



Acts

April 6 - May 3, 2015

Mountain Brook Baptist Church

www.mbbc.org



Acts

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Project 119 is a Bible reading initiative of Mountain Brook Baptist Church. Our hope is that every member of our church body would be encouraged in his or her relationship with Jesus Christ through the regular reading of God's Word. This reading plan on the book of Acts is the next installment in the Project 119 series. The plan features a devotional thought for each week that will provide you with a framework for reading the assigned chapters. The plan covers one chapter of Acts each day of the week for four weeks. To learn more about Project 119 and to access previous plans, visit www.mbbc.org/project119.

ACTS

As Dr. Dortch writes in the first devotion in this reading guide, "Acts is the original church history." In the book of Acts we find a historical account of how the gospel spread throughout the world through the ministry of the apostles. For this reason, the book is often referred to as "The Acts of the Apostles." The book begins with the resurrected Jesus commissioning his disciples to be witnesses even to the ends of the earth and the disciples receiving the Holy Spirit that they might be empowered to fulfill this mission. Acts ends with the Apostle Paul awaiting trial in Rome. In between, we read the gripping story of how the Lord moved powerfully among Jesus' first followers to establish the Church and take the good news of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. As you read the book of Acts, ask God to show you how you can be involved in the ongoing mission of testifying to the salvation that is available to all who place their faith in Jesus Christ. There is nothing special about the people we read of in the book of Acts. They were normal people like us, whom God used in mighty ways. May God graciously use us to tell others of the salvation that is available to all through faith in Jesus Christ.



Acts 1-7

April 6-12, 2015

Dr. Doug Dortch

The book of Acts is the original “church history.” It recounts the movement of the Christian witness “from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Written by Luke, the author of the third Gospel, Acts continues Luke’s account of the Jesus story by emphasizing the unshakeable confidence believers in Christ possess as they point toward the good future God has for them in the power of His Holy Spirit.

The first seven chapters focus on the beginnings of the church movement, and, in particular, its numerical growth, as it moves out into the world to speak boldly the good news of Christ. There is the Ascension story in the first chapter, which answers the question of where Jesus went after his resurrection and how his followers picked up the pieces to prepare for what they believed would be his eventual return. The second chapter contains the story of Pentecost and the indwelling of the promised Holy Spirit, which inspired Jesus’ disciples to proclaim the gospel in ways that everyone present that day could understand. The third chapter recounts how Jesus’ followers were empowered to perform the same life-changing miracles that authenticated the ministry of their master, and the fourth chapter emphasizes the power of prayer and the generosity of a Christ-centered community. The fifth chapter addresses the threats that arose against the fledgling church, both internal and external, and how faithfulness to the Spirit’s direction protected them from every one. The sixth chapter introduces the role of servant leaders (deacons) who made sure that no one in the fellowship went without, and how one of those seven, Stephen, became the first martyr (“witness” in the Greek), who would show the extent to which those first believers were called upon to go in order to make sure the cause of Christ was sufficiently advanced.

As you read these first seven chapters, notice the boldness of those first disciples as they were empowered by the Holy Spirit. Then, ask yourself the question: “What evidence of the Spirit’s presence and power does my life manifest?” Our day is perhaps more like the day the book of Acts describes as any other has ever been. Allow your reading of this narrative of the church’s beginning to inspire you to do what you can where the Spirit leads you to turn your little part of the world “upside down” (Acts 17:6) for the cause of Christ. That’s the only way that the story will go on, hearts (continued on next page)



Acts 1-7

April 6-12, 2015
Dr. Doug Dortch

continue to be turned to the Lord, and the church in general and ours in particular strengthened in the process.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

MONDAY, APRIL 6	ACTS 1
TUESDAY, APRIL 7	ACTS 2
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8	ACTS 3
THURSDAY, APRIL 9	ACTS 4
FRIDAY, APRIL 10	ACTS 5
SATURDAY, APRIL 11	ACTS 6
SUNDAY, APRIL 12	ACTS 7



Acts 8-14

April 13-19, 2015

Mary Splawn

Spontaneity has its place, but I like a plan. That's one reason I like the book of Acts. It starts with a plan for the gospel to go to the ends of the earth by the power of the Holy Spirit through the witness of the disciples (Acts 1:8). In Acts 8-14, we see God's plan for the gospel to go forth in action.

Acts 8 begins in Jerusalem with some stirring words, "And Saul was there, giving approval to his death [the stoning of Stephen - the first Christian martyr]." It could seem as if the stoning of Stephen and other persecution incurred by Christians would be a deterrent to God's plan, yet; the opposite is true. "Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went," through Judea and even to the ends of the earth (v. 4, see also Acts 11:19-21).

This reminds me of an important truth about God's plans - they cannot be thwarted! Remember the Old Testament story of Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his brothers ... and later helped save his family. Genesis 50:20 records, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." In the same way, God planned for the good news about the Lord Jesus to go forth to the nations, and in spite of (or because of) persecution, his plan comes to pass.

The story of Saul's conversion in Acts 9 reminds us of another important truth about God, that only he can change the hearts of men (Ezekiel 36:26, see also 1 Cor. 3:7). Even Saul (also called Paul), who orchestrated the persecution and killing of Christians, could be changed by the Lord and used mightily for his kingdom. No one is too far gone.

In fact, these chapters remind us that Paul, who claims to be chief among sinners (1 Tim. 1:15), is an integral part of God's plan! **This reminds us of the truth that God is always at work around us, preparing the way for the gospel to go forth (John 5:17).** Before Paul even confessed faith in Christ, God was preparing him for the task of spreading the message about Jesus. Once Paul understood the true identity of Jesus, he could clearly articulate God's plan for the Messiah through the Old Testament because of the special training he had to teach the Old Testament law (Acts 22:3)! As you read Acts 13, notice how Paul traces God's plan for redemption throughout history with its culmination in the forgiveness of sins found in Christ's atoning death.

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Acts 8-14

April 13-19, 2015

Mary Splawn

As you read these chapters in Acts, ask God to speak to you through the Scriptures. And look for truths about God in the pages of the Bible, truths like God's plans cannot be thwarted, God can change the hearts of people, and God is always at work! Then, apply these truths to your life situations.

Finally, remember that as believers (like Philip, Paul, Peter and other followers of Christ mentioned in these passages), we are called to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. Make a plan for how you'll be involved in building God's kingdom this week. And, be open and ready to seemingly spontaneous opportunities to share the good news about Jesus (Acts 8:26-40). For you can trust that God has planned them all along.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

MONDAY, APRIL 13	ACTS 8
TUESDAY, APRIL 14	ACTS 9
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15	ACTS 10
THURSDAY, APRIL 16	ACTS 11
FRIDAY, APRIL 17	ACTS 12
SATURDAY, APRIL 18	ACTS 13
SUNDAY, APRIL 19	ACTS 14



Acts 15-21

April 20-26, 2015

Wayne Splawn

What are your hopes and dreams in life? Depending on your age, many things probably come to mind when you think about your answer to this question. Maybe you hope to make a sports team or graduate from high school. Perhaps your dream is to attain a certain job or run a marathon. Our hopes and dreams in life include both personal and professional goals that will probably change greatly over the course of our lives. But, is there one overarching, primary goal in life that should remain constant regardless of your age or the circumstances you face?

I believe that we find the answer to this question in Acts 20:24. In this passage, Paul identifies the one thing he most wants to accomplish in life. Paul writes,

But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. (ESV)

Paul's primary goal in life was to testify to the good news of the grace of God. He was so captivated by the good news of Jesus that he was determined to do all that he could to help others hear this message. So, how did Paul's determination to testify to the grace of the gospel impact his life? We can identify at least three areas in Acts 15-21.

First, Paul had a desire to clearly articulate and faithfully apply the gospel. In Acts 15, Paul appeared before the Jerusalem Council to argue that Gentiles did not have to be circumcised in order to become full-fledged members of God's people. Many of the first Christians were Jewish and had continued to follow many of their Jewish customs after coming to faith in Christ. However, many were mistakenly teaching that such observance was a critical part of the gospel message. Paul knew that such teaching was not compatible with the heart of the gospel message. God shows no distinction between Jews and Gentiles. All are saved through faith in Christ alone and nothing essential to salvation can be added to one's confession of faith in Jesus. So, Paul passionately defended the gospel so that the Church might accurately testify to the gospel of the grace of God.
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Acts 15-21

April 20-26, 2015

Wayne Splawn

Second, Paul was willing to suffer and endure hardship for the gospel. As Paul preached the gospel of God's grace, many were threatened by his challenge of the status quo. And those who stood to lose power, profit or prestige if people accepted Paul's message often violently opposed him. However, in the face of such resistance, Paul remained faithful.

Finally, we see that Paul longed for people to hear the gospel and respond in faith. In Acts 17, Paul proclaims the gospel to two very different groups. In verses 10-15, he reasoned from the Scriptures with some Jews who lived in Berea. In verses 16-32, Paul took a very different approach in Athens as he presented the gospel to Stoic philosophers. In every cultural context, Paul creatively shared the good news of Jesus in a way that others could understand because he desperately wanted people to hear and believe the gospel.

Over the course of your life, your hopes and dreams will surely change. Many of your dreams may be realized and others may always seem just out of reach. However, if in every season of your life you make it your aim to testify to the good news of the grace of God, you can be assured that you will accomplish things of eternal value.

As you read Acts 15-21 this week, ask God to show you how you might more effectively use your life to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

- How can you grow in your study of the Scriptures so that you develop a clearer understanding of the gospel?
- What steps do you need to take to share the gospel with others even in if it means that you will face opposition?
- How can you become a better student of the culture in which you live so that you might more effectively share the gospel in a way that others can understand?

May we each arrive at the end of our lives and say with Paul that our greatest accomplishment was that we testified to the good news of the grace of God that has been given to us through faith in Jesus Christ.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

MONDAY, APRIL 20	ACTS 15	FRIDAY, APRIL 24	ACTS 19
TUESDAY, APRIL 21	ACTS 16	SATURDAY, APRIL 25	ACTS 20
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 22	ACTS 17	SUNDAY, APRIL 26	ACTS 21
THURSDAY, APRIL 23	ACTS 18		



Acts 22-28

April 27-May 3, 2015

Hayden Walker

"Life can only be understood backwards, but must be lived forwards." This is perhaps the most famous quote by Soren Kierkegaard. He was a Danish theologian who lived in the early half of the nineteenth century. Kierkegaard articulated what we have all experienced. In fact, in our own day and time, one frequently hears the phrase "Hindsight is 20/20!" There have certainly been times in my life when I wish I would have known the outcome from the beginning!

However it is phrased, the message is the same: we often can't understand what is happening in our lives until it is well in the past.

In Acts 22-28, Paul had a unique experience with Jesus that demonstrates a reversal of our common experience. Jesus appeared to Paul in Acts 23:11. He instructed Paul to be encouraged. This was a timely word we can be sure, for Paul spends the duration of these chapters imprisoned. Furthermore, Jesus told Paul during this appearance that Paul would testify in Rome.

This word from the Lord surely helped Paul to have 20/20 foresight. Paul got the rare gift of understanding and living forwards. He knew what his future held: a trip to Rome.

Though there was a plot to kill Paul in Jerusalem, Paul had no reason to fear. He knew it would not come to pass because Jesus had ordained a visit to Rome. Although Felix left Paul in prison for two years without a fair trial, Paul endured knowing he had an appointment in Rome. While testifying before Festus, Paul appealed to Caesar. Festus sent him onward to Rome, a trip Jesus promised years before. Not even a shipwreck in Malta or the venom of a viper could thwart God's plan for Paul to share the gospel in Rome.

Can you imagine the comfort Paul must have experienced during these very difficult years and situations? According to the standards of the world, nothing was going Paul's way. However, according to God's plan, everything was under control. Paul knew he would make it safely to Rome because Jesus said so. Paul knew when he arrived in Rome, he would have the opportunity to share the good news of the Jesus with many people. This is fulfilled in Acts 28.

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Acts 22-28

April 27-May 3, 2015

Hayden Walker

God keeps his promises to his people. He is in control of every situation, even if it appears to be out of control. We may not have 20/20 foresight for every particular situation in our lives, but we do have a special kind of understanding. We may not know what tomorrow holds, but we do know the one who holds our every tomorrow, Jesus Christ. We can live with courage, purpose and hope because we know that we belong to Jesus whose plans will not be thwarted. As the old hymn puts it, "Because He lives, I can face tomorrow. Because He lives, all fear is gone. Because I know, He holds the future. And life is worth the living, just because He lives!"

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

MONDAY, APRIL 27	ACTS 22
TUESDAY, APRIL 28	ACTS 23
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29	ACTS 24
THURSDAY, APRIL 30	ACTS 25
FRIDAY, MAY 1	ACTS 26
SATURDAY, MAY 2	ACTS 27
SUNDAY, MAY 3	ACTS 28