

# CHURCH ON FIRE

## Study 1 – Acts of the Apostles

### **Live**

Can you remember a time when you had the greatest surprise or shock?

### **Love**

Listen to or sing along to a worship song.

### **Grow**

Acts is a book of amazing scope: from a tiny sect in a corner of Jerusalem to the very centre of the Empire in Rome, taking in most of the Eastern Mediterranean on the way. It is also a book of amazing scope in its theological breadth;

- the Ascension and Return of Christ
- the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit
- the Church, its Life and its Ministry
- World Mission and Evangelisation
- Cross-cultural Issues
- The Early Gospel Message

All of this is wrapped up in an amazing adventure story involving danger, violent death, persecution, political in-fighting, imprisonment, escape and shipwreck,

Acts is Volume 2 of Luke-Acts. Its author does not sign his name to the work, but he writes himself into the narrative at points. The two volume work has been attributed to Paul's physician, Luke, since the earliest Christian documents.

Luke tells us of his methods in the first few verses of this book: he is a careful researcher. We learn from Acts that he had sufficient opportunity to carry out this research, not only from mixing with the very mobile, early believer in their travels around the ancient world, but also from this two year stay in the Holy Land during Paul's imprisonment at Caesarea, when Luke was with him but free to travel about (Acts 21-26).

The book appears incomplete – Paul still under house arrest awaiting trial in Rome, and enjoying many privileges (Acts 28). We don't know if Paul was released, and able to minister freely for another couple of years before his final martyrdom in Rome, which seems the most likely hypothesis. But Acts does leave Paul still alive and well, which would argue for a date in the first half of the 60's A.D.

### **Read Acts 1 v. 1-11.**

Acts 1 v. 8. Every commentator recognises this as the key text. The text speaks of power ministry and world mission. Few commentators have experienced either of these first hand! If we don't believe and expect the Holy Spirit to do amazing things or have no passion for a lost world to be reached by the



Gospel of Jesus Christ, we are going to have trouble with Acts. If we accept both of these, we are going to be fired up by the Acts!

1. Make a list of all the evidence in these verses that point to the fact that Jesus' resurrection was physical and not just spiritual.
2. Jesus had been with his disciples for 40 days since the resurrection, and although he had developed a habit of coming and going rather suddenly, they had got used to him being around. What did they expect to happen now? (see v.6 and Luke 24 v. 21)
3. Imagine if you were with the disciples when Jesus ascended (v. 9). How would it have felt?
4. What was the reason for meeting together and praying (v. 4)? Bearing in mind that nothing happened for 10 days from ascension to Pentecost, what effect might this period have had on the disciples? Has this got anything to teach us about waiting for God to act?
5. What promise did the two angels give when Jesus ascended (v. 10-11). How should this affect our lives?



## **Build**

Think of your group as the disciples, chosen by Jesus, waiting to receive his power and to change the world (or Liverpool at least!).

What does v. 8 call us to be? What would that look like in our lives?

How does the promise of the Holy Spirit help us in our evangelism?

## **Prayer**

Encourage the group to pray for one another in our evangelism and changing of the world. (You could share then pray, or get individuals to write a need on a piece of paper, then hold hands and pray in silence for each other- whatever is most suitable)



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## Study 2 – Acts of the Apostles

### Live

Can you remember the occasion when you were most afraid?

### Love

Play a suitable piece of music, which encourages us to open ourselves to the Holy Spirit. Encourage the group to relax and open themselves afresh.

### Grow

**Read Acts 2 v. 1-13.**

1. Jesus had promised the disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit to them. From what he had already told them, who and what should they have been expecting? See John 14 v. 15-18 and Acts 1 v. 8.
2. What three signs did the disciples receive of the coming of the Holy Spirit (v. 2-4). What do you think was/is their significance?
3. What did the disciples do after they received the Holy Spirit v. 11-14.
4. The disciples had to wait 10 days after Jesus' departure before the Holy Spirit came. Do we have to wait? ( See Acts 2 v. 38, Romans 8 v. 9-11 and 1 Corinthians 12 v. 3)
5. Notice the two reactions of the crowd (v.12 -13). What would ours have been, and what is ours to those who may have "spiritual experiences" today?

### Build

**What does this passage make you think about reaching other nations and telling them the Gospel?**

**How can the Holy Spirit help us in reaching those that we feel we cannot speak with? Whether it's a language barrier, a difference in interests or something else that we feel separates us.**

### **Prayer**

**Encourage the group to open up about areas in which they feel they are afraid or struggling and pray over these areas. Pray that the Holy Spirit would be with us, lead us and help us when we have difficult conversations with people about our faith. Pray that the Holy Spirit would fill us with the power to live our lives for God.**

### **Leader's Notes**

This passage will lead into discussion about being filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. You must decide how much time you wish to devote to this. Perhaps you could return to the topic after the study or meet up with individuals during the week, for those who would value it.

Make sure to leave sufficient time for prayer at the end of the study. You don't want this to be rushed or too late in the evening. Praying is always better than talking!



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## Study 3 – Acts of the Apostles

### **Live**

If you could go anywhere on holiday, where would it be and why?

### **Love**

Read Psalm 100 aloud. Be quiet for a couple of minutes. Ask people to share in twos what lines meant the most to them.

### **Grow**

**Read Acts 2 v. 14-41.**

1. What were the main points in Peter's sermon? Try to summarise it by each picking out a few key verses (3 maximum).
2. Peter refers to all three members of the Trinity in his sermon. Look at each in turn to see what the passage has to tell us about the roles of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in salvation.
3. Look at the way Peter preached. What can we learn from his style and content of preaching that might help to make our own witnessing more effective?
4. This particular sermon was very effective (v. 41). What do you think contributed to this?
5. What did Peter demand of those who wanted to respond? What was promised in return? Notice especially the two elements of the promise of salvation (v. 37-39).

### **Build**

We are not all called to preach to thousands like Peter, but we are all called to be witnesses. Think about how we do this in our lives now. Think also about how we could be better witnesses. Share with each other different ideas and what ones we will try to apply in our lives.

### **Prayer**

Give each person a piece of paper and ask them to write down the names of three people they would like to see come to faith. Spend some time praying for these people and opportunities to share our faith, invite them to church, etc.



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## Study 4 – Acts of the Apostles

### **Live**

What present gave you the most pleasure to give?

### **Love**

Listen to or sing along to a well-known worship song.

### **Build**

In Jerusalem the church was experiencing phenomenal growth. Luke carefully records the statistics for us. The increase in numbers is seen in v. 47 but let's look at the numbers in more detail.

- Acts 1 v. 15 – When Jesus left them, the Jerusalem fellowship numbered about 120 people in all.
- Acts 2 v. 41, 47 – On the Day of Pentecost itself, a further 3000 were added; although many of these were pilgrims from elsewhere in the Empire, visiting for the Feast, we read in v. 47 that the Lord added daily to their number. Daily must mean a minimum growth rate of 365 per year. Most churches in Britain would settle for that today!
- Acts 4 v.4 – Within months or a year or so, the numbers of the Jerusalem Church had grown to 5000 men. This would suggest at least 10000 in all, including women and children (very probably more likely 15000).
- Acts 5 v.14, 28 – More and more men and women believed and joined the church, despite rising persecution, so that (v. 28) the apostles could fairly be accused of “filling Jerusalem with their teaching”.
- Acts 6 v. 1, 7 – Luke no longer speaks of addition but of multiplication – we read that the growth was “rapid” and that the word of God “spread” (v. 28).
- Acts 21 v. 20 – By the time Paul and his group visited Jerusalem in about 55 A.D., i.e. 25 years after the Day of Pentecost, we find that the church in Jerusalem was now measured in “many thousands”. The word is literally “myriads”, meaning “tens of thousands”. This indicates a minimum membership of 20000, but suggests much more! The best estimate of the population of Jerusalem and its surrounding districts is 200,000. From almost nothing, the church had grown to a very visible and significant minority in the city of Jerusalem where Jesus had planted them 25 years earlier.

Imagine if we saw such numbers at St James' and in Liverpool! Think about how we reach the community around us at St James' and how we could improve it.

### **Grow**

**Read Acts 2 v. 42-47.**

1. The believer's lifestyle was based on “spiritual activities” (v.42). What were these and why do you think they are the ones that are mentioned?



2. V. 44-47 give a description of the apostle's lifestyle. Identify what these are. Which do you think are the most important? If you were describing our Christian lifestyle in Liverpool, how would it differ?
3. Is the lifestyle described one that we should aim for today? Is it practical? Is there a place for Christian communities? If so, what place?
4. How much is the Church lifestyle a responsibility of the Church as a whole and that of the individual?
5. What was the result in the Church (v. 43 and 47)? Was this the result of lifestyle and/or of something else?

## **Prayer**

Pray that we would see a revival in Liverpool like that of Jerusalem. Pray that we can reach into the community around us and bring people to know God.

## **Leader's Notes**

There seems to be an intensity of lifestyle in Acts 2 which diminished as time went on, although the principles did not. Acts 2 v. 44 says, "they had everything in common" but by Acts 5 v. 4, this was clearly voluntary.



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## Study 5 – Acts of the Apostles

### Live

If they decided to spend millions on making an epic film about an Old Testament character, which one would you most like it to be and why?

### Love

Listen to or sing along to a worship song thanking God for what he has given us, especially in Jesus. You could use passages such as John 3 v. 16, 2 Corinthians 8 v. 9, 2 Corinthians 9 v. 8a and Philippians 2 v. 5-11 as a basis for thanking God.

### Grow

Throughout the Book of Acts, we see the Holy Spirit leading the way to fulfil what Jesus has said and done, and we see the power that Jesus spoke of in action.

- The Spirit came upon the first 120 believers at Pentecost (2 v. 4) and filling all the church with power, courage and boldness to preach the Gospel (3 v. 8, 4 v. 31) – not only to preach it but to demonstrate it as lives were changed people were set free and diseases were healed.
- Outstanding examples of miraculous healings took place, not only at the hands of Apostles (e.g. 3 v. 6) but also others like Stephen (6 v. 8), Philip (8 v. 6) and Ananias (9 v. 17), who were not Apostles.
- Intercessory prayer saw amazing results, not only in the growth of the church, but also in the release of prisoners (12 v. 5, 12).
- Power encounters with those wielding demonic powers were not unusual (8 v. 10, 13 v. 6-12, 16 v. 16-18).
- In both Peter's ministry, even his shadow unleashed divine healing (5 v. 15). In Paul's ministry, aprons and handkerchiefs he had touched were taken to the sick and demonised, and they were healed and released (19 v. 12).
- In 19 v. 11, we read of Paul performing "extraordinary miracles"; presumably that meant there were "ordinary" miracles too!
- Dead people were raised – Dorcas (9 v. 35-42) and possibly Eutychus (20 v. 9-12).
- The Holy Spirit guides the church through visions (e.g. 9 v. 10, 10 v. 10, 16 v. 9, 18 v. 9-10), prophecies (e.g. 11 v. 27, 13 v. 2, 21 v. 10-11), direct commands (8 v. 29) and angelic visitations (8 v. 26, 10 v. 22, 12 v. 7).

Reading the book of Acts is a dangerous occupation. It will challenge you as an individual and all of us as his church as we seek to reach our generation.

### Read Acts 3 v. 1-21.

1. The crippled man used to sit on the way to the temple because he regarded it as a good place to get help. Consider the sort of help he would have got; ranging from being abused through to being ignored or given coppers to getting more than he was bargaining for. What sort of help would he get if he were sat outside of St James'?



2. Although this man was healed there must have been others who were not, so why was this man healed? As well as looking at his response, look at why Jesus did miracles (see John 20 v. 30-31).
3. What was the reaction of the crowd to the healing and how did Peter make use of it? What does this tell us about the purpose of miracles?
4. Peter challenged religious people (they were all going into the temple to pray). Why were they surprised? Would it surprise us?
5. Why were Peter and John able to perform this miracle? (See Acts 1 v. 8, Luke 10 v. 17, 1 Corinthians 12 v. 7-11.)
6. Should we expect miracles to happen today? In our church? Through us?



## **Build**

What miracles would we like to see happen – in our family, in our homes, in our relationships, in our work, in our community, in our world? Pray for these.

## **Prayer**

Pray that we will trust in God and His power that He can produce miracles and that we will be expectant. Pray that we will see miracles in the lives of those around us and in this city.