

Acts 1: 8, Jesus said,

8 ...But you will receive Power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

It is a humbling and exciting experience for me to stand here this morning for 2 major reasons. First, where else can you find so fine a group of people who come together to study God's word? And not only are you smart, but look around...so kind and good looking too!

Second, when Barry asked me to teach again, I suggested Jonah (only 4 chapters). The last time I taught the class, we studied Daniel which took 16 lessons over a 22 week period and I thought you would be sick of hearing me teach. But Barry asked me to teach the book of Acts.

The good news is, unlike Daniel, there is nothing controversial in the Book of Acts. Well, there is the little problem of the Doctrine of Holy Spirit...but other than that, Acts a piece of cake.

Many of you may not know this but I am very shy about controversial subjects.

Well, let me ask you a few questions that I know we can all agree upon.

1. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the Christian's life today?
2. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in Salvation?
3. Once the Holy Spirit indwells the believer, will He ever leave?
4. What does it mean to be baptized with the Holy Spirit?
5. Must all Christians be baptized with the Holy Spirit?
6. Should all Christians speak in tongues?
7. What does it mean to be a "Spirit Led Church?"

Anyone want to take a stab at answering any of these?

The Book of Acts deals directly with these questions. Unfortunately, not all believers agree on the answers. But, believe it or not, I have answers to each of these questions. Now you may not agree with my answers, so if you want to be wrong...

I taught the Book of Acts nearly 25 years ago at a church that was moving from a conservative doctrinal position regarding the Holy Spirit to a more charismatic view. The class I was teaching was a multiple age class including children up through senior adults.

When I was near the end of the study, an 8 year old child asked her mother, "Mom, was I 5 or 6 years old when Mr. Procopio began his study in Acts." Barry has given me as much time as I need to teach Acts and I will try to finish by the time I retire in 2009.

Now I was raised in a fundamentalist Baptist tradition. The church leadership where I taught through the Book of Acts 25 years ago was aware of that. So when I announced that I would be teaching the Book of Acts, the person who was responsible for Adult education came up to me and told me that she wanted to review everything I was going to say before I said it. (Smart lady!)

I must admit that 25 years ago, I had no problem with that request because, humbly, I "KNEW IT ALL" and I didn't care who might be offended.

I am so grateful to have a second chance to teach the Book of Acts 25 years later. I looked at my notes from 25 years ago and thought, "How could I have been so arrogant?"

So I approach this study, promising you two things. First, I will try to present a balanced viewpoint. I will tell you what IBC's position is regarding some of these controversial doctrines, but also try to present the other side so that we can understand why others believe the way they do. I now know that we will only know the full truth when we get to heaven. Acts 1:12-15 says,

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. 13 When they had

entered the city, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. 14 These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

15 At this time Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty persons was there together)...

Some have suggested that this is the first and last time that the church was in one place with one mind.

Second, I want you to know that I don't know it all, and I will depend on you to search to scriptures to see if what I am saying is correct. And if you don't agree, let's discuss it. I promise not to ask you any questions you don't know the answers to. I maintain that if teachers had asked me questions I knew the answers to, I would have done much better.

With that, let's take a 50,000 foot view of this incredible book of the Bible.

I am a teacher by training. So let's start our study with a quiz. Take out a piece of paper and let's see how many of these questions you can get right.

Jesus told his followers, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The Book of Acts tells how these words were fulfilled. I'm going to ask you a geography question from the Book of Acts, and you write down the city where the event took place. Let me ask all 8 questions and then we will go back and see how many you get. Ready?

<QUIZ>

1. Paul was on his way to this city to arrest the followers of Christ when Jesus spoke to him and struck him blind. The city starts with D.

2. Paul and Silas, imprisoned in this city, were praying and singing hymns when an earthquake shook the jail to its foundations and the doors swung open. The city starts with P.
3. Paul, a prisoner, was on his way to this city to stand trial when he was shipwrecked. He ultimately died in this city. The city starts with R.
4. In this idol-filled city, Paul tried to persuade a group of philosophers in the Areopagus on Mars Hill that Jesus was the unknown God they claimed to worship. And that He was the only true God. The city starts with A.
5. The apostles chose Stephen as one of the church's first deacons in this city. Stephen became the church's first martyr in this city. The city starts with J.
6. The Ethiopian eunuch was traveling on the road from Jerusalem to this city when Philip shared the gospel with him, then baptized him. The city starts with G.
7. The gospel was preached to Gentiles in this important city after God told a centurion named Cornelius to send for Peter to have him share the gospel with them. The city starts with C.
8. Followers of Jesus were first called "Christians" in this city. The city starts with A.

Let's see how you did.

<Answers to the Test>

1. Damascus. Turn in your Bibles to Acts 9:1-8.

Damascus was 150 miles from Jerusalem and it was an important trade hub. Paul had orders from the high priest to arrest Jewish Christians who had fled there. Jesus himself appeared to Paul and stopped his plans.

<READ> Acts 9:1-9

1. Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest,

2. and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.
3. As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him;
4. and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"
5. And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,
6. but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do."
7. The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.
8. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus.

2. Philippi. Turn in your Bibles to Acts 16:11.

Paul went to Philippi, a province of Macedonia, after having a vision in which a Macedonian man begged him to come. Philippi was founded by Philip II, father of Alexander the Great. Home to retired Roman soldiers, the city had no synagogue; Paul went to the Gangites River on the Sabbath to pray, where he met Lydia.

<READ> Acts 16:11-12

11 So putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis; 12 and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony; and we were staying in this city for some days.

Acts 16:22-26

The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. 23 When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; 24 and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

25 But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; 26

and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened.

3. Rome. Turn in your Bibles to Acts 27:27

Rome was the empire's capital and was the world's greatest city during New Testament times. Paul, a Roman citizen by birth, spent two years there under house arrest before being tried. Paul was executed in Rome in a. d. 68.

<READ> Acts 27:27

27 But when the fourteenth night came, as we were being driven about in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors began to surmise that they were approaching some land. 28 They took soundings and found it to be twenty fathoms; and a little farther on they took another sounding and found it to be fifteen fathoms. 29 Fearing that we might run aground somewhere on the rocks, they cast four anchors from the stern and wished for daybreak.

39 When day came, they could not recognize the land; but they did observe a bay with a beach, and they resolved to drive the ship onto it if they could. 40 And casting off the anchors, they left them in the sea while at the same time they were loosening the ropes of the rudders; and hoisting the foresail to the wind, they were heading for the beach. 41 But striking a reef where two seas met, they ran the vessel aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern began to be broken up by the force of the waves. 42 The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, so that none of them would swim away and escape; 43 but the centurion, wanting to bring Paul safely through, kept them from their intention, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land, 44 and the rest should follow, some on planks, and others on various things from the ship. And so it happened that they all were brought safely to land.

Acts 28:11 & 14

11 At the end of three months we set sail on an Alexandrian ship which had wintered at the island, and which had the Twin Brothers for its figurehead.

14 There we found some brethren, and were invited to stay with them for seven days; and thus we came to Rome.

4. Athens. Turn in your Bibles to Acts 17:22.

The capital of modern Greece, Athens was the home of the temple of the goddess Athena, as well as the center for Epicurean and Stoic philosophy. The Court of the Areopagus judged matters of religion and morals. One of its members, Dionysius, later became a believer.

<READ> Acts 17:22

So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. 23 "For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. 24 " The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; 25 nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; 26 and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, 27 that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28 for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.' 29 "Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. 30 "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, 31 because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

5. Jerusalem. Turn in your Bibles to Acts 7:54.

David made Jerusalem his capital c. 1000 b. c. Jesus and his disciples, like all Jewish men, celebrated the festivals of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles at the Temple. The city was

Christianity's headquarters until the persecution following Stephen's death caused believers to flee.

<READ> Acts 7:54

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him. 55 But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; 56 and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." 57 But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse. 58 When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" 60 Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" Having said this, he fell asleep.

6. Gaza. Turn in your Bibles to Acts 8:26.

Philip explained Isaiah's prophecies of Christ to this important Ethiopian official somewhere along the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, a journey of about 50 miles.

<READ> Acts 8:26

But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.) 27 So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." 30 Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this:

"HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER; AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT, SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS

MOUTH. 33 "IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY; WHO WILL RELATE HIS GENERATION? FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH."

34 The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?" 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.

7. Caesarea. Turn in your Bibles to Acts 10:1.

Caesarea was the Roman army's headquarters in Judea. Cornelius, a God-fearing Gentile, was praying at the Jewish hour of prayer when an angel spoke to him.

<READ> Acts 10:1

Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort, 2 a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually. 3 About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, "Cornelius!" 4 And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God. 5 "Now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter; 6 he is staying with a tanner named Simon, whose house is by the sea." 7 When the angel who was speaking to him had left, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who were his personal attendants, 8 and after he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

Why is Cornelius' conversion important?

Listen to Isa 56:6-7

6 "Also the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, To minister to Him, and to love the name of the LORD, To be His servants, every one who keeps from profaning the Sabbath and holds fast My covenant;

7 Even those I will bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be

acceptable on My altar; For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples."

Cornelius' conversion fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 56:6-7 and most importantly set the stage for all gentiles to be saved.

8. Antioch. Turn in your Bibles to Acts 11:19.

Antioch was the empire's third largest city after Rome and Alexandria. In Antioch, Jewish Christians founded the first largely Gentile church.

<READ> Acts 11:19

19 So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. 20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. 22 The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. 23 Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord; 24 for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord. 25 And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; 26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

What does "Christian" means?

A: "belonging to Christ." If you belong to Christ, you too are a Christian. In this safe setting, being called a Christian is not a threatening label, but think about the thousands of people who have given their lives for their association with the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Book of Acts recounts the story of what the early church went through because they wanted to be known as Christians: Ones belonging to Christ.

If we didn't have the book of Acts in the Bible, what would be missing from our body of knowledge?

The book of Acts recounts the chronology of the early church. The church was a completely new idea. Remember, the Old Testament saints missed seeing the church age from their reading of the Scriptures. They believed that Messiah would come and then what did they believe would happen?

Many of you have started businesses or new ventures. When you start a new business or new venture, there are things that you do only once to get the enterprise going and they are not repeated. Other things set the standard for the future. Do you know what I mean?

The key to understanding the book of Acts is to discern, what was meant for the early church and how much of that applies to us today. I know there is great debate on that, and as we study the book, we will take care to understand the differences.

Next week, we are going to tackle the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It may be the most important study in the series, so I hope all of you will try to be here and invite others so that they have the foundation for the rest of the study. Please pray that God will be pleased with our study. I am looking forward to learning a lot.