

Responding to God Word: How to Faithfully Interpret the Bible

Men's Bible Study at Park View
A Study of the Acts of the Apostles
March 15 and 22, 2005

During the next two weeks, we will study the Book of Acts. This book provides our most revealing window into the formation and early life of the church established by the followers of Jesus. The book is a narrative, in some ways like the Old Testament narratives we will study later. But there is one important difference.

We don't turn to Old Testament stories to help establish major Christian doctrines. In contrast, we do often turn to the Book of Acts when we're talking about baptism, church leadership, church structure, spiritual gifts, or the Christian and economics.

In the first session, we will try to get a feel for the whole book, tracing the dynamic movement of the Holy Spirit in the life of the early believers. In the second session, we will look at the authority of this book for the life of the church today. How do we use **biblical precedents** in interpreting scripture and in shaping doctrine? Is the example of the New Testament church prescriptive or merely descriptive of the life that God desires for the church today?

NOTES

Read Acts 1:1-11. In what way does this introduction help carry the story begun in the Gospel of Luke?

When reading narratives, try to capture the "big picture," the overall direction and intention of the story.

What does Luke want to accomplish with his account of the growth of the community of Jesus?

A good exercise to pursue is to read or browse through the entire Book of Acts, looking at the bold headings in your Bible, following the story as best you can.

Where does he start the book? Where does he end the book?

Think paragraphs, not just individual verses.

What are the natural dividing points in the book?

Study the historical and cultural contexts of the passage.

What seems to give forward momentum to the story?

Read Acts 2:42-47

Review the events of Acts chapters 1-2. What took place just prior to the community life described in this passage? Who were the first followers of Jesus? Who was present at Pentecost?

The Lord's followers "shared everything they had" (v. 44). Should we pattern our church life after this first community of Christians? If so, in what way? If not, why not?

Principle of Interpretation:

Unless Scripture explicitly tells us we must do something, what is only narrated or described does not function in a normative way—unless it can be demonstrated on other grounds that the author intended it to function in this way.
(Fee & Stuart, p. 106)

What did Luke intend to teach with this story?

Read Acts 10:34-48; 11:15-18.

How does this incident fit into the larger story that Luke is telling? What details are Peter (and Luke) careful to point out? Why are these details important?

How does Luke's intention as the bearer of God's revelation shape our application of this story from Acts?

How would this message (that Gentiles can receive new life through Jesus) be heard or read by the first followers of Jesus?

What might be a comparable story today? How do we "hear" and apply the insights of this story today?