

## Acts 1 - John Karmelich

For those of you who know me well, my favorite question to ask about the bible is, "Now what"? What that means is "I believe in Jesus, now what". In effect all of my studies focus on that question. When I think of the book of Acts, I picture the disciples wondering at this point, "OK Jesus rose from the dead and He went back to heaven. What do we do now?" The book of Acts effectively gives us a role model to follow as Christians. We are called to study it because the same marching orders the disciples had is what we are called to as well. This book covers specific events from the first 30 years of church history starting when Jesus first went to heaven.

Think about the book of Acts this way. If we didn't have this book, we wouldn't know who Paul was. For my newcomers, he wasn't one of the original 12 disciples but came on the scene some years later. This book explains how he became a Christian and how he used his life as a witness for Jesus. It also teaches us about a few of the other disciples gave their lives to Jesus. It's not a complete guide of what happened to each of them. The text mainly focuses on Peter and then it switches to Paul. Realize that the author of book was one of Paul's travel companions on his missionary journeys. Therefore most of the focus is on Paul with the author (Luke) doing research on the "early days" prior to Paul's journeys.

Even with my "now what" question hanging out there, let me discuss my title for Chapter 1. It's "What Christians are called to do and where to go as a witness for Jesus!" Chapter 1 is short, but it gives us a good outline of what we're called to do: Use our lives as a witness for Jesus. I also want you to know the most important verse in this chapter is Verse 8. Let me paraphrase it for you:

We (Jesus disciples, that's us!) are to be His witnesses in 1) Jerusalem, 1) Judea, 3) Samaria and 4 (the outer parts of the world. Let me expand on that for a second:

- 1) Jerusalem is the city God set up to be where the temple is and where Jesus will rule the world from.
- 2) Judea is in effect the home country of the Israelites at that time.
- 3) Samaria represents the land of "half breeds". It's a place religious Jewish people avoided back then and was the northern part of what we call Israel today.
- 4) The outer parts of the world obviously represents everywhere else!

The question for each of us is,

What is our Jerusalem? Our "home town" where God calls us to be a witness to?

What is our Judea? What is our area of our world where we could have an influence?

What is our Samaria? The place (or people) we can't stand that God loves and should be a witness to?

What's our "outer part of the world"? That's what we need to ponder as we read this chapter.

If you ever wonder why Christian churches send out missionaries, Verse 8 is the answer!

Remember why we were created in the first place, to glorify God with our lives. We're called to be a witness for Him. The "where" are those places!

OK then, back to my introduction. Time to quote a few things I wrote (wow) 20 years ago!

The Book of Acts is also called in some Bibles as "The Acts of the Apostles". It's generally thought of as a historical record of what happened to the apostles after the resurrection of Jesus. Actually, I'm not that crazy about the title. (Like I can change it!) J. Vernon McGee's (a famous bible teacher who had a church in in downtown LA a generation ago) suggestion for a title for Acts: "The Lord Jesus Christ at

Work by the Holy Spirit through the Apostles." Another title suggestion I like came from a late mentor of mine, Chuck Missler. He said, "It's a book written by one guy, to one guy about another one guy".

As I mentioned, the author of the book is Luke, (same as the Gospel of Luke). He wrote it to someone we know little about (probably a Roman official). Anyway Luke wrote it when Paul was awaiting trial for being a Christian. The book ends with Paul waiting for that trial. History records he was set free as in effect he won that trial (again that occurs after this book ends). Later Paul was later arrested again. I would argue the best estimate of a date for this book is about 65AD. Like Paul, Luke wasn't one of the 12 disciples. It appears he met Paul on one of the three missionary journeys describe in this book. Note in the middle of Acts, the pronouns change from "them to us". Most likely when Paul was in prison in Israel is when Luke interviewed people to get the details to write both his Gospel account as well as an account of stories he wanted to include in Acts. Luke was in Rome during the time of Paul's arrest and that's how he got that information about his trial in Rome that's the end of the book. As I said the book ends before Paul's death. It gives the impression that Acts is a continuous concept: to use our lives as a witness for Jesus until He returns!

As I stated, the book pretty much focuses on the ministry of Peter and Paul. For the most part, the book ignores the other apostles. The book tells very little/nothing about some key churches of that time. For example, the church at Jerusalem, the church(es) of Rome, or even Paul's home base: Antioch is barely mentioned. Much of Acts is a road journey as it follows Paul on his three missionary journeys. Realize the bible isn't so much to teach us about history, but to guide as how to be a witness for Jesus as we go through our lives.

Anyway, with that said, the focus of Acts is on the formation and growth of the early church. It is sort of a bridge between the gospels and the Epistles. After the Book of Acts, the majority of the remainder of the Bible was written by Paul. As I said, if it weren't for Acts, we wouldn't know who Paul was, or why he was so important to the early church.

As to this book, there is some history, but that's not the main reason to study it! The application for us is to see how the apostles lived, worked, prayed, studied and were a witness for Jesus. Acts is a good a model on how we need to live as Christians. Some of the background things here are cultural. What is important is the principals of Christian living and that will be a big focus of this book.

As to Chapter 1 itself, it begins with Jesus going up to heaven. An angel tells the disciples in effect, it "Hey stop looking up at the sky as if Jesus is coming right back! It isn't time for Him to rule the world yet. Before then, they must be a witness to "all those places"". Then the chapter deals with the death of Judas and naming a replacement. Why? It's a Jewish thing! There were 12 Jewish tribes so the church figured there had to be 12 apostles. As they died off, they weren't replaced. (For example, James dies in Chapter 12 (John's brother) and a replacement isn't named.) Anyway, the focus of this chapter is on the "marching orders" to be a witness for Him. Among those who were around since John the Baptist (he wasn't one of the 12. He's killed in the gospel accounts) the "11" plus about 100 more in the group picked a man to be part of the "12". In summary Chapter 1 focuses on the disciples marching orders of preaching the Gospel to those four places and replacing Judas!

If you're new here, what you've read so far is about 15% of this study. To read the rest of it click on one of the other two links on this lesson. You're always welcome to e-mail me and I hope you like this. Thanks, John

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