

Acts Midweek Study 1

As we go through the book of Acts we can see that the church was born in power and revelation. This is good news for us! None of us want to be part of a church that is simply going through the motions, same thing, week in and week out. We want to be part of a church where what happens in services and smaller gatherings sets us up for the continued inward transformation that needs to take place in every one of us if we are to see His kingdom come, His will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. That this is not something that I observe happening, but something that I usher in as I allow His work to be done in my life.

We are going to look at 6 things as part of our studies:

1. Crossing the line – taking the message further, to the Jews
2. Crossing the line – taking the message further, to the Samaritans
3. Crossing the line – taking the message further, to the Gentiles
4. Spiritual warfare
5. The Gentile question – taking the message further, to everyone everywhere
6. Hearing God's voice and manifesting His power

Acts 1:8 Luke sets the scene for the entire book. Most commentators take it as a "setting of the scene" for the rest of the book, rather than an indication of what the church can expect today.

This is the second volume of the Luke-Acts set. The gospel of Luke, the good news according to Luke, has told us what Jesus did, the book of Acts tells us what He expects of His followers; then *and* now. It's called the acts of the apostles, but could well be named the acts of the Holy Spirit through His people. What do we know about Luke:

- He was a doctor
- He was a gentile – a non-Jew – the only gentile writer in the whole of the bible
- Wrote more words in the New Testament than anyone else
- He goes between "we" and "they" meaning that part of the book was researched, verified and written down, and part of the book he was an eye witness for

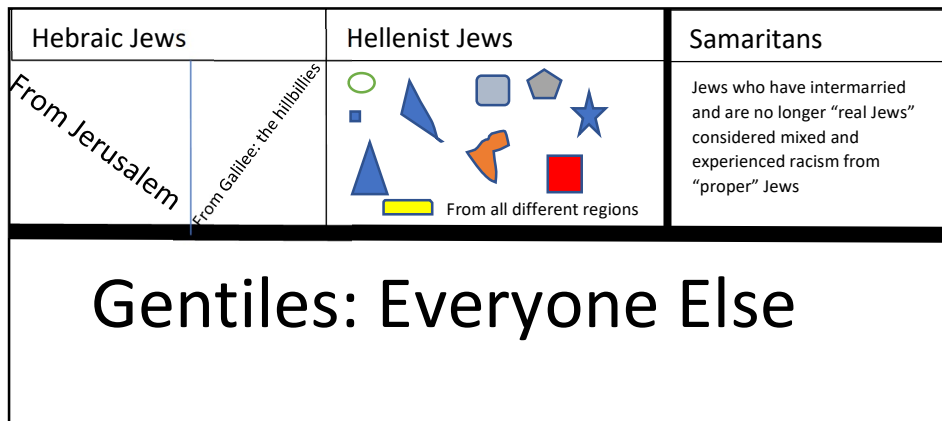
Let's set the scene for a moment. In this first century, if we are moving from a visible understanding of who was close to Yahweh, God, our God, as opposed to the many gods worshipped at the time, the Jews were closest.

- The Jews were those who followed the law, and, as part of following the law, were circumcised. You could not be a Jew without being circumcised (obviously if you were a bloke). So, it didn't matter how old you were when you decided to follow the God of the Jews, if you were 50 years old, and you wanted to be a Jew, you underwent an operation. By the by, that is still the case. It is only waived if there is a threat to life. Otherwise, circumcision for Jewish born males and non-circumcised Jewish converts is a must.
- Then there were proselytes. These were those who worshipped the God of the Jews, but weren't Jews by birth. They would follow the law, get circumcised. Proselytes.
- Then, the God fearers. They also worshipped the God of the Jews, but did not go to the lengths of following the entire law.
- Then the pagans. They followed other gods.

We will see all these kinds of people in the book of Acts.

Now, just because they were the people of God didn't make them important, in fact, they were despised and ridiculed, called names and hated by the people around them. This is important background information for what is to come. Now, among the Jews were Hebrew Jews, and Hellenistic Jews. Drilling down in the Hebrew Jews, or Hebraic Jews, were the Judean Jews and the Galilean Jews. The Galilean Jews were considered the hicks. The Hellenist Jews could be divided further into the region that they were from. And then, between the Jews and the Gentiles were the mixed blood Samaritans, also not liked by either.

All of the disciples, with the exception of maybe Judas Iscariot, were, like Jesus, from Galilee.



Those who followed the resurrected Christ and were waiting for the Holy Spirit were mainly Galileans. (See Acts 1:11, 2:7). However, we have Jews gathered from everywhere for the day of Pentecost. Pentecost means 50, and the feast of weeks, as it is called, or the feast of harvest, is held 50 days after Passover. How cool that the harvest of souls that Jesus talked about is about to take place at the feast of the harvest! Scholars suggest that between 100,000 and 200,000 Hellenist Jews would have been visiting Jerusalem for this day. At this time, we see the first cultural barrier broken down by the gospel. This would be like high school dropouts evangelism Knox Grammar graduates. There is an inbuilt bias away from the uneducated, an automatic disinclination to listen, which is where the Holy Spirit does what only He can do.

Read: Acts 1:1-11, and chapter 2. Make observations as you go.

How many regions did the Hellenist Jews come from?

Was everyone receptive to the message? How do we know that anyone was resistant? (2:13)

How does 2:23 show that this was what God had wanted all along?

What did these people hearing the message mean for the spread of the gospel?

Review and discuss the 3 visible signs of the Holy Spirit: audible, visual and oral. Have you ever heard or experienced anything like that today?

Even though Jews are preaching to Jews here, how is this still classed as cross-cultural evangelism?

Do you think every Christian should speak in tongues? How do you understand the "gift" of tongues? (Note, we will cover this more in week 6).

The church that started in Jerusalem was in many ways an ideal church. What would be some of the characteristics that our church would do well to imitate?