

Introduction to a Study of Evangelism in Acts

Luke's narrative called Acts, or Acts of the Apostles, had its beginning with John the Baptist, in Luke's Gospel (Luke 1:17). The Israelites had been looking for the Messiah (Hebrew), or the Christ (Greek). They thought John, the Baptist, might be the one who was promised. John set them straight by stating God's immediate mission for the Christ and Israel.

John answered them all, 'I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand to clear the threshing floor and to gather the wheat into His barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.'
Luke 3:16-18

The following are things God did before the Christ began to teach the kingdom of God to Israel (Luke 4:43). Those who accepted the kingdom would be the "wheat." The Book, referred to as the Old Testament, had been prepared by God for Jesus' use in His preaching the kingdom of God.

1. Jesus, the Christ, was the Anointed One of the Old Testament. Adam was His pattern, or type, of the incarnate Christ (Rom. 5:14). Jesus gave meaning to the Old Testament for the believing Israelites and later for spiritual Israel, the church (Rom. 15:4; I Cor. 10:11).
2. The Old Testament identified the role of Jesus of Nazareth. See Acts 3:17-26:
 - a. The One through whom God's everlasting covenant with Abraham is being fulfilled. Gen. 12:1-3; 17:19.
 - b. The prophet like Moses. Deut. 18:15-19.
 - c. The son of David. II Sam. 7:16.
 - d. The servant of God. Isaiah. 42:1, ff.
 - e. The righteous One who suffered. Psalm 22:1, ff.
 - f. The stricken shepherd. Zech. 13:7.
 - g. The One through whom God created all things. In Him is life. John 1:1-12.

Luke quoted Jesus at the end of his gospel to help us understand His itinerary and the identifying qualities of His incarnation (24:44). "Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." According to Luke's narrative, this major move of God of

fulfilling scripture was in process before the birth of Jesus. God moved Mary via the Holy Spirit to bring the Christ into the world by a virgin birth. They called Him Jesus. God allowed time for His physical growth before Jesus began to preach the kingdom. During this 30-year period Jesus was in training for His role as High Priest (Luke 3:23; Heb. 2:17, 18; 5:7-10).

Lesson

The mission of the Christ in cooperation with the Holy Spirit was, and is, to do the will of God. Jesus called the lost sheep of Israel to God by preaching the kingdom of God (Luke 3:21-23; 4:43). Jesus of Nazareth declared Himself to be the Christ after reading Isaiah 61:1, 2 in the synagogue in His earthly hometown. This scripture included Jesus' mission statement for His ministry.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Luke 4:18, 19

The Bible terminology for "mission statement" is best understood by Jesus' declaration, "For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God." John 6:38. The will of God and the kingdom of God are synonymous lines of poetry in Jesus' model prayer (Matt. 6:10).

John, the Baptist, was the prophet of the Most High (Luke 1:76). The Holy Spirit prophesied by the mouth of Zechariah; "And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, **to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of righteousness – to make a people prepared for the Lord.**" Luke 1:17. The Israelites needed to repent in regard to these three issues to prepare themselves to receive the kingdom of God. Their repentance would be manifested in their behavior. John's message emphasized God's desire for fruit from His people in these last days of time. Our choices are to be fruit for God or be prepared for the "ax" Jesus wielded.

- a. "The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown in the fire." Luke 3:9.
- b. "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance." 3:8.
- c. Share your "goods" to meet material necessities of others (3:11).
- d. Use your authority in a just manner (3:13).
- e. Be content with your pay (3:14).

Jesus earthly evangelism campaigns were specifically for the Jews in Palestine. They needed to repent because they had not been fruit producers for God's kingdom (Luke 13:3-8; Matt. 21:43). Near the end of His mission on earth Jesus may have had the whole world in mind when He said, "For the Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost." Luke 19:10. This declaration was made in context with the salvation that had recently come to the house of Zacchaeus. He was a wealthy Jewish tax collector who repented; however, Jesus certainly had us Gentiles in mind a few months later while giving the final instruction to His mission team. See Acts 1:8; 11:18.

The Christ is now Christians' Lord (Acts 2:36). He is both our Prince and Savior (Acts 5:31). We will join Jesus on this "seek and save" mission by following His strategies in our study of Acts. The mission was carried forward in Acts by the Holy Spirit and the apostles under Jesus' leadership from the right hand of God (Acts 1:9, 24; 7:56). Finally, the church and other Spirit gifted people cooperated with the apostles (Acts 4:31; 8:4). **Jesus' mission is being carried on today by the church Jesus built** (Matt. 16:18). Since most Christians will "Amen" this statement, we will want to understand how each of our lives relates to what is often referred to as the "Great Commission." Please note how the church is included in the commission Jesus gave to the apostles:

*This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be **preached in His name to all nations**, beginning at Jerusalem. Luke 24:46, 47*

*Go into all the world and **preach the good news to all creation**. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. Mark 16:15, 16*

*Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and **make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you**.*

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Matt. 28:18-20

What was preached in order to "clear the threshing floor" so the wheat could be brought into Jesus' barn?

1. Repentance and forgiveness of sins.

Forgiveness of sins happens in baptism when faith filled repentant sinners "wholeheartedly obey" the form of doctrine the Holy Spirit delivered from Jesus, our Lord (John 16:12-15; I Cor. 12:12, 14; Rom. 6:3, 4). John, the Baptist, said, "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance." Luke 3:8. The Apostle Paul interpreted John's definition of repentance for us.

Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness. Rom. 6:13

Sinners should repent of misusing their bodies before they decide to enter into the waters of baptism (I Peter 3:18-22). This change of mind must precede the grace of dying with Jesus in baptism (Acts 22:16; Rom. 6:3, 4).

2. The good news.

*Jesus said, "I must preach the good news of **the kingdom of God** to the towns also, because that is why I was sent." Luke 4:43*

From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Matt. 4:17

3. The apostles and other Spirit filled people preached everything Jesus commanded while on earth. The Apostle Paul is our model.

You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. Acts 20:20, 21

Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. Acts 20:25

The Son of God became incarnate, preached the kingdom, revealed the life of the kingdom and sacrificed His blood to purchase the church (Acts 20:21, 25-28). He came so mankind can become what we were created to be – "sons of the Most High." Luke 6:35-36. Every Christian must function in the body of Christ which is the church of Christ (Rom. 12:4-8; 16:16; Eph. 1:22, 23). Every church of Christ will accept the Great Commission (Matt. 28:20).

There are two concepts we want to address before we join Jesus' mission of **doing God's will** in Acts. First, let us consider the kind of leadership Jesus practiced in the Gospels. It is a model for leaders in the church today. Luke set forth two prevalent mentalities about leadership in his Gospel. They are the "towel and wash basin" and the "chief seat" mentalities. The mentality Jesus has is based on John 13:1-8. This has been referred to as the "towel and basin"

mentality. It is the type of leadership parents usually choose for ruling their children.

Jesus had this view of leadership in mind for His mission leaders in Acts. In fact, it is the only acceptable kind of leadership modeled for us in the Bible (Phil. 2:5-11). Towel and basin leadership can be understood by what Jesus said to the sons of Zebedee, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." Mark 10:45.

James and John had the other concept of leadership in mind. They thought the seat next to Jesus would give them the power to lead. Jesus told them the way to the seat they desired was up the path of a **suffering servant**. Jesus asked them, "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" Mark 10:38. They said they could and later in life they both adopted the type of leadership Jesus modeled for them. James was killed by the sword and his brother became a prisoner on the Isle of Patmos (Acts 12:2; Rev. 1:9). The type of leadership Jesus railed against that Luke included in his narrative is the "chief seat" mentality. It is the norm for human level thinking about leadership (Luke 11:37-52 and 22:24-27).

Elders who have proven themselves to be successful parents are the people Jesus ordained to lead His church family (Acts 14:23; 20:28-30). Just as Paul predicted, "savage wolves" have usurped the leadership in much of what is called the "Christian religious world." Even in the churches that identify with the Lord's church, the people who call themselves "preachers" maintain a chief seat type of leadership "contrary to the teaching you have learned." Rom. 16:17, 18.

Preachers have a role in which to function; however, it is not leading the church. The Greek word translated "preacher" is *kerux*. It means a herald – one who gives a proclamation (I Tim. 2:7; II Tim. 1:11). Timothy and Titus received their power to ordain elders and lead churches from Paul's apostleship. Jesus appointed Paul to this powerful office (I Cor. 4:14-21; 15:7-11). All three of these men preached; however, that was not what gave them power over the churches. The awesome office of an apostle with power over multiple churches became extinct when the last apostle died.

When church leaders seek titles and seats we can expect some other kind of church to be built. Jesus did not build His church with "chief seat" leadership. Peter had to learn to accept the "towel and basin" leadership role the hard way. See John 13:8; Luke 22:24, 31-34.

The second concept we want to keep in mind as we read Acts is the content of the message Jesus actually presented when He preached the kingdom of God. It is not difficult to know what He preached because it is what Luke and the other Gospel writers recorded. We need to keep all of His teachings about the quality of life in the kingdom of God in focus as we read Acts. Also, we will want to remember the characters in Acts were introduced in the Gospels. We cannot understand a story until we identify the protagonist and the antagonist, as well as their supporting cast.

God's evangelism program under the kingship of Jesus in Acts had its beginning in the Gospels. Jesus, Himself, was the preacher. This was not His title, it was what He did. He is Lord. His office is now "Prince and Savior." Acts 5:31. Before we enter the study of Acts, we will review the Gospel of Luke in order to understand what was preached to develop faith and repentance in "those who were being saved." Acts 2:47. The apostles preached the same kingdom of God, Jesus preached. His audience was the Israelites while they were still being "school-mastered" under the Law of Moses (Gal. 4:1-5). After Jesus returned to heaven, the apostles preached the same kingdom to the same Jews in Jerusalem in order to fulfill "the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Luke 24:44.

Luke wrote the narratives of Luke and Acts after "those who were being saved," from both the Jew and Gentile people, were functioning as God's churches in Christ (I Thess. 2:14). Luke wrote about "things that have been fulfilled" and messages that "were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses." Luke 1:1, 2. Although Luke, himself, is not identified by name in either narrative, he has received the credit for these divinely inspired historical documents. Because the pronouns changed from "they" to "we" in Acts 16:8-10, Luke was first introduced, if, indeed, he was the author. He joined Paul, Silas and Timothy as they crossed into Europe to preach the kingdom to the Philippians on Paul's second missionary journey. Luke joined the party again as they were taking the collection to Jerusalem at the end of Paul's third missionary journey (Acts 17:1; 20:5). He accompanied Paul to Rome and stayed with him during his first and second imprisonments (Acts 27:1; Col. 4:11; II Tim. 4:11). Luke may have penned his Gospel before his adventurous sea voyage to Malta (Acts 28:1). Perhaps he wrote Acts during Paul's two-year term because he closed the document with this information (Acts 28:30, 31).

Our next lesson will be about other major moves of God recorded in Luke.

Questions for Discussion

1. How did God establish the true identity of the Messiah for a student of the Old Testament?
2. Based on Jesus' mission statement, why would we not expect Him to be found preaching in a modern day church building?
3. List the three issues John, Baptist, was sent to address as a forerunner of the Christ.
4. In context with John's preaching, how do we interpret his statement, "The ax is already at the root of the trees?"
5. Why might the title applied to this series of lesson be a fair description of the narrative of Acts?
6. Explain how a modern day church that Jesus built is included in His commission to the apostle to continue His mission of seeking and saving the lost.
7. What is the visual result of repentance according to John's definition?
8. List the two prevalent world mentalities about leadership Luke set forth in the gospels.
9. From your own experience with churches, which mentality of the two would you say is most prevalent?
10. Why should the appointment of elders in a church eliminate the "chief seat" mentality?
11. Why is it easy to understand what Jesus and others preached about the kingdom?
12. Why is it important for a reader of Acts to keep the characters, teachings and events in the gospels activity in his or her mind?