

BNEXT BIBLE STUDY PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Gospels & Acts

FEATURING THE AMAZING JOURNEY VIDEO SERIES



BNEXT STUDY

Jesus the King : Matthew

Jesus the Servant : Mark

Jesus the Son of Man : Luke

Jesus the Son of God : John

The Acts of the Holy Spirit : Acts 1-12

To the Ends of the Earth : Acts 13-28

AMAZING JOURNEY VIDEO

- ▶ Christ is King
- ▶ Become Your Greatest
- ▶ A Living Portrait
- ▶ That You Might Believe
- ▶ Your Power Source
- ▶ Your Witness

STUDY **BNEXT**

William P. Campbell



Welcome to BNEXT Amazing Journey

I am excited to share this journey through God's Word with you. This electronic version contains the same material as the printed version. It allows you to electronically record your answers to the questions which are part of each lesson. Following each question, you will find a blue text box. Click or touch the box and the field within it will turn white allowing you to type in your answer. Your answer will automatically be saved when you exit the text box. Should you need more space for your answer, the text box will automatically expand and place a scroll bar on the right-hand side.

The Scripture covered by each lesson is listed on the mast of the page. Read the Scripture passages and then begin working your way through the lesson. Each lesson in this series contains three pages of commentary, followed by three pages of questions that will assist you dig deeper and reflect on God's Word.

An important component of BNEXT Amazing Journey are the videos that accompany each series. To access the videos associated with this particular series, see the link below my signature.

Also we have included, in the last pages of this digital version, a Leader's Guide that will enable anyone to facilitate a small group. Once you have completed this BNEXT Amazing Journey series, I hope you will consider leading others through this study material.

Again, thank you for allowing me to share this amazing journey with you.

Your brother in Christ Jesus,

Handwritten signature of William P. Campbell in blue ink.

William P. Campbell

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Repent for the Kingdom
of Heaven is near.

Matthew 4:17b

In an effort to appease the Hungarians in the Austrian empire, a plan was devised in 1867 to make the empire a dual monarchy. The same person would be emperor of Austria and king of Hungary. As Christians, we too live under a dual monarch. Christ is king in the heavens and also king over the earth—ruler over the present and the future, sovereign over both the temporal and the eternal. Our natural tendency is to allow Jesus to reign over things spiritual but to minimize His influence in the practical world of our daily lives. On what basis has this Christ the right to reign over our lives today? Matthew wrote his Gospel to provide the answer.

Introduction to the Gospels

The foundational books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) are called Gospels. Everything else written in the New Testament depends on the truths of these four books. They provide the wonderful story of Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection. The Word *Gospel* means "good news." There is no better news than this: God came to live among us so that He might provide us salvation.

The story of Jesus is so important that only one account of His life would not seem to be enough. Just as there are four points on a compass and four seasons to a complete year, it took four accounts to give us a complete picture of the life of Christ.

1. **Matthew** wrote primarily to the Jews
2. **Mark** to the Romans
3. **Luke** to the Gentiles
4. **John** to the Christian Church

Matthew portrays Jesus as King, Mark reveals Jesus as a Servant, Luke upholds Jesus as the Son of Man, and John demonstrates Christ to be the Son of God.

The first three Gospels are quite similar to each other. They are called the "synoptic" Gospels (*syn* i.e., "same") and (*optic* i.e., "vision" or "sight") come together to mean "to see the same thing". The Gospel of John, however, stands apart from the rest, giving more attention to Jesus' ministry in Judea. John writes with more discourse and theology than the other three.

A careful comparison of the Gospels shows numerous variations between them, without any real contradictions. This variety of emphasis and perspective gives the careful reader substantiating evidence that the Gospel accounts are God's accounts. If four men independently described the life of Christ, unaided by the Holy Spirit, they would likely provide us four conflicting stories. If the same writers collaborated to make their stories look good, we would likely find the four biographies nicely polished, such that each fit perfectly with the others. What we find, however, are four unique writings, each providing essential and precious perspective on the life of Christ.

The early Church fathers, in affirming the books of the New Testament canon, found need to reject numerous false gospels which lacked the authority and integrity of those found in our Bibles today.



Watch Amazing Journey Video
"Christ is King"



All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

2 Timothy 3:16

See, your King comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Matthew 21:5

The assumed authors of the Gospels are made obvious by the names given to each book. The sequence of writing has long been debated. All but 31 verses from Mark can be found in Matthew and Luke. For this reason, many scholars think Mark was written first. John appears to have been written last. The three synoptics were likely completed between AD 50-70 and John was written sometime between AD 60 and 90.

Each gospel account is written to provide a picture of our Lord Christ and is more thematic than chronological in approach. Matthew was written to show Christ as King and to introduce His kingdom.

Behold The King

The Jews were long awaiting a Messiah, a King. From the time a king last sat on the throne of David until the birth of Jesus, 600 years of quiet anticipation passed.

Matthew wrote to the Jews, and he introduced them to their King. He constructed his Gospel with more Jewish terminology and Old Testament prophecy than the other Gospel writers. Matthew's Gospel provides the natural bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament. This Gospel naturally comes first in the New Testament, for the Gospel message... "is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" (Romans 1:16).

The first verse of Matthew sets the tone for the book. Matthew introduces Christ as the "son of David," and the "son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1). The link to Abraham showed Christ to be Jewish by decent, and the connection with David demonstrated Christ to be king by right.

Matthew then presents a genealogy, tracing Christ's human roots from Abraham through David, to validate Christ as King (Matthew 1:2-17). Contrast this with Mark, whose concern is to accentuate Christ as a servant, and therefore Mark finds no need for a genealogy. Compare with Luke, who traces our Lord's lineage backward, all the way to Adam, demonstrating that Jesus is the Son of Man (Luke 3:23-38). And John's prologue grounds Christ into eternity as the Son of God (John 1:1-5). The Gospel of Matthew also closes with emphasis on Christ as King. In Matthew 28:18-20, the "Great Commission," Christ charges His followers to make disciples in the confidence that all authority is vested in Him. From beginning to end, the Gospel of Matthew presents to us Christ in regal vestments. We can outline this gospel as follows:

Matthew

Introducing the King:

The Birth of the King:

Matthew

The Preparation of the King:

The Ministry of the King:

In Galilee:

In Judea and Perea:

The Passion of the King:

The Resurrection of the King:

Christ the King

Matthew 1-4

Matthew 1

Christ the King

Matthew 2-4

Matthew 5-20

Matthew 5-18

Matthew 19-20

Matthew 21-27

Matthew 28

...and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our lord and savior Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 1:11

Behold the Kingdom

Where there is a King, there must be a Kingdom. The Gospel of Matthew mentions the Kingdom of Heaven more times than any other Gospel account. Most of the content unique to Matthew gives emphasis to this Kingdom. For example, the Gospel itself is shaped profoundly by five central discourses, much in the same way that the Old Testament is shaped by the five books of the Pentateuch. The narrative sections in each case appropriately lead up the discourses. This pattern of teaching through discourse is highlighted in the fact that each one ends with a statement like, "When Jesus had finished saying all these things" (Matthew 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1):

Discourses on the Kingdom

The Sermon on the Mount Values of the Kingdom	Matthew 5-7
Commissioning the Disciples Mandates of the Kingdom	Matthew 10
Teaching through Parable Parables on the Kingdom	Matthew 13
Who is the Greatest Servants of the Kingdom	Matthew 18
The Olivet Discourse Predictions of the Kingdom	Matthew 24-25

Final Thought

Matthew wrote with precision and care, pouring himself into a story that he might present Christ to others. Do you and I so focus our time and efforts to witness for the Lord? We should.

He, who was born of the royal line, has given us authoritative command to proclaim the immediacy of His kingdom with our lips and our lives (Matthew 28:18-20). We should match our life values to that of the kingdom (Matthew 5-7); we should carefully heed the mandates of the kingdom (Matthew 10); and we should meditate on the striking parables of the kingdom (Matthew 13) until we are living faithfully as servants of the king (Matthew 18).

One day, all the kingdoms of this world will be shaken and destroyed. On that day the Kingdom of Heaven will be revealed as Christ appears for a coronation through the praises of every living being (Matthew 24-25). And until that glorious day, the greatest evidence some people will ever have that Christ is the King will be demonstrated through the reality of His reign in your life and mine!



Spending Time With God

This lesson, in the series “God’s Good News,” is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. **PRAY, ASKING GOD FOR SPECIAL INSIGHT INTO HIS WORD.**

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read Matthew 1:18-24, the story of the birth of Christ. What challenges did Mary face due to the unusual circumstances of this birth?

2. Jesus is also called Immanuel, which means “God with us” (Matthew 1:23). Since nothing is impossible with God (Luke 1:37), do you think God could have found a way to enter the world and be with us that would have been easier for Mary and Joseph so as not to create suspicion of immorality in the eyes of the world (See John 8:41, where the Pharisees suggested Jesus was an illegitimate child)?

Do you think any such scenario would also provide for our salvation? Explain.

3. Matthew 2:1-12 describes the story of the Magi (wise men). From this account, describe the motives of the Magi and of King Herod (See also Matthew 2:13-16).

4. John the Baptist challenged people to prepare for the kingdom of God (Matthew 3). How did people respond to his ministry (Matthew 3:5-7)?



How do you think John the Baptist would be treated in our society today? Why?

If so, describe it (Did you have a sense, like the disciples, that you had to put everything aside to obey the Lord?).

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. Read Matthew 4:1-11 which describes Jesus' wilderness temptation. Why do you think God the Father allowed this desert trial?

7. We are all challenged by the call to humble obedience in the Sermon on the Mount. Which one of the beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-12 speaks to you most? Why?

If you were to face such a period of testing, what part of it would be most difficult for you? Why?

8. From Matthew 6:5-15 and 7:7-12, what principles about prayer would you teach to encourage someone who said, "Why pray? God knows my thoughts and needs anyway!"

6. Jesus called His first disciples in Matthew 4:18-22. Can you think of a time when you sensed the call of God on your life?



9. Describe Jesus' call to discipleship from Matthew 8:18-27. Do you think He expects the same radical obedience from us today?

What are the implications of this teaching for life in the church today (See also Matthew 13:36-43.)?

What part of His expectation is most difficult for you personally? Why?

11. A major theme in Matthew is the high cost of following Jesus. See Matthew 16:24-26. Why is such commitment essential for those who follow Jesus?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

10. In Matthew 13, Jesus teaches through parables. Read Matthew 13:24-30. What is the main point of this parable?

Scripture for Meditation

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me will find it."

Matthew 16:24-25



For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

Mark 10:45

Introduction

In the first chapter of Ezekiel, the prophet Ezekiel saw God in His glory surrounded by four high angelic beings. The heavenly creatures each had four faces, reflecting the person and character of God: “Each of the four had the face of a man, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle” (Ezekiel 1:10).

In this vision, we see God as King, yet God as servant...God as Divine, yet God as human. The lion in the Bible often represents regal dignity. It was connected with the tribe of Judah from which the Messiah King was promised (Genesis 49:9; Revelation 5:5). The eagle represents the heights of heaven and the strength to deliver (Job 39:27; Obadiah 1:4)...God as Divine. The face of the man may have surprised the prophet, for why would God associate Himself so closely with humanity? More striking yet would be the face of the ox, an animal that symbolized faithful, lowly, and often-difficult service!

Likewise, in Revelation 4: 6-7, the Apostle John saw a similar heavenly vision. They saw that the Good News is revealed to the New Testament saint as it was to the Old Testament prophet. God would become man. The King of the ages would become a servant in our world. The vision given to Ezekiel and the heavenly picture of God shown to John both reveal the four-sided character of God.

It is wonderfully natural for the four Gospel accounts to show us this four-fold picture of our Lord. Christ, the “exact representation” of God the Father (Hebrews 1:3), most naturally reflects the unchanging character. Matthew shows us the King, and Mark reveals God as Servant. Luke portrays Christ as a real man, the “Son of Man,” and John reveals Him as Divine, the “Son of God.”

The Message

It is generally agreed that Mark wrote to the Romans. The Romans were intensely practical. They constructed a network of transportation through highways that surpassed world-governments before them. Romans administered their kingdom well. They had many servants working to keep the machinery of government running smoothly. They measured value largely based on one's accomplishments and performance.

Romans would not be interested in the Old Testament history and prophecy about the Messiah. Mark omits nearly all prophecy and gives no genealogy to introduce the Savior. His presentation of the Christ is straight and to the point. It is visual and graphic, with each account joined to the next and the whole story racing along like an action-packed movie. Mark used the Greek word *euthios* (translated “immediately,” “straightway,” or “forthwith”) more than 40 times, connecting one scene to the next. Twelve of the 16 chapters in this Gospel begin with the word “and”—for the rendering of Christ's life by Mark is one unending demonstration of The Servant.

A skilled artist knows not only what to include in a painting, but what to leave out. Mark omits most of the discourses of Matthew, the parables of Luke, and the theological discussions of John. Mark does not record the virgin birth, the visit of the wise men, the childhood of Jesus... indeed, the first 30 years of Jesus' life are not accounted for. What matters most with a servant



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Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant...

Phillipians 2:6-7a

is performance, not pedigree or history. Mark gives Christ's credentials of service in a succinct manner. Mark's Gospel is shorter than the others—Matthew has 28 chapters and Mark only 16. The chapters in Mark's account run about half as long as Matthew's. This compact story of what Christ did is so tightly woven that it is difficult to break it into outline form. Many commentators, however, recognize one of the key transition points to be Mark 10, where Jesus acknowledges His call to be a servant: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

The Measure

James and John once approached Jesus, requesting the top places next to Christ when He sat on His glorious throne. Jesus immediately confronted their self-centered interests saying, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all" (Mark 10:42-44).

The measure of success in God's kingdom is the life of His Son, the Servant. We like to put others down, but Jesus humbled Himself that we might be lifted up. We want the top place, a place of honor, fame, and fortune. Jesus accepted the lowest place in life. He who created the worlds and who lived forever in the glories of heaven became a man. Jesus was not born in a comfortable home but in a stable. He was not raised in a king's castle or a rich man's estate but by poor, common folks. He did not come from a place of great influence but from the little known town of Nazareth. Our Lord earned no degrees, wrote no books, and did not rely on any of the world's systems of influence or power. His followers were uneducated—not the kind of men we would choose to change the world. Jesus taught that success before God is not to strive for greatness, but to become the least. Jesus would give His life as a ransom (Mark 10:45).

When we compare our records as servants to that of Christ, we feel woefully inadequate (Mark 10:43-45). We may take comfort in the knowledge that Mark struggled with the same sense of inadequacy, and that he found in Christ the fulfillment of what he lacked.

The Man

By title and tradition, the second gospel is believed to have been penned by Mark, the cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10). Mark was also called "John," and in Christian circles has come to be known (though never stated as such in the Bible) as "John Mark."

We first hear of Mark in Acts 12:12, where we find that his mother, Mary, provided a home for the gathered saints who waited and prayed for Peter's release from prison. Later, when God sent out Paul and Barnabas for their first missionary journey, John Mark came along as a helper (Acts 13:5). However, as the missionary band pressed beyond the Taurus mountains of Asia Minor, Mark left the team and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). This clearly upset Paul, for during the second missionary tour, when Barnabas wanted to again include his cousin Mark, Paul flatly refused (Acts 15:39). A sharp division arose between Paul and Barnabas, who decided to take separate routes for ministry, Mark remaining with Barnabas.

His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

Matthew 25:21a

We can imagine from the sketchy facts in these accounts that Mark struggled with faithfulness in service. He likely felt inadequate and unfaithful to God. Yet later, we find Mark restored to Paul's favor (Colossians 4:10), being eventually commended as a faithful Christian worker (2 Timothy 4:11). Early Church fathers claimed that John Mark also became a faithful helper to the Apostle Peter, and that Mark crafted his Gospel through the eyes and teachings of Peter. Indeed, in 1 Peter 5:13, Peter mentions "my son Mark," suggesting an intimate and supportive relationship.

Final Thought

Mark wrote the account of Jesus that shows the Lord Christ as a true servant. Perhaps this focus in Mark's writing demonstrates a priority in Mark's life. Young Mark met with failure. He apparently spent time with Peter, who had himself recovered from personal failure—even the outright denial of Christ. Through Peter, Mark would hear the stories of Jesus, the perfect servant, and be challenged and encouraged to press on to know the Lord. Peter, living in Pentecostal power, would teach young John Mark that by the indwelling Spirit we are empowered by Christ to live as Christ. Soon Mark became a faithful servant. In fact, John Mark was later held in high esteem by Paul himself, the one he once failed to serve.

As we read the Gospel of Mark and consider its message, let us not be overwhelmed by the example of its perfect servant, Jesus Christ. Rather let us remember that the author of this Gospel himself learned to become a faithful servant, and that the same Christ who led John Mark is leading us as we follow in His steps.

Spending Time With God

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SERIES

GOD'S GOOD NEWS | THE GOSPELS

LESSON 2

Jesus the Servant | Mark

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. Write down one insight that was especially challenging or encouraging for you.

2. Mark's Gospel reads like a fast-paced, action-packed movie. The word "immediately," used often by Mark, accentuates this tempo (E.g.: 1:10, 29 NASB). Read Mark 1, making note of how many events unfold in this relatively short block of text. What are the advantages of having an account of Christ's life that reads quickly?

3. Read Mark 2:1-13. What do you think drew people to Jesus (Mark 2: 1-2)? Note the determined efforts of the paralytic's friends to break through the crowd (Mark 2:3-4).

How were they rewarded? Do you make such effort in prayer and Bible study to "break through" to the Lord, regularly?

4. Read Mark 2:14-17. Note the approach and attitude of Christ toward those rejected by society. Who does our society reject today?

How does the church treat these outcasts? What is your attitude and approach toward the same?

5. Read Mark 2:18-3:12. What common theme ties these three accounts together?



How do these accounts challenge you personally? Pray for God to help you grow more and more into the image of Christ, as His disciple.

What fierce storms do you face today?

Discussion (Small Group Study)

6. Read Mark 3:13-19. Why do you think Christ chose Judas Iscariot (Mark 3:19)?

Do you think the Lord would challenge you for a lack of faith in Him?

7. How does Christ describe His familial relations (Mark 3:32-35)? What are the implications for our lives today?

9. See Mark 5:21-43. From the two miracles described in this narrative, what key element releases the power of God for people in need? (Compare with Mark 6:1-6, where the same quality is clearly lacking.)

8. Read Mark 4:35-41. Why does Jesus rebuke the disciples (Mark 4: 40)?

From your experience or from Scripture, how might this spiritual quality be strengthened in our lives?



10. See Mark 6:14-32. Why did the Lord and His followers find the need to get away and be alone for a time? Why is time away from the hustle and bustle of life important for our spiritual and mental health?

Discuss ways you have learned to carve out such time, even when the press of life and the demands of others seem to get in the way.

12. Skim Mark 9 to 11. Choose a teaching or work of Christ that clearly illustrates the principle of servanthood.

Discuss how this Scripture section should help shape our attitudes and actions.

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

11. See Mark 8:34-38. Jesus came to serve, and He calls us to become servants. What do you find most challenging about His call to service?

Scripture for Meditation

His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

Matthew 25:21a



For the Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost.

Luke 19:10

Introduction

We come now to the third Gospel. Matthew emphasized Jesus as the King of the Jews. Mark portrayed Christ as a Servant, a fitting image for the Romans. John tells us that Christ is the Son of God, and seems to write mostly for Christians. Luke shows us Jesus as the Son of Man. The human element would appeal to the Greeks.

While we don't want to make too much of these apparent images of Christ, neither can we ignore them. The Holy Spirit worked through four different men of different persuasions, who each brought unique and inspired perspective of the most wonderful story ever told. Is it not fitting that Matthew, a Jew, would write to the Jew? And Mark, who likely had a Jewish mother and a Roman father, would have a special compassion for the Romans. Luke, a Gentile, wrote best and clearest to his own kind. John the most intimate of Jesus' followers crafted works and teachings of Jesus that call Christians everywhere to a more serious and steady life of obedience. It was God who chose the writers and God's Spirit who brought forth these four portraits of Christ for all the world to see and enjoy.

The Author

The Gospel of Luke begins with some of the finest Greek in all the Bible. The author of this Gospel was well educated. His vocabulary is expansive. He uses no less than 266 words that are not found in the rest of the New Testament (Matthew uses half as many, and Mark uses a third as many). The writer of Luke does not state his name—so who was this educated man? If we compare the introduction and the writing style in Luke to that of Acts, we are convinced that the same man wrote both books. Acts is a companion volume to Luke (Acts 1:1). A careful study of the book of Acts reveals sections where the personal pronouns change from “they” to “we” (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; and 27:1-28:16), revealing that the author of Acts was also a traveling companion with Paul on certain occasions. The most likely candidate is Paul's “fellow worker” (Philemon 24) and “dear friend Luke, the doctor” (Colossians 4:14). This notion is supported by early and ongoing tradition.

We find, in the Gospel of Luke, the compassion and the focus on people's needs that we might expect from a physician. The first chapter in Luke, with Biblical text quoted by Jesus, includes the words, “Physician, heal yourself” (Luke 4:23). References to healing abound in Luke and surpass those found in the other Gospels. Descriptions of the sick in Luke are written with care and precision...with the eye of a doctor. We read, for example, that “Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever” (Luke 4:38). And “a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die” (Luke 7:2). The beaten citizen in the parable of the good Samaritan was not only cared for, but the good Samaritan “bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine” (Luke 10:34). Luke's Gospel is replete with such compassionate and detailed marks of a medical doctor.

We believe Luke to be a Gentile, not only because of his Gentile name, but because in Colossians 4:14 he is listed with other Gentile Christians. If this is correct, Luke is then the only Gentile writer of New Testament books. His writing betrays a love of culture, of beauty, of philosophy, and



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“A Living Portrait”

There is neither Jew nor
Greek, slave nor free,
male nor female, for you
are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28

most important, of Christ.

Luke paints such graphic and moving pictures of our Savior with his pen, that it's no surprise that some early traditions have speculated that this talented doctor was also an artist. While there is little evidence to substantiate such a claim, we do know that the wonderful stories in Luke have inspired others to paint portraits of Christ. *The Annunciation*, *The Arrival at Bethlehem*, *Tidings of Great Joy*, *The Adoration of the Shepherds*, *The Presentation in the Temple*, and other images of Christ have been lifted from the pages of this Gospel to inspire the brushes of Rembrandt, Van der Goes, Lerolle, Plockhorst, Merson, Girardet, Biermann, and the like. If we were to summarize the portraits of Christ in a word, we would say He is a real person—the “Son of Man.”

The Son of Man

The Gospel of Luke begins with simple and homey stories of two births—John the Baptist's and Jesus'. Luke does not, at first, present us with a genealogy (as does Matthew) or ministry (as does Mark) or eternal deity (as does John). Luke shows us humanity. We at once find ourselves among families and looking at babies. We can sense the fear that gripped Zechariah when the angel appeared, and we can rejoice with Elizabeth when she learns she will bear a son. The angel comes to Mary, Mary comes to Elizabeth, John is born, Jesus is born, and joy indescribable joins heaven to earth. Luke fills out the nativity story and gives the account of Jesus' boyhood with detail triple the length of Matthew's account, an account untouched by the other two Gospel writers. The human side of Jesus is first and foremost in Luke's Gospel.

Luke's genealogy shows us definitively that our Lord is the Son of Man (Luke 3:23-38). Luke's historical record moves backward from Jesus all the way to Adam, demonstrating Christ's inseparable connection with the human race. Contrast this with Matthew's lineage, which moves forward from Abraham and tracks through David, demonstrating Christ's fulfillment of prophecies as Messiah and King of the Jews. Or compare it with John's prologue which pushes into eternity past, before Adam and into the account of Christ's divine history as the Son of God (John 1:1-4).

We can rejoice exceedingly with Mary that she was “with child” and gave birth to a son who was also the “Son of the Most High” (Luke 1:31-32). Mary participated in Christ's humanity but in no way shared our Lord's divinity. God took initiative to become human, that we might be saved; this truth should strike a song of praise in every human heart. Mary spoke the “Magnificat,” a matchless song of honor to God (Luke 1:46-56). Zachariah soon joined the chorus (Luke 1:67-79), then the angels (Luke 2:14), the shepherds (Luke 2:20), the aged Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:29-32; 38), and the rugged prophet John (Luke 3:4-6). Then follows the genealogy, demonstrating that this same Savior is ours. The rest of the Gospel draws praise from our hearts with the ongoing melody of our Lord's humanity.

Luke shows us Jesus, the human who needed to pray. Prayerfulness is the outward demonstration of inner weakness before God and dependence on God. Only in Luke do we see Jesus praying at the scene of His baptism (Luke 3:21), praying in the wilderness (Luke 5:16), praying before He chose His disciples (Luke 6:12), praying when he was transfigured on the mountain (Luke 9:28-29), and even praying before he taught the “Lord's Prayer” (Luke 11:1).

Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is the devil.

Hebrews 2:14

Luke, too, emphasizes rather than spiritualizes the reality of physical need. The poor are upheld regularly throughout Luke's account where they are not often mentioned in the other Gospels. Jesus' parents were poor (Luke 2:24). Jesus preaches to the poor (Luke 7:22). The Lord tells parables about the poor (Luke 16:19-31) and blesses the poor (Luke 6:20). Sinners are central in the heart of God throughout the Gospel of Luke. Only Luke tells the story of the woman who anoints Jesus' feet with both perfume and tears (Luke 7:36-50). Only here do we learn of Zacchaeus, the rejected tax-gatherer (Luke 19:1-9); the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-gatherer (Luke 18:9-14); and the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). Perhaps most striking of all is that Luke is the only author who gives the account of the thief on the cross, who was given promise by the Savior at his side that they would soon be together in paradise (Luke 23:43).

Final Thought

Pinch yourself and know that this Good News is true. Fear not that you are human, for our Savior too took on flesh and bones. He is able to understand our weaknesses because He has been weak (Hebrews 5:7). He knows our temptations for He Himself was tempted (Hebrews 4:15). He has borne our sorrows in His heart and our sins in His body through the cross of suffering (Isaiah 53). Only in Luke's Gospel do we find the word "Savior" (Luke 1:47; 2:11) and "salvation" (Luke 1:69,71,77; 2:30; 3:6; 19:9). It is in Luke that we, for the first time in the New Testament, find the word "redemption" (Luke 1:68; 2:38; 24:21). Only in this one account of our Lord's life do we find the word *evangelizo* translated "to tell the good news"—some ten times! Let us receive the Good News and share it everywhere...God cares. He shared in our humanity that we might share in His glory (Hebrews 2:14-15). He is able to help us in our weakness, for He is the Son of Man (Hebrews 4:16).

Spending Time With God

This lesson, in the series "God's Good News," is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. PRAY, ASKING GOD FOR SPECIAL INSIGHT INTO HIS WORD.



Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. Write down one insight that was especially challenging or encouraging for you.

2. Read Luke 1:1-4. Describe the commitment Dr. Luke was making regarding the quality and precision of work he would accomplish in writing this Gospel.

3. Read Luke 1:5-25. Note the surprises Zacharias faced in just one day of temple service. On a scale of one to ten, how open are you for God to “do a new thing” in your life (Isaiah 43:19)? What might you hold back?

4. Read Luke 1:26-38. What do you consider to be the greatest miracle in this account?

Why?

5. Skim Luke 1:39-56. Note especially Mary's song of praise, called the “Magnificat.” Contemplate the goodness of God toward you, as demonstrated in this chapter of the Bible, and write your own short song of praise to God (even if it is only two or three sentences). Tell why you exalt and rejoice in the Lord.

Discussion (small group study)

6. Read Luke 1:57-80. Are the first words and the first song of praise to flow from Zacharias' mouth, after nine months of silence, expressive of a work done in the priest's heart?



How did this priest respond to God's fulfillment of His promises?

8. Read Luke 2:21-35. Describe Simeon. How was he comforted by meeting Jesus?

7. Read Luke 2:1-20. Why do you think God chose shepherds to be the only recorded public witnesses to Christ's birth (The wise men came a few months later, when the parents were settled in a home—Matthew 2:11)?

How was this encounter a comfort and challenge to Jesus' parents?

What does this account tell you about God's methods of dealing with men?

9a. Describe the encounter with Anna (Luke 2:36-38). It seemed that God gave just the amount of confirmation that Mary and Joseph would need at each turn in the road as they journeyed with God (The visit of the shepherds, the wise men, dreams, and now prophetic words from two godly persons). Does God seem to give you just enough confirmation for your journey of faith as well? Explain.

Can you think of other Biblical examples of humble people who became God's heroes?



SERIES

GOD'S GOOD NEWS | THE GOSPELS

LESSON 3

Jesus the Son of Man | Luke

9b. Can you describe a time when God gave you an external confirmation for something He had called you to do?

With which character in this parable do you most relate? Why?

10. Read Luke 2:41-52. This is the only significant account we have of Jesus' early years, and Luke 2:52 is our summary of the next 18 years before the Lord began His public ministry. Reflect on these 30 years of preparation for Christ's ministry. Jesus was not trained by a Rabbi, and yet in three years, His ministry impacted our world and eternity. Recognizing that we are all called "to the ministry" (Ephesians 4:11-13), what are some of the ways God trained you to work as His faithful servant?

12. Luke's Gospel is filled with parables and stories. Skim through the pages of this book and find one of your favorites. If time allows, tell why you made your choice.

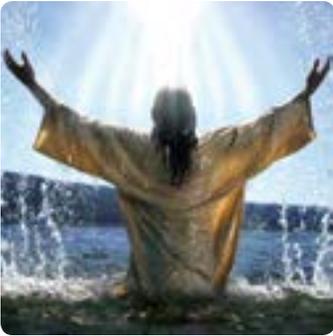
Digging Deeper (Further Study)

11. Read Luke 15:11-32. This is one of many parables that are unique to Luke. What is the central truth of this parable?

Scripture for Meditation

...The Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is His Name.

Luke 1:49



We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

2 Peter 3:8

This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

John 21:24



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"That You Might Believe"

Introduction

Among the world's great religions, only one is founded by a Person who claimed to be God. Islam's Mohammed never made such a claim. Nor did Confucius, Tao, Gandhi, Buddha, or Moses. It was the lowly carpenter from Nazareth who said, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30).

In the Gospel of John, we are brought face to face with Christ as the Son of God. Lest anyone missed Jesus' claim to divinity, here He declared Himself as the only Way to heaven (John 14:6), Who existed before Abraham (John 8:58), and Who lived a sinless life before the watching world (John 8:46).

What do you think of Christ? Does your viewpoint square with John's? Why should Jesus' claim to be God matter in your life anyway? We hope you will ponder these questions in this lesson.

The Gospel of John

It has generally been accepted that John wrote his Gospel last. He outlived the other disciples, all of whom likely wrote before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. The Apostle John was imprisoned for a time on the island of Patmos (Revelation 1:9) and then, according to early traditions, returned to Ephesus to serve as pastor in his later years.

The historian, Eusebius, records Clement of Alexandria as stating that John wrote to supplement the other Gospel writers. John describes numerous events, miracles, and discourses not mentioned by Matthew, Mark, or Luke. Indeed, the majority of John's material is unique. John seems to have taken the wonderful teachings of the other Gospels and brought them to closure around the great theme of Jesus as the Son of God. The other Gospels tell much about the good news Jesus presented. John, more than the rest, presents us Jesus as The Good News.

John, "the apostle whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20), knew Christ the best. He alone stood with Jesus through the test, not leaving the Lord in the dark hour of His betrayal (John 18:15-16). Now the beloved disciple calls people everywhere to become faithful believers in Jesus that they might have life. The foundational theme woven throughout this Gospel is stated clearly in John 20:31: "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

The Son of God

The Apostle John writes with a common simplicity about some of the deepest truths in all of Scripture. The themes that shape this marvelous Gospel are all rooted in the prologue, John 1:1-18. In the first four verses alone, we see Jesus as the "Word" (John 1:1), "God" (John 1:1), before all creation (John 1:2), co-creator (John 1:3), the "life" (John 1:4), and the "light of men" (John 1:4). John doesn't begin with or even include the nativity story. He reaches back into eternity past to show that Christ, God's Son, has no beginning and no end.

That Christ is the "Word," or the very expression of God the Father, is demonstrated throughout the Gospel. It reaches a climactic moment when Jesus confronts Philip's questioning attitude, saying, "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone

I and the Father are One.

John 10:30

who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father?'" (John 14:9).

That Christ is the eternal God, through whom all that is temporal has been created, is supported throughout the Gospel. We see the repeated claims of Jesus, for example, to be the great "I AM" (John 4:26; 6:20; 8:18, 24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5-8). This connection with the God of the Old Testament, the Creator and Sustainer of all life (Exodus 3:14) was so clear in the mind of the Jews that they sought to kill Jesus for "making himself equal with God" (John 5:18). The references to Jesus as the life and the light in this Gospel are numerous (e.g.: The "Life"—John 3:36; 4:14; 5:21-40; 6:27-68; 8:11-12; 10:10-25; 14:6; 17:2-3; 20:31. The "Light"—John 3:19-21; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35-46). These glorious descriptions of our Lord (Word, God, Creator, Life, Light), are built together throughout the book, cemented by the glue of Christ's signs and sermons, and become the very bridge on which we can move from our mundane perspectives toward a lofty and heavenly view of Jesus, the Son of God.

The Heavenly Perspective

In the Gospel of John, we find Christ performing numerous *signs*, meaning "miracles," designed to point people to the Father. Such signs were usually accompanied by Jesus' teaching so that people might understand and believe. While the term "signs" is repeated throughout the book (John 2:23; 3:2; 6:2, 26; 7:31; 9:16; 11:47; 12:37; 20:30), there were seven key miracles or signs that are central to the account (throughout Scripture, the number seven represents eternity and perfection).

1. Turning water into wine (John 2:1-11)
2. Healing the official's son (John 4:43-54)
3. Curing the man at the pool (John 5:1-47)
4. Feeding the five thousand (John 6:1-15)
5. Walking on the water (John 6:16-24)
6. Healing the man born blind (John 9:1-41)
7. Resurrection of Lazarus (John 11:1-45)

While John could have recorded many other signs, he chose these seven to demonstrate our Lord's divinity and to point the readers toward the only source of eternal salvation. In John's own words, "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30-31). Then, as if to make the point that the miraculous signs will continue in Jesus' name through the faith of the disciples, John inserted Jesus' final miracle through which He took opportunity to reinstate Peter for service (John 21:1-19).

Again we see the number seven, the number of the heavenlies, upholding the fantastic confession of Christ as the great "I AM." These "I AM" discourses are all unique to John. Each one provides clear and practical teaching that is so profound as to give insight for study, meditation and living to the Christian Church for all ages. Each discourse uniquely shows that Christ is not only preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom (Matthew), living the Gospel as a Servant (Mark), relating the Gospel as a Man (Luke), but that Christ is the Gospel...the very Son of God:

And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all the work of creating that He had done.

Genesis 2:3

1. I AM the bread of life (John 6:35, 48)
2. I AM the light of the world (John 8:12)
3. I AM the gate (John 10:9)
4. I AM the good shepherd (John 10:11, 14)
5. I AM the resurrection and the life (John 11:25)
6. I AM the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6)
7. I AM the true vine (John 15:1)

Whether John intended the prominent signs and discourses to each total seven, we cannot say. But that they point to Christ as the very expression of His father, we can affirm with certainty.

John saw fit to leave out the parables found in the other Gospels, along with the account of Jesus' early years, the genealogies, and most of the events of the public (Galilean) ministry so that he might focus on the more private, profound words Christ shared in his later (Judean) ministry. John 13-17 is sometimes referred to as the "holy of holies" of all Gospel accounts. Here, we press behind the veil and tread on sacred, holy ground. Here, we listen with joyous and fearful anticipation as God's Son prepares us to live for Him, through Him, and by Him until He returns to take us home.

Final Thought

John wrote his Gospel to bring closure to the most important issue you will ever face: Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that you might receive the eternal life He promises (John 1:12; 20:31)?

The brilliant Christian apologist and author, C.S. Lewis, stated in his book *Mere Christianity*, "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher...either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God."

What will you do with this Christ?

Spending Time With God

This lesson, in the series "God's Good News," is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. PRAY, ASKING GOD FOR SPECIAL INSIGHT INTO HIS WORD.



SERIES

GOD'S GOOD NEWS | THE GOSPELS

LESSON 4

Jesus the Son of God | John

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. Write down one insight that was especially challenging or encouraging for you.

2. Read John 1:1-5. Describe at least one profound thought about Christ that comes to you from these verses.

3. How did people receive Jesus (John 1:10-11)?

What rights were given to those who did receive Him (John 1:12-13)?

4. How does the writer describe Jesus in John 1:14-18?

5. Read John 1:29. Note some of the images of the “Lamb of God” in the following Scriptures: Genesis 22:7; Exodus 12:21; Isaiah 53:7; and Mark 14:12. Record some of the convicting truths that might have come to mind for Jews gathered around John when he presented Jesus in this manner.

Discussion (Small Group Study)

6. Read about Jesus' first public miracle (John 2:1-11). What does this story tell you about Jesus' view of marriage and weddings?

About Jesus' relationship with His mother?



About Jesus' power to operate in your difficult circumstances today?

Does anything stir up a righteous indignation within you today as you look at the world (or the Church) around you?

7. Read John 2:12-25. Why did Jesus cleanse the temple? How did He do so?

9. From John 5:16-18, why did Jewish leaders plot to kill Jesus?

Was He sinning when He expressed anger? Why or why not?

10. Notice Jesus' response (John 5:19-30). From this text, how might you answer someone who said, "I believe Jesus was a good honest example for us to follow—but I don't believe He was divine."?

8. Do you sometimes become filled with rage, and yet not sin? Explain.



11. If Jesus only claimed to be one of the world's prophets (like Mohammed or Buddha), but not God, how would your faith and/or Christianity be altered?

13. Find and contemplate the other great "I AM" statements in the Gospel of John (John 6:35; 8:12; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1). Choose one of your favorites and discuss how the imagery or implications of that statement encourages or challenges you personally.

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

12. See John 8:58. What would the phrase "I AM" bring to mind for the Jews (Exodus 3:14)?

Why did the Jews seek to kill Jesus (John 8:59)?

Scripture for Meditation

Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

John 1:12-13



For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:5

Introduction

The book of Acts is the only Biblical account focusing solely on the history of the early Church. It describes how Christians were oppressed and persecuted by the world while overcoming the world through the truth of the Gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Acts provides the bridge between the ministry of Jesus Christ and the letters of the Apostles. This historical account covers a span of more than thirty years, showing the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome. As is suggested by the title, Acts is a book about what God accomplished through these early believers. It is a book of action more than a book of doctrine. From Acts, we can learn essential principles about missions, church growth, and the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers.

Napoleon Bonaparte once said, “There are only two forces in the world, the sword and the spirit. In the long run, the sword will always be conquered by the spirit.” This maxim comes to life in the book of Acts. Here we find principles that can revive the Church of our day and set her back on her feet as a great influence on culture and society.

The Author and Date of Writing

1. While the author of Acts is not specifically stated, it is widely accepted that Luke, the “beloved physician,” penned this historical account as well as the gospel that bears his name. It is believed that Dr. Luke was the author for several reasons:
2. Both books are addressed to the same person, Theophilus (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1).
3. Both books are marked by the same vocabulary, theological perspective, and style of writing.
4. Evidence outside the Scriptures assigns authorship of this Gospel to Luke, including the Muratorian Canon (c. AD 170) and the words of historian Eusebius (c. AD 325).
5. Acts contains passages where the author uses the pronoun “we,” indicating that he was a traveling companion of the Apostle Paul (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21; 21:1-18). A comparison of Paul’s traveling companions with these sections reveals Luke as the most likely candidate.
6. The Gospels of Luke and Acts form two complementary parts to the greatest story every told. These two books might have eventually been joined as one large historical volume, if not for the limitation placed on writers by the scrolls upon which they wrote. Each book is the length of a large scroll, about 35 feet.
7. Luke was a careful historian who sought eyewitnesses for support of each written account. Accuracy was his first order of business (Luke 1:1-4). In the book of Acts, Luke mentions 95 different people from 54 cities and 32 countries. He drew from a wide circle and only made central to his writing that which was sure through evidence and testimony.



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On one occasion, while He was eating with them, He gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift My Father promised, which you have heard Me speak about.”

Acts 1:4

The Purpose and Content of the Book

Luke provided this historical record for several reasons. Like the roots of a tree, history provides a foundation for the present. Our identity is found in the formation and growth of the early Church. Here we find the story of the birth of the Church, the spread of the Gospel, the planting of congregations, and the original God-given pattern of evangelism and missions.

Lessons from the past become markers for the future. While circumstances and cultures are always changing, the courageous obedience of the early Apostles provides timeless impetus for the Church of today to chart out courses for expansion and growth for tomorrow.

Luke's account provided a defense for the Gospel. In fact, embedded in the Acts account are defenses given for the faith to both Jews and Greeks (Acts 4:8-12; 25:8-11). Some scholars have suggested that Acts may have been penned with the primary intent of providing Paul a comprehensive statement for defense in his trial at Rome.

The full title of this book is *The Acts of the Apostles*. Here we find a primary focus on Peter and Paul, with associates John the Apostle, Stephen, Philip, Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, and Luke. The two major actors in this real-life drama, however, are Peter and Paul. The book can be divided in two parts based on a shift in focus from Peter (Acts 1-12) to Paul (Acts 13-28). The first half centers in Jerusalem, and the second portion moves from Antioch to the far reaches of Rome.

The Acts of the Holy Spirit

It has been said that the title of the book could also be *The Acts of the Holy Spirit*. The Holy Spirit is mentioned over 60 times. It opens with Jesus' promise of the coming Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-8), followed by the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2). Through this momentous event, Jews from many nations received Christ as Lord and were later dispersed to bring the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Pentecost, like a huge blessing dropped from heaven on the quiet waters of the earth, soon extended like ripples in ever-widening circles. Christ predicted and ordained this pattern in Acts 1:8, where He promised: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Based on this

verse, we may also divide the book into triads, each of which demonstrate the power of the Holy Spirit to embolden His people as witnesses:

- the Gospel in Jerusalem (Acts 1-7);
- the Gospel in Judea and Samaria (Acts 8-12); and
- the Gospel to the Ends of the Earth (Acts 13-28).

Acts 1:8 describes an inseparable link between the power of the Holy Spirit and our responsibility to be witnesses of the resurrection. From this verse and from the unfolding drama in Acts, we find support for the notion that anywhere the Holy Spirit is in operation, Christ will

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the Word of Truth, the Gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 1:13

be proclaimed and honored. In the words of our Lord, “He (the Spirit) will bring glory to me...” (John 16:14). From the book of Acts, we can deduce another challenging insight: We cannot be effective witnesses without the power of the Holy Spirit. We can produce programs, but God provides the power. We can teach the truth, but the Holy Spirit gives light. We can work for God, but it will only be fruitful work if the Holy Spirit is working in and through us. A few such examples include:

- the Spirit’s witness through the Pentecost blessing (Acts 2:4);
- the Spirit’s anointing on Peter’s preaching (Acts 4:8a);
- the Spirit’s boldness for the early disciples’ witness (Acts 4:31);
- the Spirit’s gifting for the first appointed Deacons (Acts 6:3);
- the Spirit’s guidance to Philip, the traveling evangelist (Acts 8:29); and
- the Spirit’s grace upon the ever-growing Church of Christ (Acts 9:31).

Final Thought

Our Lord was a witness to His Father. We are witnesses for Jesus, telling others of His death, resurrection, and of the gift of eternal salvation. We are not left alone in this task. Jesus promised to give us “another Counselor” (John 14:16-17). Even as Jesus assisted His disciples, teaching them how to be witnesses for a period of three and a half years, so does He assist us through the Holy Spirit. In His earthly body, Jesus limited Himself to 12 close disciples. However, today He touches lives without limit. God has created a church worldwide, and we have countless comrades in ministry! Jesus walked bodily with His followers for a limited period of time; Christ promises us that our new Counselor will be with us forever (John 14:16)!

Spending Time With God

This lesson in the series, “The Acts of the Holy Spirit,” is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.



SERIES

ACTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT | THE EARLY CHURCH

LESSON 5

Acts of the Holy Spirit | Acts 1-12

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. Write down one important thing you learned or one question that remains unanswered for you regarding the New Testament.

How is that purpose just as relevant today as it was 2,000 years ago? Can you think of a specific area (or areas) in your life in which you would like more of the Holy Spirit's power?

2. Read Acts 1:1-5. Why were the disciples told to remain in Jerusalem after Christ's ascension?

4. From Acts 2:1-13, what were some of the initial evidences of the outpouring of God's Spirit?

Do you think the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" was a one-time event, reserved only for the early church? Explain. (Do not spend too much time on this question, as it is a topic of great discussion and differing opinions throughout the Church today.)

What might be the dangers of seeking to build a program or movement based on evidences? Give examples if possible.

3. From Acts 1:6-9, what was the primary purpose of the coming Holy Spirit?

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. What are the important points of the prophecy Peter quotes from Joel (Acts 2:14-21)?



Do you think portions of this prophecy are yet to be fulfilled? If possible, support your view with Scripture.

6. It has been noted that the book of Acts is not only a record of the “acts” of the Apostles but of the “acts” of the Holy Spirit. If you have time, skim Acts 2:22-9:31, making note of some of the acts of the Spirit of God. Can you find a central theme underlying the work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:14)?

7. Skim Acts 2:22-7 - 9:31. Do you see similar acts of the Holy Spirit in the Church today? Why? or Why not? (Keep in mind that this can be a controversial topic)

8. In the same passage, we see people acting with great boldness and a willingness to proclaim their faith in the face of persecution, or even possible martyrdom. In what areas of your personal faith walk have you experienced boldness?

How far you willing to go in professing your faith?

9. Read Acts 9:32–10:48 and summarize what happened.

What was the special significance of the Holy Spirit falling on this group of people (see especially 10:47 & 11:15-18)?



From what you know of the history of the Jewish people, why would this event become monumental for the early church, which was predominately Jewish?

10. Read Acts 11:1-18. How was this a breakthrough for the Kingdom of God?

How was this breakthrough dependent on the disciples' sensitivity to the working of the Holy Spirit?

Can you think of ways that we should be more sensitive to the Holy Spirit's work in our lives and in the church? Explain.

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

11. From Acts 11:19-30, note the descriptions of Barnabas and Agabus as it relates to the Holy Spirit. How might an onlooker describe your relationship to God's Spirit? Do you wish for more evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in your life?

12. What do you wish people would see when they examine your life and ministry? Pray for the work of the Holy Spirit to grow and deepen in your life, your small group, your ministry, your church, and throughout the world.

Scripture for Meditation

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Acts 1:8



But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Acts 1:8



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"Your Witness"

Introduction

Oswald Chambers once wrote, "The special person called to do missionary work is every person who is a member of the church of Christ." Henry Martyn said, "The Spirit of Christ is the spirit of missions, and the nearer we get to him, the more intensely missionary we must become." In short, you and I are called to be missionaries, each in our own context, each in our own way.

The book of Acts is the most trustworthy missionary manual ever written. It is God's inspired account of the earliest missionary endeavors. The first half of Acts (chapters 1-12) focuses on Peter, shows Church growth beginning in Jerusalem, and follows Peter and his associates as they bring the Gospel to Judea and Samaria. The second half of Acts (chapters 13-28) focuses on Paul, shows missionary outreach springing from Antioch, and follows Paul and his associates as they carry the Gospel to all the nations.

As we work for God's Kingdom today, we should look to God's original pattern for missionary activity in the book of Acts and seek to glean and apply principles for our lives and ministries.

Four Key Factors in God's Missionary Enterprise

The Gospel

From beginning to end, the motivation, measure, and method for missionary efforts must be grounded in the Gospel. Before being brought to Antioch to begin his ministry, Paul spent years in Tarsus, his hometown, studying Scripture and learning, deeply, the message of God's Gospel. Everywhere Paul went became a preaching and teaching platform to present the message of salvation. Paul's goal was to lead people to the Savior, to make them strong in their faith, and to build God's Church. When our own mission enterprises and ministry endeavors lack a sharp evangelistic edge, it may be time to study anew the priority given to the Gospel by the early Church.

God's Leading

Paul and his companions were always careful to search for God's leading at all times and in all places. You can see this from the very start, as Paul and Barnabas were first sent out as missionaries from the Church at Antioch. In the context of worship, fasting, and prayer, the Church received guidance from God: "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off" (Acts 13:2b-3).

Paul considered strategy important, but his plans would be set aside in a moment when they conflicted with specific guidance from God. During his second missionary journey, Paul's plan to enter Bithynia (modern-day Turkey) was preempted by God's call for him to press on to Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10). Paul made it his standard, not only to be open to God's guidance, but also to seek it with all his heart. We would do well to copy his example.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.

Colossians 3:23

Maximized Opportunities

Paul applied healthy doses of wisdom and willingness in every effort to further the Kingdom of Light. He poured his life into people, making disciples. His message was never compromised but always contextualized—he did all things that by all means he might save some (1 Corinthians 9:22). Paul brought people together, forming churches. He centered his efforts on the most influential cities, providing beachheads for the Gospel. He followed up his efforts, assuring success. Never ambitious to make a name for himself, Paul spared no effort to glorify God.

Relentless Courage

A weaker, softer man would have given up along the way. From beginning to end, Paul faced challenges and opposition, persecution and rejection. He saw obstacles as opportunities, suffering made him stronger, and he found reason to rejoice in God no matter where he was, in freedom or in prison. This was not a self-made confidence but a God-inspired courage! Paul had a strong sense of the sovereignty of God upon which he based his life and ministry.

Paul's courage seemed to have no bounds. He suffered perhaps more than any New Testament character other than Christ himself. When he first began preaching, there was a plot on his life (Acts 9:23-25). Even believers mistrusted him (Acts 9:26). His work was opposed in almost every locality (Acts 14:2-5; 17:13; 19:26). He faced opposition from Satan (Acts 13:8; 16:16-18) and men. He was mocked (Acts 17:18, 32), beaten and imprisoned (Acts 16:19-24), slandered (Acts 24:5-9), and even stoned (Acts 14:19). He knew the bite of the snake (Acts 28:3-4) and the sting of the whip (2 Corinthians 11:24). He was eventually forsaken by all (2 Timothy 1:15, 4:10-16). What was the key to his strength and endurance? It was his complete trust in God's guidance and support. In Paul's words: "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13).

Four Journeys For God's Kingdom

Paul embarked on four journeys for the sake of the Gospel. The first three were voluntary; the fourth was required by government mandate and enforced with chains. Yet God orchestrated all four of these journeys.

Paul's first journey (Acts 13:2–15:35) included Barnabas and John Mark, and covered five cities in Asia Minor: Paphos, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. We can observe the first Christian enterprise for foreign missions and find the first rejected missionary candidate, John Mark, sent back near the beginning of the trip. In Paphos, we see the first recorded miracle of Paul—the temporary blinding of the Jewish false prophet. In Antioch, we have Paul's first recorded sermon. At Lystra, Paul's tenacity was demonstrated as he pressed on for the Lord, even after being stoned! At the close of this first missionary journey, Paul reported to the Church in Jerusalem how God's message was reaching the world of the Gentiles. Jerusalem leaders struggled for God's guidance and cautiously gave Paul and the new Gentile converts their blessing.

Paul's second journey (Acts 15:36–18:22) included companions Paul, Silas, and Timothy, and covered the cities from the first journey in Asia Minor and into Macedonia. While in Troas, Paul received the Macedonian vision. In Philippi, he was miraculously released from prison. In Thes-

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Ephesians 2:10

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

2 Corinthians 5:20

salonica and Berea, Paul saw success mixed with persecution. In Athens, he preached on Mars Hill to intellectuals and skeptics. Paul stayed in Corinth 18 months and befriended Aquila and Priscilla. He left Aquila and Priscilla to work in Ephesus, while he rushed back to Antioch.

Paul's third journey (Acts 18:23–21:16) focused primarily on Ephesus, where he resided for two years. Other cities included Troas, Miletus, Tyre, and Caesarea. Throughout this trip, the Holy Spirit warned Paul that bonds awaited him in Jerusalem. Paul used this as an opportunity to prepare the churches for challenges they would face without their founder. His visit in Miletus with the Ephesian elders was most touching (Acts 20:13-38).

Paul's fourth journey (Acts 21:17–28:31) began in Jerusalem and ended in Rome. His imprisonment was an open door to preach to guards and kings. His isolation provided the impetus to write his final letters to the churches.

Final Thought

If the letters of the Apostles provide teaching by doctrine, then the Acts of the Apostles provide teaching by example. Paul sought to imitate the example of Christ. In turn, he urged believers to imitate him (1 Corinthians 4:16).

We may not have Paul's gifts, personality, or calling, but we serve the same God! Like Paul, let us seek to tell others the Good News, dependent on God as our guide, making the most of every opportunity, with constant trust in God for the results.

Spending Time With God

This lesson in the series, "The Acts of the Holy Spirit," is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.



Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. Write down one important truth or challenge you gleaned from the book of Acts.

2. We know that Acts 1-12 begins in Jerusalem, but what is the beginning point for the second half of this book (Read Acts 13:1-3 to find out.)?

Describe the events surrounding Paul's being sent out on his first missionary journey.

Do you see principles/guidelines here that today's church seems to neglect? Explain.

3. From the account of Paul and Barnabas in Cyprus (Acts 13:4-12), in what ways were these early missionaries striking examples for missions today?

Do you know any missionaries who have experienced the power of God in such dramatic ways? Explain.

4. You are on a mission, as God's ambassador (2 Corinthians 5:20). Considering your answers to questions 2 and 3 above, what practical steps or spiritual disciplines might you embrace to better fulfill your mission?



Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. Read Acts 13:13-52.

a. What context was the key entry-point for the Gospel in these early days (Acts 14-15)?

Why do you think Paul chose this as his place for preaching and teaching?

b. Compare the content of this message to Jews with Paul's sermon in Athens to Greeks (Acts 17:22-32). How did the two differ in approach and content?

c. Compare both messages with Paul's sermon to Roman officials (Acts 25 or 26). How does this presentation differ?

d. Which of these approaches to presenting the message of God's salvation do you think would be most effective in our society today? Why?

6. Read Acts 14:21-28. Find one or more key principles for missionary outreach and ministry from these verses. Are these principles relevant for today? Why or why not?

7. Skim through Acts 16-21, taking care to note some of Paul's sufferings for the sake of the gospel. Now read 2 Corinthians 11:16-33.

a. What parallels do you see between Luke's account in Acts and Paul's account in his letter to the Corinthians?



b. What suffering have you faced for the sake of the Gospel?

c. Why do you think some restrictions were still placed on the Gentile converts (Acts 15:19-20; 28-29)?

c. Who do you know personally who is suffering for Christ's sake? Take time to pray for those who suffer for their faith, worldwide. Pray for yourself and other Christians to become emboldened by the Holy Spirit to become more effective witnesses for Christ.

d. Would such restrictions be important today?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

8. Read Acts 15:1-18.

a. What was the reason for this council at Jerusalem?

e. What timeless principles can be drawn from this account in Acts 15?

b. From Acts 15:19-29, what was the result of the council?

Scripture for Meditation

However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

Acts 20:24



BNEXT Amazing Journey Leader's Guide

This BNEXT Leader's Guide section is for facilitator/leaders. Please read this information before you begin. As the facilitator of a small group, you will have the experience of not only sharing this journey through God's Word with others, but of aiding them along the way. The purpose of this Leader's Guide is to aid you in your role as facilitator. You do not need previous experience or special training to lead a group. Your primary responsibility is to serve as facilitator, not to teach.

MATERIALS NEEDED FOR A SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCE

The BNEXT Study / Amazing Journey includes a weekly video of 15–20 minutes in length. The video provided is on a flash drive, so make sure you have USB-compatible technology. Please review the video *before* each class. Here's a materials checklist:

- TV or computer with a USB 2.0 (or faster) port
- For larger groups, a projector is needed (and may even enhance a small group experience)
- Amazing Journey videos (on USB flash-drive)
- This Participant's Guide (one per participant)
- Bible for each participant, preferably the same version (these studies use the NIV)
- Pen or pencil for each participant
- Watch or clock to monitor time

ABOUT THIS STUDY

The BNEXT study series' are versatile and may be used by individuals, small groups, or even entire congregations. The use of a small group as part of the program will enhance each one's experience. BNEXT studies have successfully been used in a variety of environments, including home groups, churches, prisons, and businesses.

Total time for each weekly lesson should be about 1 to 1 ½ hours in length, which includes time for group discussion and video viewing. Suggested lesson plans with timing guidelines are found at the end of this Guide.

If you use this study in a large group or an entire church, there are two possible approaches. One approach is for the entire group to first gather for a welcome and opening prayer, after which participants can meet in small groups for discussion using the BNEXT questions. After a specified amount of time, all would reconvene into a larger setting to watch the video together. Alternately, the flash-drive videos may be made available for each small group, in which case, after the opening and welcome time, everyone can move to groups and remain there until the end of the day's session.

ABOUT SMALL GROUPS

Group Size: Experience has shown that a group size of 10–12 people works best. If your group is significantly larger, we suggest that you create additional small groups.

Group Leaders: Each group should have its own facilitator/leader. It is good to also have at least one back-up facilitator in case the primary facilitator is absent. If you have several groups meeting at one time, decide who will be responsible for facilitating the larger group gatherings for the welcome time and so forth.

ABOUT FACILITATOR/LEADERS

The ideal small group facilitator/leader should have:

- A hunger for God's Word and a deep desire to see others grow in their knowledge of God and His Word.
- A commitment to the group, emphasizing seeing the program through to the end.
- The ability to facilitate and moderate discussion rather than teach.
- A willingness to follow the "Discussion Group Rules of Engagement" (found in this Participant's Guide).

As facilitator, pray for your small group. Spend time preparing your own lesson and be thinking about how to present the questions to the class. You should attempt to answer all of the questions before the class. Group members should be encouraged to at least answer the first two sets of questions: Devotion (Personal Study) and Discussion (Small Group Study) questions, before each class, to enhance their learning experience. Even better, encourage them to find time to complete Digging Deeper (Further Study) questions on their own. One of the goals of this approach is to encourage participants to develop the habit of delving into Scripture and studying on a regular basis.

You are not expected to be a Biblical expert. You are a facilitator, so resist the attempt to teach. You are there to guide the group, keep them on track, and avoid getting caught up in doctrinal debates. These lessons are designed to easi-

ly be used by a first-time leader as well as an experienced leader. If you want to facilitate the group with a broadened background knowledge, see our "Background Study Option" below.

Recognize that not everyone is comfortable answering questions. Gently keep discussion going by asking questions like, "Does anyone else have something to add?" It can be helpful at times to have a volunteer read Scripture texts that are referred to in the questions.

Recognize and affirm all who contribute to the discussion. Do not dismiss someone's answer as wrong. If an answer is obviously off-base, thank them for their answer, then ask what others think. Remind the group to let Scripture interpret Scripture.

If you feel that a certain statement or question is inappropriate for your group, you may omit it or at least recognize that not everyone needs to answer it. However, do not be afraid of letting the group tackle tough topics.

BACKGROUND STUDY OPTIONS

Again, facilitators are not expected to be Biblical experts. If the group looks to you for an answer you do not have, it is perfectly fine to say, "I'm not sure. Perhaps we can all think about that one and bring it up again next week?" Or, "Let's bring this one up to the larger group when there is time allotted for such discussion," or, "Let's see if this doesn't answer itself over the weeks as we continue our study. Remember, the Bible interprets itself."

For extra study, you may wish to approach your pastor, or to read commentaries and use other resources. The internet contains a wealth of information ... and also disinformation. Some internet sites that provide reliable (and free) commentaries and articles include: biblegateway.com, biblestudytools.com, biblehub.com, and blueletterbible.org.

Another useful source of general Biblical knowledge is *The Essential Bible Companion*, by the same contributors of our Bible

in 90 Days study series: John Walton, Mark Strauss, and Ted Cooper Jr., Zondervan Publishing (also available as an e-book).

LEADING THE CLASS

First Class

Decide where you want to meet weekly and decide on a time. Once this has been done, actively publicize the *BNEXT Amazing Journey* study throughout all your circles — at your church, workplace, friends, family, etc. There are some free publicity aids on our website at ScriptureAwakening.com/bnext/freebies/.

The first class is unique in that the participant will not have anything to prepare. Use this time for getting to know one another and to introduce the BNEXT lesson format. There is an 18-minute BNEXT introduction video that accompanies this first lesson. Before showing the introduction video, we recommend:

1. Opening prayer, welcome, and introduction of members (10 minutes)
 - a. Think of something brief each participant could say about themselves such as: “Tell us something unique about yourself.” Or perhaps, “What do you hope to get out of this BNEXT study?” Or, “This first lesson will provide an overview of the Bible. How comfortable are you with the Bible as a whole? Do you think you can benefit by learning more about each of its books and sections?”
 - b. Remind them to keep their answers brief (one minute or less).
2. Handout materials and give an overview (7 minutes)
 - a. Discuss the format of BNEXT Amazing Journey:
 - Reading of a specific book(s) or chapters of a book of the Bible.
 - Lesson commentary and questions (at least the Devotion and Discussion questions, and ideally, more) to be completed individually through the week.
 - Meet weekly to watch a 20-minute video and to go

through the Discussion questions (and if time allows, the Digging Deeper questions).

- b. Review the “Rules of Engagement” (found in the front of this Participant's Guide).
 - c. Ask if there are any questions.
3. Discuss the study you will be doing (15 minutes)
 - a. Inform class of how many weeks you will be meeting to cover the study and what date will be your last date for this study.
 - b. Ask the group, “What do you know about [insert study's Bible book(s) name(s) such as Genesis].
 - c. Ask the group, “What do you hope to have answered about (Genesis)?”
 4. Watch the BNEXT Amazing Journey Introduction and Overview video (18 minutes)
 5. Video discussion (5 minutes)
 - a. Ask if there are one or two participants who have a comment on the video or who may have learned something new from the video.
 - b. Remind them to keep their answers brief to allow others to respond.
 6. Closing prayer (5 minutes)
 - a. If time is short, then as the leader, pray for the group.
 - b. If you have more time, you may ask if there are any prayer requests and either pray on behalf of the group or open it up for the group to pray.
 7. Dismissal

Subsequent Classes

1. Opening prayer, welcome, and introduction of any new participants (5 minutes)
 - a. If there are new members, have them introduce themselves. Remind them to be brief (one minute or less).

- b. Think of a good ice-breaker that somehow relates to the study. For example, if you are about to watch a video on the Exodus from Israel: “Why do you think the Exodus was important?”, or “From what you know about the Exodus, how does it relate to the work of Christ on the cross?” Remind them to keep their answers short. Set a time limit for this opening section; not everyone needs to answer.
 - c. If you think it's necessary, remind the group of the “Rules of Engagement” in the front of this Participant's Guide.
 2. Discuss lesson questions (20 minutes)
 - a. Ask if there are any Devotion questions that people in the group would like to discuss. These are the questions they have been encouraged to complete on their own prior to the class.
 - b. Give primary attention to the Discussion questions, which are designed to promote good discussion.
 - c. If time permits, you may wish to use one or more of the Digging Deeper questions.
 3. Watch the BNEXT Amazing Journey video (about 20 minutes)
 4. Video discussion (10 minutes)

Ask what participants may have learned or found interesting in the video.
 5. Closing prayer (5 minutes)
 - a. If time is short, then as the leader, pray for the group.
 - b. If you have more time, you may ask if there are any prayer requests and either pray on behalf of the group or open it up for the group to pray.
 6. Dismissal