

For group study

A group of four to ten people allows the richest discussions, but you can adapt this guide for other sized groups. It will suit a wide range of group types, such as home Bible studies, growth groups, youth groups, and businessmen's studies. Both new and experienced Bible students, and new and mature Christians, will benefit from the guide. You can omit or leave for later years any questions you find too easy or too hard.

The guide is intended to lead a group through one lesson per week. However, feel free to split lessons if you want to discuss them more thoroughly, or omit some questions in a lesson if preparation or discussion time is limited. You can always return to this guide for personal study later. You will be able to discuss only a few questions at length, so choose some for discussion and others for background. Make time at each discussion for members to ask about anything they didn't understand.

Each lesson in the guide ends with a section called "For the Group." This section gives advice on how to focus a discussion, how you might apply the lesson in your group, how you might shorten a lesson, and so on. The group leader should read each "For the Group" at least a week ahead so that he or she can tell the group how to prepare for the next lesson.

Each member should prepare for a meeting by writing answers for all of the background and discussion questions to be covered. If the group decides not to take an hour per week for private preparation, then expect to take at least two meetings per lesson to work through the questions. Application will be very difficult, however, without private thought and prayer.

Two reasons for studying in a group are accountability and support. When each member commits in front of the rest to seek growth in an area of life, you can pray with one another, listen jointly for God's guidance, help one another to resist temptation, assure each other that the other's growth matters to you, use the group to practice spiritual principles, and so on. Pray about one another's commitments and needs at most meetings. Spend the first few minutes of each meeting sharing any results from applications prompted by previous lessons. Then discuss new applications toward the end of the meeting. Follow such sharing with prayer for these and other needs.

If you write down each other's applications and prayer requests, you are more likely to remember to pray for them during the week, ask about them at the next meeting, and notice answered prayers. You might want to get a notebook for prayer requests and discussion notes.

Notes taken during discussion will help you to remember, follow up on ideas, stay on the subject, and clarify a total view of an issue. But don't let note-taking keep you from participating. Some groups choose one member at each meeting to take notes. Then someone copies the notes and distributes them at the next meeting. Rotating these tasks can help include people. Some groups have someone take notes on a large pad of paper or erasable marker board so that everyone can see what has been recorded.

Page 220 lists some good sources of counsel for leading group studies.

OVERVIEW

What Is Acts?

The Holy Spirit has given us in the New Testament four accounts of Jesus' ministry but only one book on the early years of the church. It is called the Acts of the Apostles, but in fact it tells us only selected things about a few of the apostles. What about John, who gave us five of the New Testament books? What about Matthew, who wrote one gospel? What about Andrew, Thomas, Bartholomew, James the Younger, Simon the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Matthias? Acts is even silent on the last fifteen years or so of Peter's ministry. Clearly, just as God has not chosen to give us a complete biography of Jesus, so He has determined not to inspire a thorough history of the church's beginnings.¹

What is Acts?

If Acts is not a complete history of the church's first three decades, then what is it? Our first clue is that it is the second of a two-volume work. An early convert to Christianity named Luke wrote a gospel and Acts for a Roman aristocrat named Theophilus (see Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1). Luke was the "beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14, NASB) of the apostle Paul. He traveled with Paul on part of his second missionary journey. Some years later, Luke went from Philippi to Jerusalem with Paul, and when Paul was arrested there, Luke accompanied him on his harrowing journey to Rome. We surmise these facts from the way Luke changed from the third person ("they") to the first ("we") in parts of Acts (see 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16).

We don't know whether Luke was a Gentile, a Gentile convert to Judaism, or a Jew before he became a Christian. His writings show that he was steeped in the urban, Gentile, Greek-speaking culture of the Roman Empire; Luke 1:1-4 is written in the literary Greek of the educated elite, and Acts describes Gentile kings, philosophers, and legal details accurately. On the other hand, Luke was also well versed in the *Septuagint*, the Greek translation of the Old Testament that Jews all over the Empire used.

About Theophilus we can only speculate. His name means "lover of God," but it was a common Greek name and was probably not made up by Luke. In Luke's day, people often wrote for and dedicated their works to wealthy patrons, who helped pay for publishing the books. Theophilus was probably an educated Gentile aristocrat, either a new convert or an interested pagan. Luke may have wanted to help confirm this man and others like him in the faith by showing that it rested on firm historical foundations and the power of God.

When was Acts written? The earliest would be about AD 62, where chapter 28 leaves off abruptly. However, Luke seems to be looking back on those events from at least some distance. On the other hand, the book gives no hint of the deaths of Paul, Peter, or James, nor of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, nor even of Paul's letters. Would a book written after AD 90 partly about Paul have ignored his letters, which were so influential by then? Most scholars who think Acts is an accurate account by Luke (as opposed to fiction) guess that the book was written over some time and finished "towards AD 70."²

1. Look at Luke's prologue to his whole work (see Luke 1:1-4). What does he say Luke-Acts is meant to be?

2. In Acts 1:1-2, Luke summarizes volume 1 (Luke's gospel) as an introduction to volume 2 (Acts). He says the gospel is about "all that Jesus began to do and to teach" until His ascension into heaven forty days after the resurrection. If Luke's gospel is about what Jesus began to do and to teach, what is Acts probably about?

3. What does Acts 1:8 tell you about the purpose of the book?

4. Read 1:15, 2:41, 4:4, 5:14, 6:7, 9:31, 12:24, 16:5, 19:20, and 28:31.

a. What do these verses have in common, and what progression do you see?

b. What does this pattern tell you about Acts?

Acts does not tell us *all* that Jesus did through the apostles, but only some of what He did through some of them. We learn nothing about the spread of the gospel to "Crete (Titus 1:5), Illyricum (Romans 15:19—modern Yugoslavia), or Pontus, Cappadocia and Bithynia (1 Peter 1:1), not to mention the church's expansion eastward toward Mesopotamia or southward toward Egypt."³ Instead, Luke focuses on one line of geographical expansion: from Jerusalem to Rome. Therefore, Acts 1:8 is only a partial clue to the book's theme.

Also, Luke is not concerned to give us the apostles' biographies. He begins with the apostles in Jerusalem, then ignores most of them to focus on Peter and two non-apostles. Then he turns from Peter to Paul, and he ends the book at last with Paul a prisoner in Rome probably destined to live several more years.

Moreover, Luke does not tell us all we might like to know about organization, lifestyle, and worship in the early church. He gives us glimpses of details, but these are incidental to the focus of the story.

What is the main focus? The best way to find this out (indeed, the best way to begin studying any book) is to read it several times, noting first impressions and the major sections. If possible, you should stop now and read through Acts once. Then, get a piece of paper, go back through the book, and write down what each of the following sections is about:

1:1-6:7
6:8-9:31
9:32-12:24
12:25-16:5
16:6-19:20
19:21-28:31

This whole procedure should take you four to five hours, but Acts is a terrific story so it should be fun. However, if you don't have time for this kind of preparation, you can look at the following outlines before you read the book.

Acts can be outlined in several ways. We can divide chapters 1-12 (which focus on Peter and the Jewish mission) from chapters 13-28 (which focus on Paul and the Gentile mission). Or we can use 1:8 as a framework, like this:

Jerusalem (1:1-7:60)
Samaria and Judea (8:1-10:48)
The ends of the earth (11:1-28:31)

Third, we can combine these two views, like this:⁴

- I. Peter and the Beginnings of the Church in Palestine (chapters 1-12)
 - A. "Throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria" (1:1-9:31; see 9:31)
 - B. "As far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch" (9:32-12:25; see 11:19)
- II. Paul and the Expansion of the Church from Antioch to Rome (chapters 13-28)
 - A. "Throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia" (13:1-15:35; see 16:6)
 - B. "Over to Macedonia" (15:36-21:16; see 16:9)
 - C. "To Rome" (21:17-28:31; see 28:14)

Finally, we can use those "progress reports" you observed in question 4, like this:

(1:1-6:7) *The earliest church in Jerusalem*: Preaching for Jews, common life among Jewish Christians, worship at the temple and synagogues, opposition from other Jews. Concludes with a resolved disagreement between Greek- and Aramaic-speaking believers.

(6:8-9:31) *The first geographical expansion*: Greek-speaking Jewish Christians ("Hellenists") bring the gospel to Jews, Samaritans (semi-Jews), and a convert to Judaism. The martyrdom of Stephen (a Hellenist) causes the expansion, and the conversion of Paul (a Jew from outside Palestine) partly results from the expansion.

(9:32-12:24) *The first expansion to the Gentiles*: To make this breakthrough, God uses Peter (an Aramaic-speaking Jew, a "Hebrew") rather than the Hellenists. The Hellenists begin evangelizing Gentiles in Antioch.

(12:25-16:5) *The first geographical expansion into the Gentile world*: Paul leads. When the church decides that Gentile Christians need not live as Jews, the Gentile mission is free to explode. Opposition is still mainly Jewish.

(16:6-19:20) *Paul's westward expansion reaches Europe*. Jews continue to reject the gospel, and Gentiles continue to accept it. However, success

with some Gentiles produces opposition from others. (19:21-28:31) *Paul reaches Rome with the gospel*. Paul suffers many trials patiently while innocent of wrongdoing.⁵

5. If you have not already done so, read the whole book of Acts, at one sitting if possible. It is one of the finest examples of the kind of history written in the ancient world. You will notice that it is not like the history written today; you'll see few dates but a great concern for the reader's enjoyment. The pace is fast, so you'll scarcely notice that the events of chapter 12 occurred some ten to thirteen years after those of chapter 2.

Use the outlines on page 12, the timeline on page 19, and the map of the Roman Empire on page 20 to guide your reading. If you want to remember any observations or questions, jot them in the space below. In particular, look for repeated words and patterns of events.

6. One main character dominates the whole of Acts. Who is that character, and what are some of his effects? (See, for instance, 1:8; 2:4; 4:8,31; 8:39; 9:31; 13:4; 15:28; 16:6-10; 20:22-24; 21:10-11.)

7. From your observations so far, what seem to be the central themes, messages, or purposes of Acts?

Your response

Study Skill—Application

Second Timothy 3:16-17 tells us that “all Scripture . . . is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” James 1:22 urges us to do what the Word says, not merely hear it. Therefore, the last step of Bible study is asking ourselves, “What difference should this passage make to my life? How should it make me want to think or act?” Application will require time, thought, prayer, and perhaps even discussion with another person.

If you sometimes have trouble finding a truth in a passage that is relevant to you, consider the following five questions:

- Is there a *sin* for me to avoid?
- Is there a *promise* for me to trust?
- Is there an *example* for me to follow?
- Is there a *command* for me to obey?
- How can this passage increase my *knowledge* of the Lord (not just knowledge about Him)?

You can recall these five questions by remembering the acronym SPECK—Sin, Promise, Example, Command, Knowledge.

Look for something specific you can do or pray about in response to the truth (the sin, promise, and so on) that is relevant to you. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in choosing and empower you in fulfilling your application. If your application is a change of attitude rather than an action, plan to pray about it daily for awhile, and ask God to show you circumstances in which you can act on your change of attitude.

8. The book of Acts is largely about how the church fulfilled its mission during its first thirty years (from Jesus’ ascension to about AD 62). Why is it important for us to study this story? How is it relevant to us?

9. a. Did you notice anything in your first reading of Acts that you want to remember and apply? If so, what is the truth you want to take to heart?

b. Ask God to show you how you can apply this truth, and write your thoughts and plans here.

For the group

This "For the Group" section and the ones in later lessons are intended to suggest ways of structuring your discussions. Feel free to select what suits your group.

The main goals of an introductory lesson are to get to know Acts in general and the people with whom you are going to study it. The group will benefit from having time to read the "How to Use This Study" section, the whole book of Acts, and the background in this lesson before diving into detailed study.

Later lessons will give more background as necessary on Luke, Jerusalem, the Roman Empire, and so on. You might make a list of group members' questions and decide if they need to be answered right away. If so, see some sources of information. If not, watch for answers later in the study guide.

Some people may not be able to read all of Acts at one time. Encourage everyone to get through it at some point, even if some people need several sittings. (You can plan two meetings for this overview lesson—see suggestions under "Warm-up" below.)

Worship. Some groups like to begin meetings with prayer and/or singing. Some prefer to share requests for prayer at the beginning, but leave the actual prayer until after the study. Others prefer just to chat and have refreshments and then move to the study, leaving worship until the end. It is generally good to begin with at least a brief prayer for God's guidance in the study.

Warm-up. The beginning of a new study is a good time to lay a foundation for honest sharing of ideas, for getting comfortable with each other, and for encouraging a sense of common purpose. One way to establish common ground is to talk about what each group member hopes to get out of your group—out of your study of Acts, and out of any prayer, singing, sharing, outreach, or anything else you might do together. You can include what you hope to give the group as well. Why are you studying the Bible, and Acts in particular? If you have someone write down each member's hopes and expectations, then you can look back at these goals later to see if they are being met. You can then make changes in your meetings if necessary, such as planning more time for prayer or deciding to cover Acts more slowly.

You can take about fifteen minutes before discussing lesson 1 to discuss these goals. Or you can take a whole meeting to introduce the study, discuss the "How to Use This Study" section, and share your goals. In a second meeting, you can discuss questions 1-9. Doing this will allow the group more time to read Acts and complete lesson 1.

Overview. You can structure your discussion like this:

1. *How to Use This Study.* The group should have read this section at home. The leader can remind everyone of the main points and ask if anyone has questions about what to do. For example, point out the optional questions in the margins. These are available as group discussion questions, ideas for application, and suggestions for further study. It is unlikely that

anyone will have either the time or desire to answer all the optional questions and do all the applications. It is reasonable to expect a person to do one "Optional Application" for any given lesson. You might choose two "For Thought and Discussions" for your group discussion. If someone wants to write answers to the optional questions, suggest that he use a separate notebook. It will also be helpful for discussion notes, prayer requests, answers to prayer, application plans, and so on.

Note the observation-interpretation-application pattern in each lesson. Many of the numbered questions are observations and basic interpretations that lay the groundwork for deeper study. The meaty questions are sometimes in the margins. In your group discussion, you may prefer to move quickly through the observation questions in order to concentrate on questions that interest you. Or you may want to spend more time learning to observe details and leave deeper questions for future years.

Point out the study aids. If you own any, bring them in to show the group.

2. **First Impressions.** Ask questions to draw out the group's impressions of Acts after one reading. Some possibilities are: "What is Acts about? What are your first impressions of the book? Who are some of the important characters? Tell something about each of those people. Did you enjoy reading the book? Why or why not? What kinds of things happen over and over in the book? What aspects of early church history do and don't seem to have interested Luke? What did you learn about Luke, the gospel he wrote, and Acts from the background in lesson 1?"

If you let several people answer questions like these, you should put together a good picture of the book. Then, let some people answer questions 1-7.

3. **Questions.** Don't forget to keep a list of the group's questions as you discuss. You can try to answer them as you go through later lessons.
4. **Application.** If your group is not already familiar with how to apply Scripture to your lives, think of some sample ways you could apply something in Acts. Use the Study Skill—Application on pages 14-15. If the group already understands how to apply, give everyone a chance to share one truth that he or she would like to put into practice this week.

Wrap-up. This is a time to bring the discussion to a focused end and to make any announcements about the next lesson or meeting.

Some people tend to prepare for group discussions only one or two days before the meetings and then feel that it is too late to start an application. Tell the group that it is fine to be applying an insight from the previous lesson during the week when you are preparing the next lesson for discussion.

Worship. Thank God for the book of Acts and the people described in it. Praise Him for some particular things He has revealed to you about Himself through this book. Ask Him to enable you each to understand and apply what He says to you through Acts.

1. Other books called the Acts of John, the Acts of Peter and Paul, the Acts of Thomas, and so on were written during the church's first two centuries, but the church as a whole judged these to be largely fictional and not inspired by God.

2. F. F. Bruce, "The Acts of the Apostles," *The New Bible Commentary: Revised*, ed. Donald Guthrie, et al. (London: InterVarsity, 1970), 968-969; I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 46-48.

3. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 92.

4. Adapted from the outline of Acts by Lewis Foster in Kenneth Barker, ed., *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 1643.

5. Adapted from the outline in Fee and Stuart, 90-91.

Timeline of Acts

(All dates are approximate, based on F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, 475.)

Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection; Pentecost	AD 30
Martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 6:8-8:1)	33
Conversion of Paul (Acts 9:1-19)	33
Paul visits Jerusalem to see Peter (Galatians 1:18)	35
Paul in Cilicia and Syria (Galatians 1:21; Acts 9:30)	35-46
Herod Agrippa I dies (Acts 12:19-23)	44
Paul visits Jerusalem to clarify the mission to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:1-10)	46
Paul and Barnabas in Cyprus and Galatia (Acts 13-14)	47-48
Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15)	49
Paul and Silas travel from Antioch to Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Achaia (Acts 16-17)	49-50
Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:1-18)	50-52
Paul visits Jerusalem	52
Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19)	52-55
Paul travels to Macedonia, Dalmatia, and Achaia (Acts 20)	55-57
Paul to Jerusalem (Acts 21:1-23:22)	May 57
Paul imprisoned in Caesarea (Acts 23:23-26:32)	57-59
Paul sent to house arrest in Rome (Acts 27:1-28:31)	59-62

ACTS 1:1-26

Preparation

Luke was a master of many styles of writing. He wrote Luke 1:1-4 in formal, classical Greek, but in the rest of his gospel and all of Acts, Luke used a style reminiscent of the *Septuagint*, the Greek version of the Old Testament.

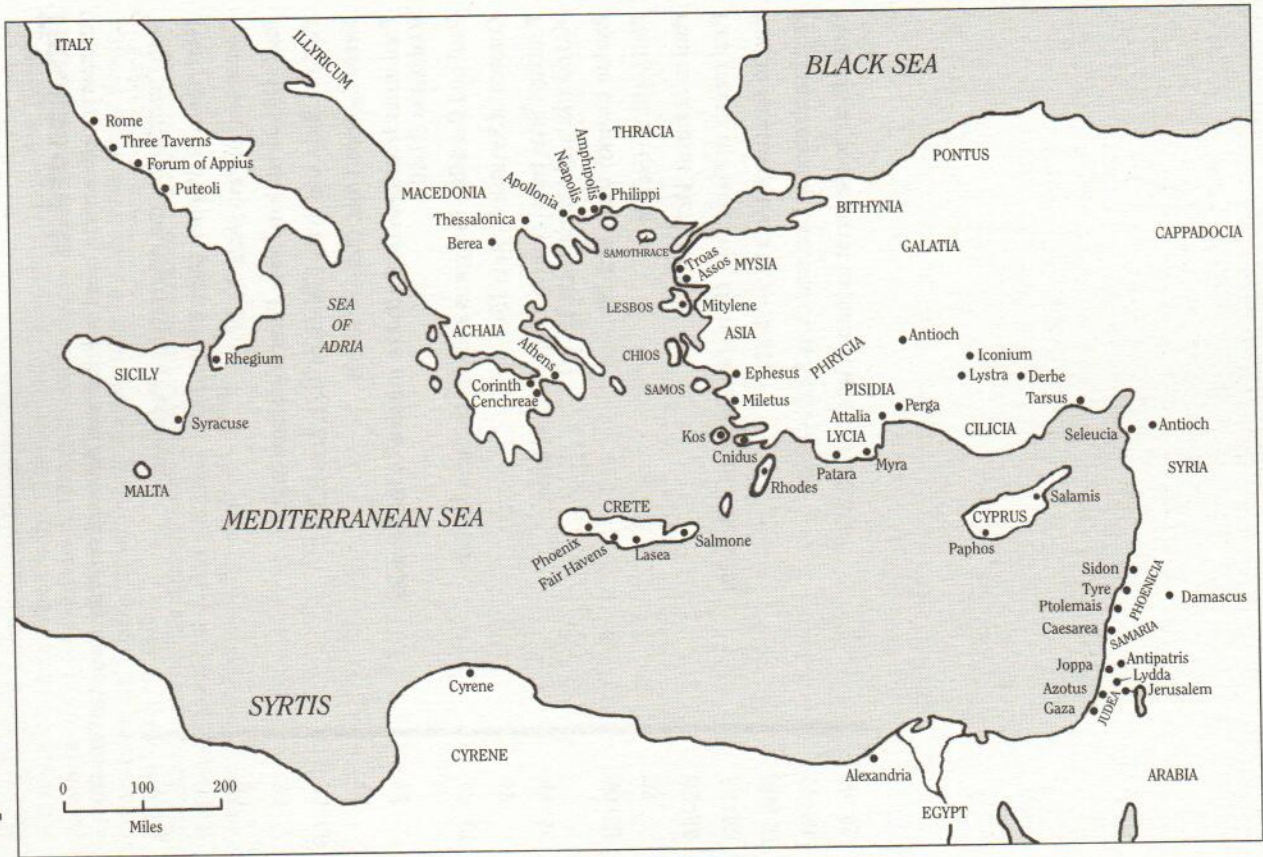
Septuagint Greek was a unique style. It was almost as different from the Greek spoken in Luke's day as the English of the King James Bible is different from what is spoken today. Why did Luke use the style of the Jewish Bible? Perhaps he knew he was writing "sacred history,"¹ a continuation of God's dealings with man that began in Genesis and reached its culmination in the ministry of Jesus. By using the *Septuagint's* style and quoting it often, Luke stressed that Acts recounted the continuation and fulfillment of the Scripture's story.

Before you begin the questions in this lesson, read 1:1-26 all the way through. You might find it helpful to compare two versions of the Bible. Ask God to show you the important truths of this opening chapter of Acts.

Study Skill—Outlining

Sketching a rough outline of a chapter is often good preparation for studying it closely. It is also often helpful to relate the chapter to the themes of the whole book. Then, after studying the chapter in detail, you can reconsider your outline and how the chapter relates to the whole.

Map of the Roman Empire



1. For each of the following sections, write a title that expresses what the section is about.

1:1-11 _____

1:12-26 _____

2. If Acts tells how the church began to fulfill its mission through the Holy Spirit, how does 1:1-26 relate to this theme?

Commission (1:1-11)

Apostles (1:2). An apostle is literally "one who is sent"—a messenger, proxy, ambassador. In Jewish law, an *apostolos* (Greek) or *shalia'ch* (Aramaic) was "a person acting with full authority for another" in a business or legal transaction.² John 13:16, 20 and 20:21 reflect the Jewish idea of the *shalia'ch*.

During His earthly life, Jesus appointed twelve of His disciples to be His apostles (see Luke 6:12-16). To these twelve He gave the most intensive training and intimate friendship.

The early church eventually recognized other believers as apostles in some sense: Paul (see Acts 14:14), Barnabas (see 14:14), James the brother of Jesus (see Galatians 1:19), and perhaps Andronicus and Junias (see Romans 16:7). However, it is not clear that all these people held the church's highest authority regarding doctrine and policy, as the Twelve did.³ Paul does seem to have eventually attained this status (see Galatians 1:1-2:10). Nevertheless, in

these early chapters of Acts, Luke uses the term "the Twelve" as equivalent to "the apostles."

Kingdom of God (1:3). Jesus called His message "the good news of the kingdom of God" (Luke 4:43) and He spoke about the kingdom constantly. The Old Testament had promised that God would restore His own kingship over the earth, and Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom was present in the person of the King, Jesus Himself. The early church spoke of the kingdom to refer to "the saving, sovereign action of God through" Jesus (see Acts 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31).⁴

The Jews believed that when the Messiah (God's "Anointed One") came, He would inaugurate God's kingdom on earth by delivering Israel from its oppressors. One of the prophesied signs of the kingdom was that God would pour out His Spirit (see Isaiah 44:3; Joel 2:28-32). Jesus' disciples knew He was the Messiah (Greek: *Christos*), so they supposed that by promising the Spirit, Jesus was saying He would soon **restore the kingdom to Israel** (1:6). Despite Jesus' teaching, they still thought He was going to establish a political kingdom at once.

3. From Acts 1:2-5, what was apparently the purpose of the forty days Jesus spent with His disciples after the Resurrection?

Baptized (1:5). Literally, "to immerse a person in water or to deluge him with it, usually as a means of cleansing."⁵ The Old Testament often describes the Holy Spirit figuratively as a liquid that can be "poured" out" (Isaiah 44:3; Joel 2:28). However, Scripture also speaks of the Spirit filling and coming upon people. We should remember that these terms are figurative; the Spirit is a Person, not a fluid or a force like electricity.

For Further Study: Using a concordance (see Study Aids on page 217), trace what Jesus says about the kingdom of God in one of the Gospels.

For Thought and Discussion: What do we need to know about the time of Jesus' return (see Luke 21:5-36—especially verses 8-9 and 34-36—and Acts 1:11)? What don't we need to know (Acts 1:7)? Why is this distinction important for us to remember?

Optional Application: Does 1:8 apply to you? If not, why not? If so, what are some attitudes, priorities, or specific actions that this verse suggests for your life?

For Thought and Discussion: How was it going to be possible for the apostles to fulfill their mission (see 1:8)? Why is this important for us to remember?

Optional Application: Does 1:11 encourage you? If so, what does it encourage you to think and do?

4. Consider what Jesus said to the apostles when they asked whether His reign in power was about to begin (see 1:6-8). Why wasn't it important for the apostles to know precisely when Jesus would finish bringing God's reign to earth?

5. Why was it necessary for Jesus to stop giving direct instructions to His disciples and ascend to be with His Father (see Acts 1:9)? Also see John 16:5-15.

6. a. What conviction was going to sustain the apostles as they fulfilled their mission while Jesus was physically absent (see 1:11)?

b. Why would this have been encouraging?

A twelfth witness chosen (1:12-26)

A Sabbath day's walk (1:12). Jewish tradition said that traveling more than three thousand feet was work, so that distance came to be called a Sabbath day's journey.⁶

Women (1:14). Among these were probably the wives of the apostles, as well as Jesus' mother. But unlike most Jewish teachers, Jesus had permitted women to travel with Him as disciples and even support Him financially, those women were among the witnesses to His crucifixion and resurrection (see Mark 15:40-41; Luke 8:1-3; 23:49,55-56; 24:1-11).

Brothers (1:14). When the church came to believe that Mary remained a virgin throughout her life, it was assumed that Jesus' "brothers" were either His cousins or Joseph's sons by a previous marriage. However, some people think they were the sons of Joseph and Mary, Jesus' half brothers. They did not believe He was the Son of God during His life, so they continually tried to dissuade Him from the path that appeared insane (see Mark 3:21; John 7:5). But Jesus appeared to them after His resurrection, and they believed. The eldest brother, James, became a leader in the Jerusalem church (see Acts 12:17; 15:13; Galatians 2:9).

At His death, Jesus committed His mother into the care of the Apostle John because His brothers did not yet believe (see John 19:26-27). From this fact, and because Joseph is not mentioned in Acts 1:14, we conclude that he had died.

In their language (1:19). Verses 18-19 are a parenthesis that Luke has inserted into Peter's speech to explain to the reader how Judas died. Peter's words actually flow from 1:17 to 1:20.⁷

It is necessary (1:21). According to Jewish law, a hundred and twenty or more adult men could establish a community with its own ruling council. **A hundred and twenty** (1:15) believers were going to set up their own community with the twelve apostles as its council.⁸

For Further Study:
Trace references to prayer in Acts. Who prays? Why? What happens when people pray? What do your observations imply for your life?

Twelve men were necessary because they symbolized the twelve patriarchs who headed the twelve tribes (the whole nation) of Israel. (See Matthew 19:28, where "judging" is the Hebrew term for ruling or governing.⁹) Just as the patriarchs were the heads (under God) of Israel, so the apostles are the heads (under Jesus) of the church.

7. How did Peter describe the chief function of an apostle (see 1:22)? What were the qualifications of such a person (see 1:21-22)?

Justus (1:23). Many Jews had both a Hebrew and a Greek or Latin name. "Joseph" is Hebrew, "Justus" is Latin. "Barsabbas" means "son of the Sabbath"; many Jews had nicknames that contained the phrase "son of . . ." (4:36).

Ministry (1:25). "The Greek word *diakonia* means 'service' (originally service at a meal table), and it is used of Christian work of all kinds, which takes its pattern from the One who came not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45)."¹⁰ "To serve tables" in 6:2 (NASB) is *diakonoi*; this is the root of the English word *deacon*.

Lots (1:26). This method of discerning God's will for a decision was common in Old Testament times and among the Jews. Proverbs 16:33 states the belief that God, not chance, determined the outcome when lots were cast. Acts 1:26 is the only biblical instance of Christians casting lots.

8. a. What role did prayer have among the believers between the Ascension and Pentecost (see 1:14,24-25)?

b. How is this a model for us?

Your response

9. Acts covers many topics that are relevant to our lives. Some of the book's themes are given with space for you to write what you learn about each theme as you go through the book. For now, look back over this lesson and 1:1-26, and write what you can about each theme. Give verse references for your observations.

Study Skill—Application

Because Acts is a narrative (a true story), it teaches us mainly by example, not directly as the Gospels and Epistles do. However, the first thirty years of church history were a unique period in the history of God's dealings with man. Therefore, not everything in Acts sets an example that we should imitate. Acts records what *did* happen, not necessarily what should have happened or what always should happen. (For instance, the apostles cast lots and prayed to select the twelfth apostle, 1:23-26. Is this meant to be a model for choosing an apostle or leaders in general? How do we know?)

(continued on page 28)

(continued from page 27)

To apply Acts to our lives sensibly, we need to distinguish when Luke is describing an example we *should* follow; when he is describing one we *may* follow; and when he is giving details to portray the overall message, not to be exact models for us.

One clue to this distinction is that *primary patterns recur* whereas *specific details vary*. For instance, people repeatedly pray for God's guidance to make decisions in Acts but casting lots occurs only once, before the Spirit is poured out at Pentecost. Likewise, when people become believers in Acts, water baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit normally occur, but "these can be in reverse order, with or without the laying on of hands, with or without the mention of tongues; and scarcely ever with a specific mention of repentance, even after what Peter says in 2:38-39."¹¹

You'll find more guidelines for applications later in this study guide. For now, keep this question in mind: When is a practice in Acts a norm we should follow; when is it an option we should consider, and when is it unique to the time? Also, watch for recurring patterns and varying details.

10. Review your answers to questions 4, 5, 8, and 9. Ask God to guide you, and write down
- (a) the one specific truth from 1:1-26 you want to take to heart and
 - (b) any commitment to some action or prayer you would like to make during the coming week.

a. _____

b. _____

Study Skill—Outlining

Some people remember a book better if they outline it as they go through it. Questions 1 and 2 of this lesson have given you a head start on outlining chapter 1 of Acts. If you like, start with a broad framework, such as one of those in the overview. Then add specifics:

1:1-26 _____

1:1-5 _____

1:6-11 _____

1:12-26 _____

Give each section a title that tells what it is about. Try to show how the sections contribute to the themes of Acts.

11. If you have any questions about 1:1-26, write them here.

For the group

Worship.

Warm-up. Instead of launching right into the study, it is often helpful to begin with a simple question related to the theme of the lesson. This helps people unwind from the day's business and focus on the Scripture. A warm-up question for Acts 1:1-26 might be, "What is a witness?"

Read aloud. It is usually a good idea to read aloud the passage you are going to study. This refreshes everyone's memory and, like the warm-up, helps everyone to focus.

Summarize. Ask someone to summarize what 1:1-26 is about. A quick summary at the beginning can keep you from losing sight of the forest when you examine the trees. Questions 1 and 2 may help.

Discussion. Sometimes, in order to make a question clearer or just to make the discussion more interesting, you may want to rephrase a question in the study guide. If you want to do this, keep in mind that most questions ask you either to *observe* what a passage says, *interpret* what it means, or *apply* it to yourselves.

Also, you may sometimes need to ask a few questions about the word definitions and background in the lesson, such as "What does 'so-and-so' mean?" Make sure that everyone understands important words, but don't worry if many people aren't interested in all the details. The background is there to help the book come alive for you, but you don't have to memorize all of it.

Talk about the Study Skill—Application on pages 27-28. Does everyone understand the differences between a norm we must follow, an option we may follow, and a unique event that is not an example for us? How does this distinction apply to Acts 1:1-26?

Many groups feel that half their discussion time should be devoted to exploring how the passage applies to their lives. If you've prepared the interpretation questions ahead of time, you should not need long to cover them. But even if you decide to spend less than half of your time on application, do allow at least fifteen minutes for it. Don't *insist* that members do something about the passage, but do *encourage* them to do so; ask what difference it should make to their lives. You could suggest that each member tell one person outside the group one significant insight he or she had from your discussion. Or suggest that a member choose an insight or several verses to meditate on for the next week. Not everyone may feel comfortable telling what he or she plans to do for application. You may need to make an effort to develop trust and openness over several weeks.

Make sure that everyone understands the point of the themes. Discuss what you learned about the church's mission, the Holy Spirit, and so on from 1:1-26. Encourage the group to keep up with these lists because, when finished, they will give you illuminating topical studies of Acts.

Give everyone a chance to raise questions about the passage.

Summarize. Ask one person or several people to summarize the main points of your discussion. What do you want to remember from 1:1-26? Summarizing a discussion helps to clarify it in people's minds so they can remember it. Pull together what 1:1-26 is about and also how it applies to you.

Worship. Thank Jesus for giving His church its mission and promising power to accomplish that mission. Thank Him for preparing the apostles to be His witnesses. Give thanks for the return He promised.

1. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 18.
2. Erich von Eicken and Helgo Lindner, "Apostle," *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 1, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 128.
3. Kenneth Barker, ed., *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 1505.
4. Marshall, 57.
5. Marshall, 58.
6. H. Porter, "Sabbath Day's Journey," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), 2634.
7. Barker, 1645, and Marshall, 64-65, explain ways of harmonizing Acts 1:18-19 with Matthew 27:3-8.
8. Marshall, 64.
9. Barker, 1470; "Krinio" in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* abridged in one volume, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 469-473.
10. Marshall, 66.
11. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 92.

Themes in Acts

What is the church's mission?

What is the church's message?

What is the Holy Spirit's role in the church and the world?

How do believers respond to opposition and persecution in Acts?

What is the relationship between Christianity and Judaism in Acts?

LESSON THREE

ACTS 2:1-41

Pentecost

Forty days after the Resurrection, Jesus left His disciples with a mission and a promise. For ten more days the believers prayed together and prepared. Then came the Jewish feast of Pentecost.

Read 2:1-41 before you begin the questions. Imagine yourself as one of the believers gathered to celebrate the feast with no idea of what was coming. Or put yourself in the crowd of Jews witnessing the bizarre events and Peter's speech. Ask God to bring this scene alive for you.

For Thought and Discussion: Briefly, what is 2:1-41 about?

What does Acts show about fellowship (partnership, participation, sharing, communion)?

The Spirit descends (2:1-13)

Pentecost (2:1). The fiftieth day after the Sabbath of Passover week (*pente koste* is Greek for "fiftieth day"). *Pentecost* is the name Greek-speaking Jews used for the Feast of Weeks (see Leviticus 23:15-21; Deuteronomy 16:9-12), the Feast of Harvest (see Exodus 23:16), or the Day of Firstfruits (see Numbers 28:26-31). On Pentecost, the Jews brought offerings of the firstfruits of the wheat harvest to the temple to thank the Lord for it. In Jesus' time, Pentecost "was associated with the renewal of the covenant made with Noah and then with Moses . . . ; in second-century Judaism Pentecost was regarded as the day when the law was given at Sinai."¹