

— THE —
NEW TESTAMENT
— IN A —
YEAR



Lakewood
BAPTIST CHURCH

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**MARK & ACTS
LEADER'S GUIDE**

NT LEADER'S GUIDE

MARK & ACTS

JOHN D. MORRISON



NT Leader's Guide: Mark & Acts

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WELCOME TO NT18

Welcome to NT18!

Authentic Community is more than a slogan or pithy phrase It is really about LIFE TRANSFORMATION.

I am so excited about our NT18, especially as I consider the Life Transformation that I know will occur as you read God's Word.

God's Word is strong, powerful, and provides Truth and Light for every aspect our lives.

This Leader's Guide will be extremely helpful to each of our community group leaders as Authentic Community occurs in and through the local church.

I am so very thankful for your love of God, HIS Word, and HIS Church.

Blessings,

Dr. T

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

AUTHORSHIP & AUDIENCE

While the author of the Gospel according to Mark is never named, the earliest traditions attribute this book to John Mark who recorded the Apostle Peter's eyewitness accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus. John Mark is not mentioned in this Gospel, but he plays an important role in the early church as seen in the book of Acts (12:12; 12:25; 13:5, 13; 15:37) and other New Testament epistles (Col. 4:10; Philem. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11; 1 Peter 5:13). Support for Mark as the author of this Gospel comes from evidence outside of the book itself, but this support is early and well attested. In the Gospel itself, there is strong support for Peter's role behind the work such as the detail in the accounts involving Peter and the way in which this Gospel in particular presents the weaknesses of the disciples as a whole and particularly Peter

The precise date of writing cannot be determined, but it was most likely

Early Support for Mark

This is what the Elder used to say: Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote accurately, though not in order, all that he remembered of the things said or done by the Lord. For he had not himself heard the Lord or been his follower, but later, as I said, he followed Peter. Peter delivered teachings as occasion required, rather than compiling a sort of orderly presentation of the traditions of the Lord. So Mark was not wrong in recording in this way the individual items as he remembered them. His one concern was to leave out nothing of what he had heard and to make no false statements in reporting them.

Papias, 2nd Century

composed sometime in the period between the late-50's and the late-60's in the first century. Most scholars agree that the book was written before the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in AD 70. Disagreement, however, does exist on whether this Gospel was written before or after the death of Peter in AD 64/65 and on how this book's relationship with Luke and Acts should influence the dating. Some time in the late-50's through the 60's is when Mark wrote this Gospel.

As with the dating, the original audience for Mark's Gospel cannot be stated with complete certainty, but it was most likely the church in Rome. One piece of evidence for such a conclusion is that Mark wrote for a Greek-speaking audience who was unfamiliar with Aramaic, the language of Judea at that time. Such an audience would account for the numerous times Mark explains different Aramaic phrases (3:17,22; 5:41; 7:11, 34; 9:43; 10:46; 14:36; 15:22, 34). Mark also takes the time to describe a number of Jewish customs, which suggests a Gentile audience unfamiliar with them (e.g. 7:3-4).

Aramaic Phrases in Mark

Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you arise."

Mark 5:41

Mark's language provides additional support for this view because he uses a number of "Latinisms," which are words and phrases that reveal a strong Latin influence and suggest a Roman audience and perhaps Rome as the place of writing.

The audience of this Gospel has been understood to be a Christian one because Mark assumes his audience understands some key Christian concepts such as the titles of Jesus, the use of "the word" as a synonym for the gospel, and "the disciples" are never explained. Additionally, Mark mentions in 15:21 the two sons of Simon of Cyrene. From Mark's naming of Alexander and Rufus, scholars infer that Mark knew his audience well, and that the audience was a church that included these two men as members.

PURPOSE

In this Gospel, Mark has two main goals: (1) to show who Jesus is and (2) to show how we should respond to Jesus.

Throughout the Gospel, the question resounds, "Who is Jesus?" As Jesus calmed the storm the disciples want to know, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (4:41). And Jesus himself asks,

“Who do you say that I am?” (8:28).

Mark begins to answer this question in 1:1, stating clearly that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The Gospel as a whole recounts how as the Son of God Jesus is at once both exalted and the one who suffers. Broadly speaking, the first half of the Gospel (1:1-8:26) demonstrates Jesus’s power through his miracles, and the second half focuses on his suffering and death (8:27-16:8).

Who is Jesus? How will you respond to him?

Mark, however, does more than merely recount the life of Jesus. He calls on his readers to respond to the life and ministry of Jesus. Thus, a second major theme in this Gospel is discipleship. Mark sets forth what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Discipleship is the response to understanding properly who Jesus is as the God-man who reconciles sinners to God. Mark challenges the readers of this Gospel to imitate Jesus in his life of humility and suffering. The foundation of this imitation of Christ is fellowship with Jesus. This fellowship with the Savior necessarily involves trusting in his atoning work that reconciles people to God.

Mark demonstrates that Jesus is the Son of God, the fully God and fully human Messiah who has come to redeem sinners. The life and work of Jesus demand a response, and the proper response is one of following him in trust and obedience.

MEMORY VERSES | MARK 8:34-38

³⁴ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. 36 For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? 37 For what can a man give in return for his soul? 38 For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

MARK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Leaders, don't feel like you have to get through all of these questions each week or that you can't ask others that come up from your own reading or from the sermon. As you prayerfully prepare to lead your group, make use of these questions as much as they are helpful.

WEEK 1 | MARK 1-5

1. Mark 1:12-13 | Why was Jesus tempted? How does his temptation and his overcoming those temptations give us hope? (See also Heb. 4:14-16).

2. Mark 1:17 | How does this verse describe what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? How do you believe, by God's grace, you're following Christ well? What areas of your life need to look more like Jesus? How are you "fishing" for others as Jesus commanded?

3. Mark 4:1-20 | We all desire to be the good soil, but do you ever feel one of the other soils describes you better? How can we endure in our faith (v. 16-17)? How do we prevent the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches from choking out our faith (v. 19)?

4. Mark 4:35-41 | How would you answer the disciples' question at the end of v. 41: "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" Why would Mark include this account in his Gospel? What does this calming of the storm teach us about Jesus?

5. Mark 5:21-43 | Would it have been harder for you to be the woman who had waited 12 years for healing or to be the father whose daughter was on the verge of death? Why doesn't Jesus seem to be in a hurry? What lesson can you draw from these two healings about God's timing? Where do you need to be patient for God's timing in your life?

WEEK 2 | MARK 6-10

1. Mark 6:1-29 | Notice the theme of rejection in these verses: Jesus is rejected at Nazareth (vv. 1-4), he warns his disciples about being rejected (v. 11), and John the Baptist is rejected and ultimately killed by Herod (vv. 14-29). What do these verses teach about the dangers of following Jesus? Have you ever felt rejected for following

Christ? How does knowing Christ was rejected for you enable you to follow him through difficulties?

2. Mark 7:1-13 | In your life, where do your traditions get in the way of your following Jesus? Are there certain assumptions about how things “must” be done that prevent you from keeping in step with Christ?

3. Mark 8:27-33 | Mark again presents the question: who is Jesus? This is not just a question for the crowds and the disciples, but this is for us as the readers of this Gospel: how would you answer Jesus’ question in v. 29? How could Peter go from such a great answer to Jesus’s question (v. 29) to completely missing the point of what Jesus was teaching (vv. 31-33)? How does Peter’s example serve as a warning for us?

4. Mark 8:34-38 | What is Jesus teaching in these verses about the cost of following him? What does it look like for you to deny yourself and take up your cross? How do we save our lives by losing them for Christ? Where are you tempted to be ashamed of Christ and his words?

5. Mark 10:17-31 | What are you holding on to that is preventing you from fully following Christ? In other words, what do you love and prioritize over Jesus? How is v. 27 a word of great hope for us? In light of v. 27, on whom must we depend for our salvation?

WEEK 3 | MARK 11-15

1. Mark 11:1-11 | Why is it significant that Jesus enters Jerusalem like a king? 11:10 references “the coming kingdom of our father David,” and elsewhere in the Gospel of Mark, there are allusions to Jesus as the Son of David who will be a new and better king (2:23-28; 10:47-48; 12:35-37). How does Jesus as the Son of David reveal God’s faithfulness? (See 2 Samuel 7). How is Jesus the king? What does it mean for your life that Jesus is king?

2. Mark 12:35-34 | Why does Jesus answer with two commandments when the question being asked is only for one? How are these two commandments connected? We typically think of love as an emotion we feel, so what does it mean to love God “with all your heart and with all your

soul and with all your mind and with all your strength”)?

3. Mark 13:32-37 | Christians can lovingly disagree over specifics of Jesus’s return, but what must all Christians agree about his return? What are Jesus’s instructions to us as we wait for his return?

4. Mark 14:32-42 | What does Jesus’s example in the garden teach us about prayer? How can you come to a point where you can join Jesus in praying, “Not what I will, but what you will”?

5. Mark 14:60-62 | Why did the religious leaders want Jesus crucified? Why did they consider Jesus’s response to the high priest’s question to be so bad? How does the high priest’s question and Jesus’s response help answer the underlying question of Mark: who is Jesus?

WEEK 4 | MARK 16

1. Mark 16:1-8 | Considering the first-century setting, why is it surprising that Mark records women as the first witnesses of the empty tomb? What are the women commissioned to do?

MARK FAQs

In your study of Mark, these two questions below may come up, and what follows begins to address the issues raised.

Why doesn't Jesus want people to tell others about him?

If one of the purposes of the Gospel is to tell people that Jesus is the Messiah, it seems odd that at points in Mark, Jesus explicitly tells people not to talk about what he has done (1:43-44; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26).

At the outset, it should be noted that Jesus does not always seek to operate in secret. Much of his ministry involves open proclamation, such as in 1:14-39, and at points he actively draws attention to himself, as in 11:1-10, 15-18.

One reason Jesus may have commanded secrecy is that he sought to avoid too much publicity in order to accomplish his ministry. 1:45-2:2 recounts how quickly news about him spread and the crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed by him. Additionally, Jesus may have wanted to avoid undue attention from authorities who opposed his work (such as Herod in 6:14-15).

When it comes to his specific instruction to the disciples and to demons not to reveal that he is the Messiah, Jesus seems to be waiting for the right time for his identity as the Son of God to be revealed. As the readers, we know from the outset of the Gospel, who he really is, but those experiencing Jesus' life first-hand were still discovering this. As Jesus approaches his crucifixion, there will be a time where he openly announces who he is:

⁶⁰ And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" ⁶¹ But he remained silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" ⁶² And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:60-62).

The time comes when it is appropriate and necessary for him to declare who he is, and even his instruction after the transfiguration for the disciples to be silent about what they saw only lasted until the resurrection

(9:9).

In summary, the instruction to those healed to remain silent is most likely a request to make Jesus's ministry possible. The command to the disciples and to demons not to reveal that Jesus is the Messiah was a matter of waiting until the right time for that announcement to be made.

Why does my Bible say that the earliest and best manuscripts don't include Mark 16:9-20?

The vast majority of scholars believe that vv. 9-20 were a later addition meant to soften what seems to be a rather abrupt and disheartening ending in 16:8. This verse speaks of the women fleeing in fear, trembling, and astonishment without obeying the angel's command to tell the disciples of Jesus's resurrection. Two pieces of evidence support the idea that these final verses were a later addition.

First is evidence based upon the manuscripts upon which our New Testament is based. We do not have the original Gospel account that Mark wrote, nor, for that matter, do we have the original manuscripts of any of the biblical books. Instead, we have copies of these manuscripts, and in many cases, we have copies of copies of copies, and so on down the line. Thankfully, the copyists employed were experts who highly valued the biblical text. The beautiful illustrations and rich ornamentation of these Bibles testify to the high value in which they were held. Even with the vast number of copies of the Bible made by hand, scholars believe that over 92% of the New Testament is stable, so that less than 8% has questions about it. In fact most of these questions come from words that were misspelled or rearranged, and there are no issues of doctrine that come into question. As for the ending of Mark, the earliest and best manuscripts end with 16:8, and so the textual evidence suggests that this is where Mark initially ended his work.

Second is evidence that comes from what is written in vv. 9-20. Nearly all of the material in these final verses seems to be derived from the other Gospel accounts. It seems that someone took pieces from all the other accounts to create a hodge-podge ending to the Gospel. This could have originated as someone's notes at the end of the Gospel to add on to the end after they read it, or it could have been an attempt to soften the ending.

The overlap with the other Gospels can be seen below:

v. 9	Appearance to Mary Magdalene	Jn. 20:11-17 (Lk. 8:2)
v.10	Mary Magdalene as messenger	Jn. 20:18
v. 11, 13	Disciples' unbelief	Lk. 24:11, 41
vv. 12-13	Walk to Emmaus	Lk. 24:13-35
v. 14	Appearance to the eleven	Lk. 24:36-49; Jn. 20:19-23
v. 14	Rebuke of unbelief	Jn. 20:24-29
v. 15	Evangelistic commission	Mt. 28:19; Lk. 24:47
v. 19	Ascension	Lk. 24:50-51

from R. T. France, The Gospel of Mark (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 686.

From the chart above, it is clear that all the information in Mark 16:9-20 can be found elsewhere in the New Testament. We do not depend on Mark alone for this material. Rather than seeing the exclusion of vv. 9-20 as “taking away from the Bible,” we should understand it as restoring Mark to its original condition.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

AUTHORSHIP & AUDIENCE

As Acts 1:1 indicates, Acts is the second part of a two-volume work that began with the Gospel according to Luke. Neither Luke nor Acts identifies their author, but from the earliest history of the church, these two books have been attributed to Luke, the physician and traveling companion of Paul (Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24). Luke likely wrote Acts sometime between AD 62 and 70. Proponents of an earlier date highlight how the narrative ends with Paul under house arrest in Rome as evidence for their view. They argue that Luke would have continued recounting Paul's missionary endeavors after he was released. Those who argue for a later date reach that conclusion based on three beliefs: (1) Acts was written after the Gospel according to Luke; (2) Luke used the Gospel according to Mark as one of his sources; (3) Mark was written after Peter's death in the mid-60s. Thus, proponents for a later date argue, Acts was written in the late-60s to 70. Given how close the proposed dates for the writing of Acts are, the difference in dating has little to no bearing on how the book is interpreted.

In 1:1, Luke identifies the intended audience of Acts as "Theophilus." The name "Theophilus" means "lover of God," and some take Theophilus to be a particular individual to whom Luke addresses his two-volume work. Others, however, understand Theophilus to be a symbolic name for any Christian believer or for one who is a seeker. As with the dating of the book, the different understandings of audience have little to no influence on how Acts is read.

PURPOSE

Luke introduces his Gospel by stating that his goal was to write an “orderly account” of “the things that have been accomplished among us” (Luke 1:1-4). In the Gospel, Luke recounts the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and in Acts, he describes the spread of the good news of Jesus Christ from Jerusalem to the world. The Gospel is Luke’s account of Jesus’s ministry while he was on earth, and Acts is the narrative of Jesus’s ministry after his ascension to heaven.

Jesus continues his mission through his Spirit-empowered church.

Following his ascension, Jesus continues his ministry through his Spirit-empowered church. Acts describes how through the proclamation of the good news of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit people came to faith in Christ and new churches were formed.

What began as small group of believers hiding together in Jerusalem becomes, by Acts 28, a worldwide religion. Thus, the book of Acts can be seen as a fulfillment of Jesus’s command in 1:8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Through the testimony of these witnesses and by the working of the Spirit, the gospel of Jesus spread across the world.

MEMORY VERSES | ACTS 2:36-39

³⁶ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” ³⁷ Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” ³⁸ And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

ACTS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Leaders, don't feel like you have to get through all of these questions each week or that you can't ask others that come up from your own reading or from the sermon. As you prayerfully prepare to lead your group, make use of these questions as much as they are helpful.

WEEK 1 | ACTS 1-4

1. Acts 1:4-8 | Why does Jesus command his followers to wait in Jerusalem even though they were to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth? What does this command from Jesus tell us about the role of the Holy Spirit in spreading the gospel? What would it look like for you to be Jesus's witness in your Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth?

2. Acts 2 | Why does Peter cite so many Old Testament (OT) passages? Do you think the OT has much relevance for your life as a Christian? Who did Peter think the OT was about? Look at 1 Peter 1:10-12: for whom did Peter think the OT was written?

3. Acts 2:34-35 | In these verses, Peter quotes from Psalm 110. Psalm 110 is one of the OT passages most often alluded to in the New Testament (NT). Read Psalm 110, and then look at a few places where it is quoted in the NT: Matthew 22:41-46; Hebrews 1:13; Hebrews 5:6. What do these quotations of Psalm 110 teach us about Jesus?

4. Acts 2:37-47 | How do people respond to Peter's message? What does it mean to repent? Where can you live out v. 42 with church today? From these verses, does it seem like gathering with the community of faith was important for believers at this time? Do you think it is still important today? Why?

5. Acts 4:18-21 | Have you ever been challenged for sharing the good news of Jesus? In what areas do you particularly feel the need for the reminder that you must listen to God rather than to others? Look at 4:23-31: where do the believers get the boldness they have? Could we join these early believers in that same prayer?

WEEK 2 | ACTS 5-9

1. Acts 5:1-11 | Why do you think Luke included the story of Ananias and Sapphira? How does this account fit into the overall point of the book of Acts? According to 5:3, to whom did Ananias lie? To whom did Peter say Ananias lied in 5:4? How can both of these things be true?

2. Acts 5:40-42 | Why did the apostles rejoice? How were they able to rejoice in such circumstances? How can you rejoice even in the midst of suffering? Also look at James 1:2; Philippians 4:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Psalm 40:16-17.

3. Acts 7 | Looking at vv. 1-53, does Stephen see Christianity as something new or as a continuation of something else? What does Stephen's sermon teach us about the importance of the OT for Christians? Looking at vv. 59-60, how could Stephen forgive those about to kill him? Reflect on where you have been unwilling to forgive and pray that God would change your heart so that you would forgive that person. For more on forgiveness, see Matthew 18:21-35; Luke 23:34; Ephesians 4:31-32.

4. Acts 8:26-39 | What do vv. 30-31 tell us about our need for others in studying the Bible? Where are you getting help in understanding the Scriptures? Where are you helping others understand and apply the Scriptures to their lives? How does the Ethiopian eunuch respond to Philip's message in vv. 36-38? Why is baptism so closely connected with saving faith in Acts? After trusting in Christ alone for the forgiveness of your sins and the hope of eternal life, have you followed him in believer's baptism?

5. Acts 9:1-25 | What does Saul's conversion to faith in Christ tell us about the nature of conversion to Christianity? Was Saul seeking Christ when he was converted? Who would you say is responsible for his conversion? How should Saul's conversion humble us about our own salvation? How should this account embolden us to share the gospel and to pray for others to come to faith?

WEEK 3 | ACTS 10-14

1. Acts 10:34-43 | How did the vision God gave to Peter in 10:1-33 prepare him for this encounter with Cornelius? What does Peter mean in v. 34 that God "shows no partiality"? What implications does God's

impartiality have for our missions and evangelism? Peter's message here is a summary of the gospel of Jesus Christ: how would you give a 1 to 2 minute summary of the good news of Jesus Christ?

2. Acts 12:6-19 | One recurring theme through Acts is that the spread of the gospel cannot be limited by human authority. In this instance, Peter is literally bound with chains and surrounded by guards, and yet God freed him so that he might continue to proclaim Christ. Are there circumstances in your life where it seems, from a human perspective, that the good news of Christ is restricted or cannot be shared? How can you be praying for the opportunity to share the gospel in this circumstance or to this person this week?

3. Acts 13:1-3 | Who called Barnabas and Saul to their missionary work? What role did the church in Antioch have in their sending? Where has God called you to be sharing the gospel? Have you ever sensed a call to share the good news of Jesus cross-culturally?

4. Acts 13:22-23 | Why is it important that Jesus is descended from David? What does it teach us about the Lord? See 2 Samuel 7:1-17, esp. vv. 12-14. What does his relation to David teach us about the nature of Jesus's ministry? Consider 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; Ephesians 1:20-23; Hebrews 7:1-3; Revelation 5:5, 19:11-16.

5. Acts 14:19-23 | What happened to Paul in v. 19? How badly was he hurt? What did he do next? How did he not fear returning to Lystra? How does what happened in v. 19 put Paul's instruction in v. 22 into perspective? What are tribulations you must endure to enter the kingdom of God? How can you prepare for those tribulations? How can you endure them?

WEEK 4 | ACTS 15-19

1. Acts 15:1-11 | Why were Paul and Barnabas upset with the men who came from Judea? How were they changing the gospel? If people are not saved by circumcision or through the law of Moses, how does Paul say that they are saved? (See v. 9 and v. 11). Where are you tempted to add to the gospel, making something other than faith in Christ a

necessary part of salvation?

2. Acts 16:19-40 | Where were Paul and Silas in this account? According to v. 25, how did they respond to their imprisonment? If you were in their position, what would have seemed like the possibility of being freed? Why did God free them? What does this account tell us about the Lord's ability to accomplish his will? How are you encouraged by this truth?

3. Acts 17:10-15 | According to v. 11, why were those in Berea considered to be "more noble"? How did they test the message that Paul and Silas proclaimed? What should we learn from the example of the Bereans? Notice the opposition that arose in v. 13 when people came to faith in Christ: how do you think Paul, Silas, and these new believers were able to withstand such hostility?

4. Acts 18:1-11 | What two activities did Paul do while he stayed in Corinth? Why do you think Paul worked as a tentmaker while he was busy proclaiming the gospel in this city? See 1 Corinthians 9:1-27. Given Paul's own example, how can you combine your work at home or at a job with sharing the good news of Jesus with others?

5. Acts 19:21-41 | Have you noticed throughout the book of Acts the strong opposition to the gospel of Jesus Christ? Why do you think so many were so hostile to this message? How do you think you will respond when following Christ is no longer seen by most in your community as "socially acceptable"? How will you have to adapt? How will the church need to adapt?

WEEK 5 | ACTS 20-24

1. Acts 20:24 | Why do you think Paul was able to "not account my life of any value"? What was his goal in life? Why was Paul willing to suffer so much for Christ? For his willingness to suffer, see 2 Corinthians 4:7-12; Philippians 1:20-21; Colossians 1:24. Should you expect to face suffering as a Christian? How could you prepare for such suffering?

2. Acts 22:21-24 | Why was the crowd so upset with Paul's message? Is

there any group or person that you would be shocked if the Lord saved them? Would you be able to rejoice in their salvation or would you be upset? What does your response reveal about your understanding of the Lord and the gospel?

3. Acts 22:25-29 | What about Paul kept him from being severely beaten in this instance? How did he become a Roman citizen? Was it his choice? What does this teach us about how God orchestrates even the seemingly insignificant details of our lives?

4. Acts 23:11 | How did Paul's knowing his mission allow him to courageously proclaim the gospel? Where has God called you to courageously share the good news of Jesus?

5. Acts 24:26-27 | What motivated Felix to keep Paul in prison? How did God use even Felix's evil intentions for good?

WEEK 6 | ACTS 25-28

1. Acts 25:23-27, 26:32 | In reading these passages, it might seem that Paul missed a great opportunity to go free, but why was it God's plan for him to stay in prison? How would you handle the Lord having you stay in a difficult situation in order to tell people about Jesus? How do you think Paul was able to handle it?

2. Acts 26:24-29 | What does Paul do when he is on trial before Festus? How could you steer the conversations you have every day toward the gospel?

3. Acts 27 | What does this account tell us about the Lord's ability to protect his people and to accomplish his will? How can you look to God's miraculous provision here as encouragement to endure the challenges in your own life?

4. Acts 28:30-31 | How was the Lord able to use Paul's imprisonment? How was Paul able to write 2 Timothy 2:8-10 while imprisoned? What situation are you in now that seems like a dead-end that the Lord might actually be orchestrating for you to share the gos-

ACTS FAQs

In your study of Acts, these two questions below may come up, and what follows begins to address the issues raised.

Does Acts merely record what happened to the first-century church or does it also tell us what the church should do and be today?

The short answer is yes. Parts of Acts describe the first-century church and are unique to that era of salvation history. However, other sections of Acts not only describe the first-century church but also prescribe what the church throughout all the ages should be and do.

Two examples will help show the difference. In Acts 27:30-32, Paul is the midst of a great storm and is about to be shipwrecked on Malta. Luke records this exchange:

³⁰ And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, and had lowered the ship's boat into the sea under pretense of laying out anchors from the bow, ³¹ Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved." ³² Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it go.

From this account, we do not believe that anytime people are in a shipwreck that should stay out of the lifeboats in order to be saved. Paul's command was a unique instruction for this particular time.

As an example of something that both describes and prescribes, there is Peter's sermon in Acts 2. When Peter is asked by the people how they should respond to his message, he tells them in 2:38, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." At once, these instructions by Peter are the record of what he says, but they also tell us how all people should respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ: they should turn from their sin and turn toward Christ.

Salvation History

Before the foundation of the world, the Lord planned to redeem his people to the praise of his glorious grace. Salvation history refers to the outworking of this plan in the course of this world's existence. From Adam to Christ's first coming and from the start of the church to Christ's return, God has been and is working to reconcile sinners to himself through Jesus Christ.

For us, then, the question becomes, “How can I tell the difference between the two?” In other words: what differentiates between a descriptive section and a prescriptive section?

There are three principles that can help us be better readers of Acts:

(1) *Read in Context.* Scripture must be read in context. This context includes reading in the context of a paragraph, reading in the context of the whole book, and reading in the context of the whole Bible. In Acts, reading in context helps us determine if a particular passage describes a one-time event or is prescriptive for all believers. One of the key things to look for in this regard in Acts is whether or not the passage is about the gospel going to a new area. Often in Acts, when the gospel goes to a new place or new people, the Spirit accompanies the proclamation of the gospel with dramatic signs that testify to the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus.

(2) *Let Scripture interpret Scripture.* Part of reading Scripture well is reading in the context of the whole Bible. This means we should let the clearer sections of Scripture interpret the less clear parts. Often this entails reading narrative books like Acts in light of the Epistles, which generally teach in a more direct manner.

(3) *Look for timeless gospel truths.* As you read Acts in light of the rest of Scripture, look for those truths that can be applied across all generations of believers. As in Acts 2, the message of Christ crucified and risen again is unchanging as is the necessary response of repentance and faith.

Acts both describes unique events and also prescribes what the church should be and do. As we become more familiar with Acts and with the whole of Scripture, we will be better able to interpret well this divinely inspired portion of Scripture.

Should we expect a second experience of the Holy Spirit in our lives today?

At two different points in the book of Acts – 8:14-17 and 19:1-6 – it seems that people have put their faith in Christ but have not yet received the Holy Spirit. Only after an apostle arrives, teaches about the Holy Spirit, and prays for the coming the Spirit, does the Spirit come and live inside these believers.

The question for us as modern readers of Acts is whether or not we should expect a second experience after coming to faith in Christ where we receive the Holy Spirit. The nature of the book of Acts and other teaching in the NT indicates that we should not expect a second experience during which we receive the Holy Spirit. Rather, the NT teaches that we receive the Holy Spirit when we put our faith in Christ Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life.

The book of Acts describes a unique period in salvation history. This is the first time in history that the gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed to the world. In the same way that we do not expect to experience Pentecost in the same way that we see described in Acts 2, so too we should not expect to have to wait for the Spirit after coming to faith in Christ. In Acts 8, the Samaritans receive the Spirit at the hands of Peter and John to demonstrate that these people, who had been despised by their Jewish neighbors for centuries, were now included in the people of God through the work of Christ. Likewise, in 19, as the Ephesians learn more fully about Jesus and the Holy Spirit, they receive the Spirit. In some sense, we can view both of these as “mini-Pentecosts.” As the gospel travels into new areas, the Spirit accompanies it with miraculous signs and special means of reception.

Ephesians 1:13-14 even more clearly teaches that the Holy Spirit comes when a person believes in Christ. In this passage, Paul teaches the church, “In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.” When these people heard the gospel and believed, they were sealed by the Holy Spirit. This is the pattern the NT teaches: believers are sealed by the Spirit upon their belief in Christ. Thus, the Spirit indwells all believers and produces fruit in their lives (Gal 5:22-24).