held at Jerusalem, (Acts 15) it was finally decided that:

It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. (Acts 15:28,29, NIV)

How could Paul later say, “Eat anything sold in the meat market [in Corinth] without raising questions of conscience”? (1 Corinthians 10:25, NIV) [brackets and content inside brackets supplied] Was Paul disagreeing with the Holy Spirit? Who inspired Paul to write?

19. How could Paul have told the jailer simply, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” (Acts 16:31, NIV) Isn’t it also necessary to have “faith,” live a faithful Christian life, know the doctrines of the church, etc? Was Paul indicating to the jailer that contrary to the practices of his heathen background—and even the thoughts of some of the Jews—that he did not need to do or perform any ritual or penance or sacrifice, but rather, just believe and have faith in God? (See Micah 6:6-8)?
20. For the first time, God was sending His followers out to “convert” people. (Matthew 28:19,20) Prior to that time, it was assumed that if one belonged to the special “group” that were considered to be the followers of Jehovah, that is, the descendants of Abraham, he would be “redeemed.” Since people were being asked and persuaded to join the “Christian” group, what criteria should have been used to decide who would be accepted as a member? Is it necessary to “receive the Holy Spirit and be baptized”? (See Acts 10:44-48) Or, must one follow certain of the customs of the ceremonial law? (Acts 15:28,29; 21:25) Or, is it enough just to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? (Acts 16:31) How do you reconcile these three experiences?
21. God has started out working with several different groups down through the millennia. He first worked with all of Adam’s descendants. Then, He destroyed all but Noah’s family in the flood. After working with Noah’s descendants for some time, He apparently had to leave the majority and focus on Abraham and his descendants. After 1800 years of working with the children of Abraham, Acts describes the time when God left them and began working with the Christian church. At first, Christians did very well even under difficult circumstances, but the church gradually deteriorated into a religious-political organization that had little to do with true spirituality. Then, at the time of the Reformation, God turned to the Protestants. But, it was not that long before many of the Protestant churches had become “state churches” as well. Seventh-day Adventists came along and tried to convince people that Jesus was coming soon. What is the chance that God will have to abandon us as a church? Why do we think that this generation will succeed when every generation before us has failed?

This is a very serious thought question. What do you think?

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Last Modified: April 27, 2014 (from TG March 20, 2011)
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