

OpenTheo

Acts Survey



Acts - Steve Gregg

In "Acts Survey," Steve Gregg offers insight into the historical and spiritual significance of the book of Acts in the Bible. The book serves as a link between the Gospels and the Epistles and highlights the courage and commitment of the early church leaders, who trusted God and put their lives on the line for the gospel. The book of Acts also provides a standard for measuring the spiritual health of the church and serves as a model for revival, emphasizing the importance of unity and full-on commitment to discipleship and ministry. Through the use of eyewitness testimony and careful selection of stories, the book also offers valuable lessons for modern churches in areas such as governance, prayer, preaching, and missions.

Transcript

Alright, this is an introduction to the book of Acts and I just want to say that Acts is a unique book. I suppose every book of the Bible is unique in some measure, but some books are very much like others. Obviously, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, very similar to each other, at least in many of their passages.

And John, too. even has some overlap, those four books are the historical record of the events of the life of Jesus. Acts is the only historical record in the New Testament that isn't about the stories of Jesus, but it's about the stories of the Apostles.

We know it as the Acts of the Apostles. That's the way it's named in our Bible. It's been called that for many centuries.

Now the author didn't call it by that name and therefore different times in the early churches it was being you know translated into Latin and other things like that, different names were given to it. And even the present name Acts of the Apostles, many have said this is not really a very descriptive title because only a few disciples and their activities are recorded, especially Peter and Paul, and only a very little bit is said about any of the other Apostles in the book of Acts. But it is nonetheless the Acts of the Apostolic Church.

Now when Jesus was on earth he selected 12 to be his Apostles and to train them and of

course it was his intention to leave them in charge of the movement after he would leave, which seems like a very risky thing to do because frankly they weren't all that sharp and they weren't you know real extremely literate, they weren't they weren't educated, they had never been taught in rabbinic studies. I mean the more educated Jews who knew the Word of God, the scriptures, would have been you'd think maybe better suited than these men, but maybe not because the Bible says that God chooses the foolish things of the world to confound the wise so that no flesh would glory in his sight. Paul said in 1st Corinthians 1 and that's apparently what he did.

He picked fishermen, tax collectors, and who knows what other kind of peasants to be the 12. And even near the end of his life with them, even in the upper room the night before he was crucified, almost the last night he would have to say anything to them. He gave a very long discourse to them and even then they didn't understand some very important things.

They certainly didn't understand that he was God and he was surprised that they didn't by this point. He said, have I been so long time with you, Philip, and you don't know who I am? Don't you know that I'm in the Father and the Father's in me and if you've seen me you've seen the Father? And so these guys really they've been trained for a couple of years. Of course Jesus' public ministry had been about three and a half, but he started calling his disciples to him somewhat into that period of time.

We don't know exactly how long some of these men had been with him, but probably at least two, two and a half years most of them had been with him and that's a short educational time. I mean it's long enough if you're just gonna have someone be a pastor of a church or something like that, I would think, depending on how quick they learn. But we have to realize that Jesus was leaving the fate of the entire movement in the hands of these people.

His public ministry was only three and a half years and then he went away and left it all in the hands of these guys that he'd trained for a couple of years. And they weren't all that ready, at least let's just say by human reckoning they were not very ready. But you see Jesus told them, remain in Jerusalem, don't touch anything, don't do anything until you receive power from on high.

When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you'll receive power and you'll be my witnesses. And of course the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus. When the Spirit of Christ came upon them and filled them, they were then empowered like Jesus was.

Not only to do miracles, which they did as Jesus had done, but also to understand things they hadn't understood. You might remember the last night he spent with them before his crucifixion. In John 16 verses 12 and 13 he said to them, I still have many things to tell you, but you're not ready to, you know, to endure them.

You can't even stand them yet. So when the Holy Spirit comes, he'll guide you into all truth. And this is really what happened.

They didn't know really very much of what was going on at all, even just before he ascended. Their last question to him in Acts 1-6 was, Lord will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? Well he'd been teaching them about the kingdom of God as long as he'd been with them, but they were still thinking in terms of a Jewish kingdom and they still thought this is about Israel and so forth. And of course they came to understand differently after the Holy Spirit came and clarified things.

But Jesus, I think Jesus sometimes near the end of his ministry with these people, sometimes things they said he probably just rolled his eyes and thought, these guys? Are these the guys who are gonna really, the whole world is gonna be transformed by what's built on these 12 foundation stones? You know? But it wasn't them. It was the power and the revelation that they received from the Holy Spirit. And it was their, of course, genuine, honest commitment to Christ and therefore their reliability to do what he would lead them to do when the Holy Spirit would come that made it less risky.

And we find that they did well. All of them eventually died as martyrs, although the book of Acts only records one of the Apostles' death, but we know from church history that all of them except for John died as martyrs, which means they were pretty loyal, you know? Pretty trustworthy guys. And it shows that Jesus is more interested in hunting trustworthy people, loyal people, than highly skilled, highly educated people or people who are situated in the society in an advantageous situation.

None of them really were. So he's looking for people who will be loyal, faithful, no doubt humble, and I think that's part of the reason he chose them from the ranks from which he chose them, because they didn't, they weren't proud Pharisees who thought they knew everything. It takes humility and teachable spirit to grow, and these are the kind of people that Jesus chose.

And so these men began what we call the church. Now when we think of the church, of course in the modern day churches are all over the place and they're these buildings are sort of like theaters. They're set up like theaters.

There's a stage and there's theater seating and there's amplifiers and there's musical performers and there's an entertaining pastor. I'm not saying he doesn't have anything edifying to say, but if he's not edifying it won't be a very big church. I should say if he's not entertaining it won't be a very big church.

He could be very edifying and not have very many people, but if he's not very entertaining, you know, it's not going to be much of a theater. And so I mean church today is really quite different than what Jesus had in mind or what the Apostles had in mind or what they started. And it's by looking at the book of Acts that we discover

exactly what it was that Jesus had them do.

What the pure church in its earliest days, the pure water springing out of the ground before it went downstream and picked up all the silt and the pollution of human traditions. That's why it's so valuable to read the book of Acts because we look at church and we interpret church in terms of what's familiar to us and that's really a somewhat polluted stream. But when you read the book of Acts we're looking at the fresh spring water, pure water coming out of the ground that later got polluted.

And so I've always loved looking at the book of Acts, especially making the comparison between what they thought, how they did things, you know, what their values were, and contrasting that with that of the majority of people in Christendom today. But one thing we can say good about Christendom today is it has spread over the whole world and it is now the largest movement in the entire world. There are more people in the world who claim to be Christians than any other world religion.

Islam is growing very fast but it's still not as large as Christianity. There are about a quarter of the world's population at least claim to be Christian. That includes Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Coptic, Protestant, and so forth.

And many of us would say, well some of those people aren't what we'd call Christians. Well, it's not what we call Christians that matters, it's what God does. But the point is there are a huge number of people in every nation and kindred and tongue who profess Jesus as Lord and that is something that wasn't true 2,000 years ago.

And that's one positive and that is that Jesus said to the disciples, when the Spirit comes upon you you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth. And of course that's what we live at a time where you look back and say hey that really did happen. And it's still happening because the church is still reaching out to unreached peoples as we speak.

Now, the book of Acts is not only unique in terms of being the only historical record about the church after Jesus left, but it fills an essential gap in our understanding because the church and situation when Jesus left is a certain way. And then when we read the epistles, the church is in a very different situation and only the book of Acts bridges that gap. If we didn't have the book of Acts, we would have the Gospels which end with Jesus ascending into heaven leaving the disciples behind, waiting for the Holy Spirit to come.

And then without the book of Acts, the next thing we have is the epistles of Paul and the epistles of Peter writing to establish churches all over the Roman Empire. And we think well how'd those churches get there? And who's this guy Paul anyway? You know he wrote 13 of the books of our New Testament. We wouldn't have a clue who is this guy anyway if we only had the Gospels and the epistles and didn't have Acts.

We wouldn't even know what to make of this man who wrote 13 of the books of our New Testament. And we wouldn't know how it is that the church had become established in Rome and in Greece and in Turkey and in many other parts of the world. Well we learn about that in the book of Acts.

It's the link. It's the logical and necessary link between the Gospels on the one hand and the epistles on the other which make up the rest of the New Testament. And of course the introduction to Paul is a very important advantage we get from the book of Acts.

It was written by one of Paul's companions and that's why we get so much about Paul. I mentioned the book of Acts doesn't talk much about most of the Apostles. It talks quite a bit about Peter in the early part and then almost entirely and uniquely about Paul in the latter part.

Well that's because the author joined Paul on his second missionary journey and traveled with him and was with him until his death. And so he obviously had stories to tell that he himself witnessed and experienced when he was with Paul. He also could tell other things about Paul that Paul could tell him that the author had not himself witnessed.

He didn't travel for example with Andrew or with Thaddeus or with Simon Zalotes or with Judas not Iscariot or some of these other members of the Twelve. And we don't have anyone who did travel with him who left a record. So we don't know much from any scriptural account of what these others did.

There are church traditions about what they did and and they went far and wide. Thomas for example is fairly well known to have gone to India and been martyred there. Mark who is not one of the Apostles but traveled with them went down to Alexandria Egypt and it is our it is claimed by the Egyptian church that he started the church down there and he was martyred down there.

There's a lot of traditions from the early church that are probably reliable. I say they're probably reliable because why would they lie about their own history? I mean it's not as if it's a glorious thing that makes you look good to say your movement was started by someone who got sawn in two or hanged or or something like that. They wouldn't have those stories unless they had some basis for them and I believe the early church had a strong motivation to remember the truth about what happened to the Apostles and so I think the traditions about them are no doubt correct but the only thing that's really an inspired record of any of the activities of the Apostles after Jesus left is the book of Acts and it covers you know we could wish that it had more to say than it does but it it doesn't tell us as much as we could like to know about most the other Apostles or even about the Apostles whom it mentions and talks about but it tells enough apparently and it does have a it's apparently enough to connect the movement of Jesus to the movement of the Gentile churches that we read about in the in the epistles and so it's that connecting link.

Now the the book of Acts probably served not only as a history but as an apologetic work. You know the word apologetic from the Greek word it means a defense and many of the books of the Bible probably the Gospels included were written at least partially as a defense of the gospel so that unbelievers would be impressed that the gospel is true. John for example wrote his gospel and at the end he said he said Jesus did many other signs besides those that are written in this book but these ones are recorded here so that you might believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that you might have life through believing.

So John makes it very clear he puts his cards on the table. The reason I wrote this book and recorded these things is I'm hoping you'll be convinced. I'm hoping this will lead you to believe.

I'm sure that Acts was written the same way. Now Acts was written by the same author as wrote the the third gospel. Now I use that term in a lecture recently someone said what do you mean the third gospel? I'm not being mysterious I'm talking about the the four Gospels we have Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

We you know we if we don't call them by name we'll call them the first, second, third, and fourth gospel in you know respectively and the reason sometimes the Gospels are spoken of that way is because they were written anonymously. The writers of the Gospels never mentioned their own names as the writers. How do we know Matthew wrote Matthew? How do we know Mark wrote the second gospel or Luke the third gospel or John the fourth? Well again that's something that's come down to us from church tradition and once again every reason to be trusted since the church would have no would have nothing to gain by deceiving their children about who gave them their holy books it seems like you know they'd be very interested in preserving that knowledge and not letting it slip away and by the way some people say well you know those weren't written by important people like that they were written by some nobodies and then they the church wanted to make them seem credible so they said that these guys wrote them well what when people say that they don't realize how insignificant Mark and Luke are for example in the early church.

Mark is not one of the Apostles and he's not even represented very favorably in in in the book of Acts and Luke is not even mentioned by name in the book of Acts or in any other part of the Bible except when Paul is writing to the Colossians and to Philemon and he lists some of the people who are with him it's a long list and Luke's name is in the list but he's very obscure. Luke would not be you know hardly anyone we'd even know anything about if we didn't have the third gospel attributed to him and the book of Acts attributed to him. Now this is a very strong reason to believe that he's the real author because if they if he didn't write it and the church was later trying to think of someone important to fix you know as the author so that people would respect these books they wouldn't pick Luke because without his name being on these books already he's not really anyone that

most people pay any attention to at all in the in the book of Acts or anything.

He doesn't name himself in the book of Acts but he does mention when he's with Paul in a rather subtle way. The book of Acts has several sections that are called we sections that's what the scholars call them we sections because it has the the plural first person pronoun we instead of the third person pronoun they. Now most of the book is they because Luke is I'm assuming it's Luke the author is usually writing about things that he wasn't part of when he talks about the Apostles he'll say they did this or when it talks about you know anyone that that was doing something that he wasn't present for he says they as any author would as any historian would but there's certain times where when without any fanfare he just says and so we sailed to so-and-so he suddenly has changed from they to we and then at a later point it's they again because he's not accompanying them on another portion and so there are these we sections which scholars used to decide at what point the author was with Paul and we can there's there's three or so we sections and it's easy to trace the activities of the author he joined Paul and Silas and Timothy on the second missionary journey in Troas just before they sailed to Europe they sailed to Greece and they came to Troas but we left you know he talks about how Silas and Paul and Timothy they came to Troas and they were trying to decide where they should go they tried to go into Bithynia but the Lord for didn't let him and they tried to go into Asia the Holy Spirit didn't let him and finally Paul had a dream of a man from Macedonia saying come over to Macedonia and help us and Paul said that's where we're going and then it says so we sailed to Macedonia so that's the first time the author's in the story he joined them at Troas just before they sailed there and then they they they went to Philippi and there's this story about Paul and Silas being thrown in prison and converting the jailer and then when they had to leave town says so they went down to Thessalonica not we it's clear the author stayed in Philippi when Paul and his companions went down Thessalonica but later on we sailed on to Jerusalem and so the author is sometimes with them sometimes not it's clear that he's not making a big issue about who he is he never mentions his own name and there's been many theories about who it was I mean the early church never had theories about the early church always from the earliest church father said it was Luke and it but some people you know scholars always try to find some new thing that you know what it takes to get a PhD you're gonna write a thesis on something a dissertation on something no one's ever written before you're gonna have an idea no one ever had before so there's strong pressure on people say let's I'll write a thesis saying that Luke wasn't the author but so-and-so was the author so there's other theories about who wrote it which are contradicting the long-standing tradition of the church but the evidence is all in favor of Luke and that is because we know that the author was with Paul in certain places including Rome when Paul was finally imprisoned there the we sections of Acts tell us so when Paul was in prison Rome we went to Rome the author and Paul went to Rome now when Paul wrote from Rome Luke was one of the names in his letters when he's writing from Rome to other churches saying Luke is with me and these other people are too but

the other people that are with Paul are named in the book of Acts in other words they're not the writers of the book of Acts because the author of the book X doesn't name himself he names other characters everyone who's not himself so it can't be Timothy that wrote the book of Acts because Timothy is named in the book of Acts and it can't be you know Aristarchus and it can't be some of these other guys that were with Paul at the end because they are mentioned by name as characters other than the we so by the process of elimination Luke is you know the tradition that it's Luke makes perfectly good sense and no other alternative makes anywhere near as good sense actually another thing that's just an incidental and you know Bible scholars have noted this for many centuries anyway now or decades anyway probably centuries and that is the Greek language of the book of Luke and of the book of Acts which are both written by the same man I'll point out why they are but it's it's the most cultured and most educated Greek of any book in the New Testament with the possible exception of Hebrews which is at about the same level Paul for example is not very cultured in his writing of Greek and most of the other writers were not they wrote passively but they they weren't literary geniuses in Greek but Luke and Acts and Hebrews and some people think Luke wrote Hebrews too no one knows for sure but they are written in the most literate Greek of any books in the New Testament and happen to use certain vocabulary that is known to have been found in the ancient medical texts of other Greek doctors there's quite a lot actually of these I don't remember the number but scholars have found a surprising number of Greek words in the book of Luke and in the book of Acts which are technical medical terms now the reason that points in the direction of Luke of course is that in Colossians chapter 4 and verse 14 Paul speaks of Luke and this is the only time he tells us anything about him and it's not much we know very little about Luke but he does say this as much about him in Colossians 4 14 Paul says Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you greet the brethren who are in latest etc etc now he says that Luke is the physician and whoever wrote the third gospel and the book of Acts may well have been a physician certainly the vocabulary he uses gives some indication that he may well have been in other words there's really nothing that would preclude Luke from being the author and there's no other person known to us who could qualify and be more likely for which there's better evidence that he's the author so we accept all conservative Christians except that Luke wrote the third gospel which is why his name has been attached to it and that he wrote Acts now the book of Acts doesn't mention that Luke is the author but so how do we know that it's written by the same author as Luke well one of the ways we know is of course the Greek style is the same and so forth but that wouldn't be definitive except if you look at Luke chapter 1 and verse 3 I suppose I could just read the first three verses Luke 1 1 through 3 the author says in as much as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us it seemed good to me also having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first to write to you an orderly account Oh most excellent Theophilus that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed now if you'll look over at Acts

chapter 1 and verse 1 it begins this way the former account I made Oh Theophilus of all that Jesus began both to do and teach until the day that he was taken up now notice both books are addressed to somebody named Theophilus the second book says my first book covered the life of Jesus up until his ascension well that's exactly what the book of Luke covers and he implies now I'm gonna pick up the story from there and and move on from that point but the most important point is that Theophilus is the recipient of both books and that acts is said to be the second book written to him so along with the tradition that the same author wrote both books you have this very strong suggestion just from the interior evidence for the book now who was Theophilus there are theories about that but no one knows for sure Theophilus is a word in Greek that means lover of God Theos it means God and Phyllis or Philea means God lover so a lover of God is what Theophilus means now some people think well then the author may not be writing to an individual but to just the the generic Christian readership addressing an old lover of God my you know my beloved brothers my my fellow lovers of God you know he could be doing that but it's not likely and one reason it's not likely is because Theophilus was a very common name in the Greek world at the time proper name and therefore you know it's it's it's as likely as not that it's a man by that name it's also the first time he is addressed in Luke chapter 1 verse 3 he is referred to as most excellent Theophilus now most excellent was a standard way of addressing somebody of high rank in the government in fact we find Paul later in the book of Acts saying most excellent Felix or most excellent Festus or whatever you know addressing a government official as most excellent as well you might address a judge as your honor or a king is your majesty these are this is a common way to address a Roman government official and so most scholars I think have concluded Theophilus must have had some position in the Roman government some have thought he might have been an official that was assigned to Paul's case because the book of Acts closes with Paul in prison waiting to stand trial in Rome before Nero actually and since Nero probably wouldn't do all the research on every case that is brought before him he's governing the whole Empire he'd have underlings in his government who would do the research and and bring him reports about you know their recommendations and so forth and so some have thought well maybe Theophilus was a guy appointed in the Roman government to acquaint himself with Paul's case and and Luke says well I'll tell you the whole story let's start with the story of Jesus and then we'll get to the story of Paul and and the book ends acts ends with Paul awaiting trial the theory that Theophilus was a Roman official appointed to you know investigate Paul's case is a very decent theory not all scholars are convinced that that's how we should look at him and there's no proof that it is the case but one thing that's interesting is that when Luke addresses him in Luke chapter 1 in verse 3 he uses that title most excellent Theophilus but when he writes acts he just calls him Oh Theophilus which is a more of an affectionate term Oh Theophilus much more casual and so a theory of course which has some merit is out there that Theophilus was not a Christian just a Roman official when Luke was written to him so he addressed him more formally but as a result of reading the book of Luke the man became a brother in the Lord so when he wrote a second

volume of his work Luke just addressed him as a more familiar brother more casually Oh Theophilus that's I mean a lot of this is just theories but it's theories based on what we have and certainly the evidence would fit the theory and almost suggested it seems to me now I did mention and I skipped over it in the notes you might want to go back to if you've been following at all my notes that Luke although we don't know who Theophilus was and we don't know exactly the purpose of Luke writing it to him Luke does seem to be writing it to convince a reader whether it's Theophilus himself or any later readers that would read it because obviously the book was not only given to Theophilus the church had copies of it and it became part of the Bible later on but to convince a reader that the gospel is true because it presents the history in such a way that that would make that point very strongly one is that it features throughout the book of Acts the testimony of eyewitnesses of Jesus resurrection this is emphasized in all the sermons in Acts chapter 2 and Acts chapter 3 and Acts chapter 9 and Acts chapter 10 Acts chapter 13 you go through the sermons and basically they all emphasize that the preachers who are preaching said and we saw him we are witnesses of this now it's very important to note that I was once interviewed on an atheist radio show and I made the point which we Christians often make that one reason that the Bible that it's very convincing that Jesus rose from the dead is that the Apostles died for their testimony about that usually people won't die for something that they know to be false and the fact that the Apostles were willing to die for their testimony suggests they were very sincere and know what they're talking about and my atheist host said that doesn't mean anything people of all religions will die for their beliefs Muslims die for their beliefs all the time and I said I didn't say anything about them dying for their beliefs they died for their testimony there's a big difference a testimony is what you offer in court saying I saw this if it's not eyewitness to be thrown out of court is hearsay an eyewitness testimony that's what we have throughout the book of Acts and say we saw him now the way that's different than a modern suicide bomber blowing himself up for Allah is that the suicide bomber believes in Islam believes in Muhammad but he never saw Muhammad he was just taught it from his parents who were taught by their parents so forth he's got beliefs and he believes them very sincerely it would seem enough to kill himself over it you can believe anything enough to kill yourself over it and be deluded but when you're saying I saw this and I'll die before I deny it you're not deluded you may be a fanatic that you're not deluded you know what you're talking about and you're and you're sincere now this is the important thing the book of Acts records again and again and again the eyewitness testimony Peter and John and Paul saying and this was witnessed his resurrection is witnessed now in case you're not aware because there are so many stories about Jesus and you know they're all pretty exciting and memorable and so forth we need to understand that the resurrection of Jesus stands out among the miracles of Jesus as unique and that it proved who he was you might say well raising the raising Lazarus from the dead probably would prove what he was to or curing a man born blind or cast out demons well I think they did prove who he was but but the problem is that there are magicians and fakers and so forth who've done similar things by fakery and

one could argue that that was faked you know that he wasn't really God he just you know he he knew how to do this like Pharaoh's magicians knew how to fake miracles that Moses did but to raise yourself from the dead and and to do so when you had predicted that you would Jesus three times told his disciples I'm gonna die and on the third day I'm gonna rise again and the disciples didn't even remember or believe it until after he did rise from the dead and precautions were taken to prevent it were taken to prevent it because of course the guards were set at the tomb and tomb was sealed and so forth you know everything was against this happening now since the tomb clearly was empty a few days after Jesus died someone removed the body it was either Jesus himself standing up and removing his own body from the tomb as of course the witnesses say happened or some other people remove the body but who would do it what could be either the enemies of Christ or the friends of Christ there's no other categories the enemies of Christ would not do it or if they did they would certainly reveal that they had done it as soon as the Apostle started preaching the resurrection because of course the best way to stop the Apostles from spreading Christianity is to present a dead corpse of Jesus as they look I don't know why these guys are saying this guy rose from the dead here's his body right here we moved it that's why the tomb was empty they made a mistake but here's the dead body anyone who is an enemy of Christ who knew what happened to the body and knew where to find it would certainly have presented it and no one did they didn't know where it was so the only story that has ever made sense to anybody is that the Apostles stole the body and then lied about it and again you you might argue that the Apostles first of all wouldn't have any motivation to steal the body what did they get by starting the Christian religion martyrdom they lived in poverty they were persecuted all their lives had to run from town to town this is not exactly a desirable life been more desirable just go back to fishing more profitable too but they would have no motivation to lie about this they weren't interested in starting a religion they didn't have any religious training they they believed it because they saw that he rose from the dead and if they knew that they were lying they wouldn't have died for that and if they'd stolen the body they would know that they're lying so this is the thing the the resurrection of Christ witnessed by eyewitnesses is the strongest proof that Christianity is real and there is no logical or historical argument against it that doesn't fall apart upon examination but the argument that he did rise from the dead was witnessed by these men it never falls apart upon examination because all the facts correspond with it and so acts records this eyewitness testimony so it's a strong apologetic for the legitimacy of Christianity more than that it also of course shows that Christ continued to exist and work through his disciples because the disciples who were then empowered by his spirit did the same miracles he did and whenever they did miracles they said we didn't do this by our power this is you know Jesus is still doing miracles you killed him but he rose from the dead and he's still and he's working these works that you're seeing done you see the the Apostles weren't just copycat miracle workers who were trying to imitate in Jesus they were his very body his flesh and his bones the church is the body of Christ through whom Christ continues to work even the

opening verse of Acts suggests that this is what Luke is suggesting when he says the former account I made of the office of all that Jesus both began both to do and teach until the day he was taken up well that suggests that was just the beginning Jesus continued to do and teach things after he was taken up and he did so through his body the church and I'm about to tell you about that in this volume 2 of my work and that's of course one thing that he demonstrates to us that Jesus who has been risen and testified by our witnesses proved himself risen by continue to do this very same stuff that he did before he died but he did it through his agents he did through his hands and his feet flesh and bones which is his body of the church and that's what Acts points out to it also in its own way proves the superiority of Christ over the demonic powers because the book of Acts records many times when the agents of Christ meet up with the agents of Satan whether it's Simon the sorcerer that Peter confronts in Acts chapter 8 whether it's Elymas the false prophet that Paul blinds with a statement in Acts 13 whether it's the demon-possessed girl in Acts 16 that Paul drives a demon out of continually they're running into demonic forces opposing them and they conquer them every time in the name of Jesus when Paul was in Ephesus according to Acts chapter 19 his ministry was so powerful that he was able to send aprons and handkerchiefs from his body to demon-possessed people and the demons would leave their victims without Paul even being present because just his own sweatband was sent to them and in that same town some false exorcists tried to cast demons out saying we adjure you in the name of Jesus that Paul preaches and the demons said we know Jesus and we know Paul but we don't know you in other words the demons make it very clear they're afraid of Jesus and Paul but they're not afraid of these guys I mean this one of the themes you see again and again is there's a spiritual warfare that's waged between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan and it and it is marked by many confrontations and the book of Acts records many of these confrontations and points out whenever that happens it's the kingdom of Satan that's put to the worst because the kingdom of God is superior Christ is superior greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world is certainly one of the things demonstrated through the stories in the book of Acts and then also the book of Acts I think indicates that the kingdom of Christ is superior to worldly governments not just to the satanic kingdom of the occult but also to the political powers which from an earthly point of view seem to be the most powerful entities in the world like the Roman Empire the Emperor or even the local governors of Roman cities and so forth that that the Apostles encounter again and again the powers that be whether it's the Jewish Sanhedrin or the Roman officials in different towns that Paul preaches they try to stop the gospel they put him in prison but the door is open you know Peter was put in prison in Acts chapter 12 an angel let him out the four guards responsible for him were put to death because they lost their prisoner they they didn't know what happened to him Paul and Silas are in prison in Philippi in Acts chapter 16 and an earthquake comes and opens the prison doors the chains fall off their hands I mean it's very clear that no matter what happens the the church survives the church continues now of course the Apostle didn't survive forever nobody's expected to do that but again and again when their progress in

the pagan world was sought to be checked and slowed or hindered by governmental authority it just didn't work despite the most powerful government in the world trying to prevent them they still conquered the Roman Empire with just the gospel and without swords and without war and the Roman Empire of course eventually did become Christian not in their lifetime but because of the work that they had done eventually it worked so the book of Acts gives us I think three ways four ways of establishing the obvious superiority of the gospel to anything else one is that there's eyewitnesses plenty of them that gave witness to his resurrection two is that there's evidence that Jesus continued to work after his death and resurrection through the Apostles doing exactly the same kind of works which the Apostles didn't say hey that's us doing it they said no we're not doing this that's Jesus he's still the Jesus you crucified he's still doing this kind of stuff he rose again he's doing these same signs that he did before he died it's a continuation of the activity of Jesus through his body the church then of course these confrontations with the satanic world and also with the Roman political world the stories in the book of Acts make it very clear the kingdom of God is superior to all and will not be stopped by any human or demonic powers now one of the values I have found for me and I think any any Christian can find in the book of Acts is that it helps us to take our own spiritual temperature in your notes that's on the first page under C what I mean by taking our spiritual temperature well that's probably pretty self-explanatory how healthy are we as a church how are we doing spiritually well if we look around at the modern church only we probably feel like we're doing about average we're no worse than most better than some if we look at church history back in the Middle Ages we say we're really doing great compared to you know the papacy and and the Roman Church in the Middle Ages that was corrupt to the core but if we look back at the Apostles if that's the measure then we say well we could do better we could and should do better and we're not maybe as healthy as we thought the church has been unhealthier than it is now at some times but it's still to measure ourselves by the medieval church or even by the present church and say I think we're doing better than most these churches are that's not the measure we should be going by we should be going by the standard which was set by the Apostles who established the church and set the norms and so we can use the Book of Acts as we can use no other book in the Bible or even outside the Bible for that matter no other book in the world can serve to help us compare our own spiritual reality and spiritual health against that of the true standard which is the apostolic movement that Jesus started at Pentecost through the Apostles for one thing everyone's interested in revival I think most churches are anyway most churches would love to see what they call a revival everyone knows that that requires the Holy Spirit to come and move and you know convert people and and revive the church and bring power and glory to the testimony of Jesus and I don't know if you've ever been in a revival I I have had the fortune good fortune to be in one I didn't have anything to do with making it happen I may have had some something to do damaging it I don't know I hope not but in the 70s there was the Jesus movement I was 16 years old and I just got to be a witness and a participant of it and it was true revival thousands of people were saved very quickly from

the younger generation and many of them continued to become missionaries and pastors and many of them pastor huge churches I mean Greg Laurie who has a huge church and a huge evangelistic Association almost like Billy Graham he was a convert he was a convert the very year I came to Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa in 1970 and and the revival is just starting to take off and and in those days the Holy Spirit was manifesting in many ways that you rarely see in our time but even that was not completely like the book of Acts the book of Acts gives us this the the model for a Holy Spirit revival and if we want revival for example we can see how the how how God did it for example he didn't do it by bringing in some high-power speaker and and music and and you know musicians and drama and all kinds of stuff that we sometimes try to do to get a church to grow and sometimes we do get churches to grow but not necessarily they don't necessarily grow healthy that way but they grow bigger but growing healthy is what I think is we're lacking and how did the early church have that revival get started the people were all in one place in one accord praying for the Holy Spirit to fall for ten days it took for that to happen sometimes you have to go longer perhaps but they weren't out trying to stir things up they're trying to stir God up with their prayers and with their unity and again the unity of the church that's often mentioned in the book of Acts which impressed so many outsiders had a great deal with bringing people into the church too Jesus said that would be true when he prayed for the church in John chapter 17 twice Jesus said father I pray that they may be one as we are so that the world may know that you have sent me you know it's the unity of the church Jesus said would cause the world to be convinced that God sent Jesus now we don't see much unity in the church today there's it there have been worse times but there's certainly been better times but it's you know the unity of the church I think that's a prerequisite for revival as well as a result of it the the disciples before the revival broke out were in one place in one accord one accord means they had one intention they were in unity and they were praying together and that's what led to the spirit being poured out and after the spirit was poured out he even increased not only the size but the unity of the church as we see that they no one said that anything he owned was his own but you know as anyone had needs everyone felt another man's need as it was his own need they're like one body like Paul said when one suffers all suffer when one is exalted all rejoice that's how Paul put it first Corinthians 12 but that unity where everyone just felt like what happens to you is happening to me we're one we're one body just like my wife and I are one flesh anything that that comes to harm me is hurting her too at the same time or vice versa that kind of unity is part of revival in the book of Acts we don't see that much of that unity now and that's I think one thing one reason we're not seeing much revival but though it's not the only factor the main thing is that by looking at the book of Acts and analyzing what's going on we do get to see what is the basis of true revival and what it is about us that might be hindering that another thing about it that helps us take our temperature is we see what is the true measure of discipleship and of ministry discipleship required full-on commitment of course especially in times of persecution it even meant you had to be ready to die and sometimes died very young if you're gonna follow Christ and you had to

obey and if you didn't obey there's at least one case given where a couple were struck dead supernaturally because they they they're the purity of their testimony they lied it was not pleasing to God we see how much commitment to righteousness discipleship involved in that church and the leaders in their ministry how they did it I just want to say that when you look study the mystery of Peter and Paul or Philip or Stephen in the book of Acts you're not going to see anything that resembles very many of the high-powered ministries today the the standards for one thing I don't think they did it for money I think they were supported I think God provided for them but I don't think they were on a get a paycheck I don't think that there was some headquarters in Jerusalem sending or an Antioch sending Paul a paycheck when he's out on the field but they trusted God ministers had to trust God and they had to put their life on the line and and and they had to be courageous and so forth and and you know you get a model in the book of Acts of true discipleship and true Christian ministers there and then one other thing that is that when you read the book of Acts and you read about these supernatural things how do you feel when you read it do you feel like like it's kind of surreal I have to say that when I was young before the Jesus moment I would say I was in a church I was a Christian and if I read the book of Acts or the area or even the life of Jesus in the Gospels the miracles and all that you know the Holy Spirit filling them and they did all these great things I knew it was true but it was so far removed from my own experience they just seemed like it just seems surreal rather than realistic I knew that God did those things but it just didn't seem like anything connected to what God does now you know at least not anything I had heard or seen and then when the revival came and I also got filled with the Spirit at that time and I read the book of Acts very differently then because when I read these things that that sounds about right that sounds about real I mean that's kind of like what's going on right now people are getting healed you know lots of people getting saved there's persecution and there's even martyrs you know this is the kind of stuff that was normal in the early church if you read it doesn't seem very normal doesn't seem very realistic that may be just a way of judging your own spiritual temperature how spiritual am I how much is the Holy Spirit real in my life if he isn't then this will seem kind of like reading the Iliad in the Odyssey you know but if he is real in the same sense he was to these people you'll just be reading like yeah these are my buds here these I can I know people like that today you know who do those kind of things so I mean as you read the book of Acts it really kind of shines a light on the quality of we have in our own time and it's not always a positive comparison now I'm gonna skip over some things in the notes because I don't want to go too late here but I do want to point out this that the author deliberately seems to point out parallels between Peter and Paul now the Luke is obviously a big fan of Paul but he respects Peter too we know that Peter and Paul weren't always exactly harmonious as though they normally were they had their moments according to Galatians chapter 2 Paul said he had to rebuke Peter publicly in front of the whole church once that must have been embarrassing to Peter and how much courage that took from Paul to judge to actually can criticize for the church the guy who's like the main Apostle that Jesus set up the most respected the guy who preached on the day of

Pentecost and 3,000 people were saved in the church started you know I mean this is the guy that Paul a Johnny come lately who got converted years later he's publicly taking Peter test Peter accepted it Peter Peter took the rebuke they I'm they were they were on the same page for the most part but they had their moments there certainly were times when you would think a wedge would have been put between them and yet Peter highly respected Paul we know because in 2nd Peter which Peter wrote many years later 2nd Peter 3 verse 15 he says and count that the long-suffering of our Lord is what's he say he means opportune something like opportunity says even as our beloved brother Paul according to the wisdom given to him has written unto you in all his epistles in which he speaks in them of these things he says which the the foolish and the unlearned people twist Paul's letters as they do the other scriptures it's interesting that Peter would suggest that he saw Paul's writings as scriptures and would read refer to Paul as our beloved brother Paul and his wisdom and so forth when in fact Paul had once no doubt embarrassed Peter pretty significantly I reviewed him publicly but they they obviously whatever rough spots they may have had in their relationship there was no rivalry there was no ego there and although Luke was Paul's biggest fan as you can tell from how he writes of Paul he also thought very well of Peter it's just that Peter was the main leader in the church from the very beginning up through almost to the middle of the book of Acts Peter's story goes up through chapter 12 and then we only see him appearing one time at the Jerusalem Council in chapter 15 but the book goes on to chapter 28 and most of that is about Paul but although there's there must have been hundreds of stories about Peter and hundreds of stories about Paul that could have been recorded like any historian Luke had to select what he's going to include or what he's not going to include and it's it's probably significant that the things he included about Peter and the things he included about Paul notwithstanding whatever stories he left out our stories that are very similar to each other for example when Peter is the leader of the church we have one long sermon of Peter recorded in Acts chapter 2 and a few other short ones later on when Paul is prominent of one long sermon of Paul recorded in chapter 13 and some shorter ones but each of these guys has one very lengthy sermon recorded from themselves although they no doubt Luke could have recorded very many more but he wanted at least a good sample a long sample of each of these guys sermons to be included and the rest of the sermons recorded were pretty short both of them healed lame men who couldn't walk in Acts chapter 3 Peter did Acts chapter 9 Paul did or not 9 later on I think it says 9 in it so I believe it's I think it's later than that but I'm not gonna dig for it right now but they did both heal lame men both actually were able to inflict judgment on on sinners with a word Peter was able to rebuke and an eyes and Sapphira and they dropped dead Paul was able to rebuke elements the false prophet and he went blind for a few days both of them did miracles in a strange way Peter in chapter 5 was able his shadow passing over sick people who were alongside the road would heal them Paul his handkerchiefs and aprons taken from him in Ephesus in chapter 19 would heal people and cast out demons both of them confronted sorcerers Peter confronted the sorcerer Simon in Samaria in Acts chapter 8 and Paul confronted the sorcerer elements

in Acts 13 both of them raised the dead one one case each is recorded there may have been more but Luke records one case each of raising the dead Peter raised Tabitha in chapter 9 and Paul raised Eutychus who had fallen out the window in chapter 20 and then finally both were miraculously released from prison with you know Peter was in Acts chapter 4 the prison doors were open and and also in chapter 12 Peter was released from prison supernaturally and then also Paul was in Acts 16 in Philippi so these are all you know we have selections of stories about both these men but it looks like Luke kind of wanted to balance out the account of both these men Luke Peter is definitely prominent in the early stories Paul is prominent in the later ones and it may be that Luke has selected the stories in order to show that Paul became basically Peter's equal you know basically that Peter even before Paul was converted was doing all these amazing things but after Paul's converted all the same kinds of things were recorded of Paul doing them now I'm not going to go through the outline of the contents of the book which is actually in your in your notes at nor the last page we're actually coming to the end of our talk tonight the last page I'm not going to go in detail but these are I listed like 21 topics that would be very interesting for a person to search out using the book of Acts like the the work of the Holy Spirit in Acts if you want to study Acts you'd be want to keep your eye out for things that that tell us something when the Holy Spirit was involved and what he was doing because the Holy Spirit is mentioned throughout the book of Acts as being really the way in which Jesus was working through the Apostles was by the Holy Spirit they were filled with the Spirit and they did these things to see the the role of prayer in Acts our prayers often seem a little bit feeble and ineffectual their prayers not so much their prayers really got some results and reading about the results of prayer in Acts can be challenging and instructive how the how the presentation of the gospel is given frankly I think the both the occasions and the content of these gospel presentations if you compare them with perhaps what's more familiar with to us today you'll see some remarkable differences when the gospel is preached it doesn't have the same contents as what we usually hear preached even in some of the best churches strangely the way that converts were nurtured is interesting you can study in Acts the way the church grows as opposed to modern church growth methods the unity of the church in Acts as opposed today these are all areas where we can study these features of the church in Acts and contrast them or at least compare them with the church today and see what areas maybe maybe ought to be changed if we would like to see some of the results they had again how the church was governed church government acts for example you never find a church in Acts that had a pastor nor does Paul ever write a letter to a church that had a pastor although he wrote to churches seven different churches he wrote to as far as we can tell none of them had a pastor almost every church has a pastor now well how were the churches governed well that's what you find out if you read the book if you're paying attention I'm saying these are things you're looking for in the book because it is instructive to us church economics and ministry and finances in Acts very different than modern church especially if you read chapters two and four but I'm not I'm not gonna explain these things or expound them I could if we had an equal number of

hours to these things on the list but these are things for you that you can search out and find in the book of Acts church community what was community life in the church like then how did they select and train ministers did they send him people young men off to seminary and then recruit them with a candidate coming to the church to see if he's a if he can impress the crowd enough to be hired on is that how they did it I don't think so how about how normal is the prophetic ministry in the churches in the book of Acts and how much of that do we have in our modern churches what was the role of speaking in tongues in the churches in Acts we get have to get some of that from Acts and some of them from 1st Corinthians but there's you know the book of Acts has some of that information there's not much in the Bible about speaking in times but what little we have is in Acts and basically Paul's discussion in Rome in 1st Corinthians 12 through 14 and nothing else the miracles in Acts what kind of miracles did God do and through whom we're all that over all the Christians working miracles you'd be surprised who wasn't who was not and what kind of miracles because there's groups now especially there's a certain movement up in Northern California that spread around the world that wants everyone to be out working miracles and there are real big stress on miracles but then some modern alleged revivals have been characterized by weird phenomena which are not at all of the same type of phenomena as the miracles in Acts I mean this is something anyone can study out to their own profit to see how to judge matters in the modern church team ministry in Acts again I said there's no church in exit has a pastor but there were churches that had groups of leaders the church that sent Paul and Barnabas out the church in Antioch in chapter 13 it says there were five men prophets and teachers in the church that were kind of apparently nurturing the church and Saul and Barnabas were two of those five and as they prayed and fasted they the Holy Spirit spoke to send out Barnabas and Saul but this is this a team they didn't you know they worked as a team also they appointed elders and Paul never embarked on one of his ministry trips without team members with him is there a reason for that probably is what are the missionary strategies in Acts there's been modern missions for the past 300 years developing in the Protestant churches and missionaries do things a certain way certain kinds of people are selected for missionaries how is it in the book of Acts it's worth looking into spiritual warfare in Acts how is that conducted how did the church confront the powers of darkness the kingdom of Satan and defeated what were the church-state relations in the book of Acts now that's gonna be different than now because of course they were under persecution and an empire were in a different kind of government but what did they think about the state and the church and the relationship between the two and finally what what about persecution in Acts you know as you read the book of Acts you'll see that persecution was a very normal part of both the Apostles in Jerusalem and Paul and his team when they traveled abroad everywhere they went the gospel and its missionaries were persecuted and so were the ordinary church members so badly in fact that apparently hundreds if not thousands of Christians scattered from Jerusalem because the of the intense persecution that came upon them and and then Saul of Tarsus pursued them even to the places they fled to so that's going

on in many parts of the world today too and it's not happening here quite the same way though it might in the future and sometimes reading the book of Acts will will prepare us for what's normal I mean Peter said to his readers don't don't think it a strange thing concerning the trials that are coming upon you as if some strange thing was happening I have a feeling if we ended up having our pastors arrested and put in prison and and tortured and killed as has happened in communist countries and other places for decades since over a century now we think that's pretty strange that's not what we're used to and again reading the book of Acts helps to I guess condition you to understand what is really normal what we've experienced in America the last two or three hundred years the freedoms we've had largely freedom from persecution is a pretty unusual thing historically speaking it certainly was not known in the early church and it's not known in most of the world today either but it's but reading the book of Acts we see these different features and practices and policies of the early church and and I suggest that you keep a list like that in mind as you read through the book of Acts to say I'm gonna see what I can learn with the work of the Holy Spirit in the church in the first century and what I when I learn about that it'll give me some way of to assess the Holy Spirit's work or lack of it and the church I go to you know I mean this is one of the great things that book of Acts can do for you and I would suggest you keep that list or make your own when you study and read the book of Acts be looking for that kind of information