



MISSION IMPOSSIBLE 4 • The Apostles

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Acts

The study traces through the story of the initial expansion of the gospel as recorded in the Book of Acts.

Acts 1

Before the disciples were to “go and make disciples of all nations,” Jesus instructs them to ‘sit and wait’ in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would empower them and lead them in this mission. Without God’s Spirit, the disciples might as well have been given the mission of planning and executing a successful moon launch.

The disciples asked Jesus when He would return. Given their situation, it’s a logical question. Wouldn’t you want to know as you began this mission, whether Jesus would return in a couple years or a couple thousand? Jesus tells them that this piece of information is given out on a ‘need to know’ basis and only the Father needs to know. Instead, Jesus simply affirms that no matter how long the mission lasts, where it leads and what they may suffer in the process, He would be with them through the Holy Spirit who would indwell and abide with them.

Their witness was to radiate outward. From Jerusalem you come to Judea, and from Judea you come to Samaria, and after Samaria you come to the Gentile nations, and on, and on to the ends of the earth. The Book of Acts follows this basic flow – we see the gospel go from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria. Paul then takes the gospel to the Gentile nations on his missionary journeys.

Acts 2

Here we have the account of the Holy Spirit being ‘poured out’ upon the church. This is what Jesus had told them to wait for. The event coincides with the Jewish feast of Pentecost which, ironically enough, was the celebration of the ‘first fruits’ of the new harvest – and that, it most certainly was. In the passage, we see that as the believers are filled with the Spirit, they begin to speak in other tongues. This signified the missionary nature of the church – they were to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to all nations. If you think about it, this is actually a reversal of the Tower of Babel where God had splintered humanity by confusing its speech. As God builds His kingdom, He starts construction at Ground Zero – where Babel had fallen. Here, God gifts His people with different languages so that the gospel can be proclaimed and understood by all and the kingdoms, united under one King.

Exodus 40:33-38 records the completion of the Tabernacle, which was the more portable prototype of the Jerusalem Temple. When the Tabernacle was complete, God’s presence visibly filled the structure. The same thing happened again when

What’s the Big Idea?

The study traces the initial growth, expansion and evangelism of the incipient church. Through Acts we witness the strong missionary impulse and Spirit-led obedience that defined the early church.

What’s the Problem?

We are not as powerfully led by the Spirit, as gripped by the gospel and as mission-minded as the early church, who boldly manifested the resurrected Christ, through the indwelling Spirit.



they built the permanent Temple in Jerusalem: “and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the temple of God” (2Chr. 5:14). The Jews had actually been awaiting a Temple upgrade – a bigger and better Temple that the Messiah would build when He came. Well, He did come, and this was the new Temple: a building of living stones, each believer a brick in the structure. Acts 2 is the Lord’s presence filling this new Temple.

Outside of Jerusalem, synagogues had been erected for Jews who were not within traveling distance of the Temple in Jerusalem. The weekly service consisted of Scripture reading, creedal statements and prayer. These early Christians, no longer welcome in the synagogues, met in gatherings like the one pictured in Acts 2:42-47. They prayed, were taught by the disciples, shared meals and celebrated the Lord’s supper. And God “added daily to their number”.

Acts 3

In Acts 2 and 3, the ministry of the disciples is launched. Recorded here, is one of Peter’s first sermons. Peter’s words show he still had hope that Israel would repent. That was going to happen. The next few chapters record the persecution by Jewish leaders.

Acts 8

In Acts 8:1, we read that a “great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered.” This is significant because Jesus had commissioned His disciples to “go” to the nations, and they hadn’t “gone” anywhere. They hadn’t even left town. This persecution blasted them out of Jerusalem in every direction. As a result, the gospel is preached in Judea, Samaria and several of the nearby Gentile nations. The global expansion of the gospel is underway and the church will spread from city to city like Starbucks.

Equally important, this persecution would separate, at birth, Christians from their fraternal twin, the Jews. Up to this point, many Christians were still a part of community life in Israel. This persecution forced the inevitable separation.

Acts 13

In Acts 13 we see a new development in the expansion of the church and gospel. As noted in chapter 8, the persecution of Christians in Jerusalem was responsible for the initial spread of the gospel beyond Israel’s borders. In chapter 13, the Holy Spirit calls Paul and Barnabas to be missionaries with the task of intentionally taking the gospel to the Gentile nations. This missionary arm of the church will be primarily responsible for the acceleration of the spread of the gospel.

Acts 15

In many of the new churches, there arose conflict between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians, concerning how much of the Mosaic Law Gentiles needed to follow. As we have already seen through Israel’s past, relationships with the Gentiles weren’t exactly chummy, and now they were coexisting in the same church together. Problems were bound to arise. In Acts 15, various church leaders and apostles gather to consider the question. Gentile believers had a lot riding on the outcome, as one of the issues was whether they needed to be circumcised. God led them to the decision that Gentile believers did not need to follow Jewish customs. The Jews, however, asked the Gentiles to abstain from certain practices the Jews found particularly odious, for the sake of unity.

Summary

Read the Book of Acts is like reading another gospel. As the church preaches, teaches, heals, endures persecution, and loves one another, it’s like viewing the resurrected Christ – which it was – manifested in the lives of the believers through the power of the Spirit.

What’s Our Response?

As the first century church powerfully manifested the presence of the risen Christ in their lives and ministry, you want the members of your group to desire to live in this way: yielded to God, obedient, loving, preaching and living just as Christ did during His earthly ministry.

What Are the Questions?

Acts

LAUNCH

If Christians from the first century were visiting us, what do you think they would find strange about our practice of the Christian faith?

EXPLORE

The Book of Acts gives us an account of the initial spread of the gospel.

Read Acts 1:1-10.

1. Why did Jesus command them to wait in Jerusalem? Why did they need the Holy Spirit when they had Jesus?
2. Why do you think God hasn't told us the day or hour? Are there signposts that will allow us to see the Day approaching? Do you feel like the Day is approaching?
3. Read Acts 2:1-13. What did the disciples learn about this new phase of God's kingdom plan (the church) from this event? What would the tongues have led them to conclude?
4. Read Exodus 40:33-38. After the Israelites first completed the tabernacle where God would dwell, the Holy Spirit visibly filled it. The Jews also believed that when the Messiah came, He would rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem to a new and magnificent stature. In what ways was this fulfilled and in what ways was it not?
5. Read Acts 3:17-24. What do you think Peter was anticipating was going to happen in and to Israel? If you were a Jewish Christian at this time, what sorts of questions would you have had about how to participate in the practices of Judaism?
6. Read Acts 8 1-4. How did God's use this persecution?
7. As believers could no longer meet in the synagogues, they had to start their own gatherings. If you had to design the first church service, how would you have done it? What would you include?
8. Read Acts 2:42-47. What were some of the essential ingredients of the fellowship meetings? What do you feel might be lacking in our gatherings today?
9. These first churches were comprised of both believing Jews and Gentiles. What would have been potentially divisive issues between them? Why do you think they didn't have separate fellowships – one for Gentile believers and one for Jewish believers?
10. Read Acts 13:1-4. Why is this a significant event in the history of the church?
11. After missionaries like Paul planted these churches of new believers, who led them when they left? How?
12. Within the span of 20 years, many questions about the church were being answered: what the church was, what it should look like, what its purpose was, where it should meet, etc. Describe some of these answers.
13. In what ways would you say that the church today falls short of the what we read in the book of Acts?

APPLY

14. How do you see the early church manifest the life of the resurrected Christ? What parallels do you see to Jesus' ministry? How are you experiencing the Lord living in and through you?
15. What is so radical about the gospel message? Today, or this week, how have you been gripped by it?
16. In what ways are you playing a role in the church's missionary mandate? What might the future hold for you?
17. The Scriptures call us to live with urgency, as if Christ were coming soon. What does it mean to live with this sense of urgency?

What Are the Answers?

1. To wait for the Holy Spirit, who would be God's abiding presence with them in the mission. It is only through the Spirit that Christ can indwell each of us.
2. Discuss. In Matthew 24, Jesus does give some clear signposts so that we will sense the Day of His coming as it approaches.
3. Believers are the new Temple. The tongues should have helped them to see the global, multi-ethnic and missionary nature of the church. See notes on Acts 2.
4. See notes on Acts 2.
5. Peter still hoped Israel would repent (turn to Christ) so that God's plans would be fulfilled through Israel. They probably struggled with whether they should still go to the Temple and participate in Feasts and Festivals.
6. He used it to have the gospel preached in Judea, Samaria and several nearby Gentile nations. This was also a final breach that divided Judaism and Christianity into two distinct entities.
7. Allow the group to discuss.
8. They prayed, were taught by the disciples, shared meals and celebrated the Lord's supper. It also states that "God added to their number", inferring evangelism.
9. See notes under Acts 15. The major issues concerned what aspects of Judaism the Gentiles needed to embrace (e.g., Should Gentiles eat Jewish food, be circumcised). Christ's kingdom comprises all nations. We must learn to love one another and reflect the true diversity of the kingdom.
10. This seems to be the commissioning of the role of full-time missionary.
11. Often one of the missionaries remained behind to shepherd the ministry until local leadership was sufficient to take over.
12. Allow the group to summarize.
13. Allow the group to discuss.
14. Discuss, but keep an eye out for how well your group members understand abiding in Christ and walking in step with God's Spirit.
15. Again you want to see how well your group members understand God's grace and if they are continuing to live in that grace.
16. Allow the group to discuss.
17. Allow the group to discuss.

Memorize

Have the group read through the Book of Acts and take note of any new pieces of information that aids their understanding of the initial growth of the church.