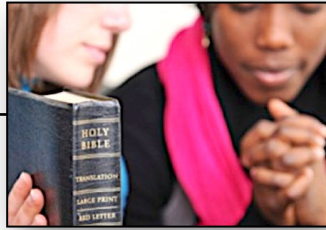


God at Work in Tough Times

“...A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem; and all the believers except the apostles were **scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria.**” Acts 8:1 NLT



The key verse to understanding the message of the book of Acts is Acts 1:8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be **my witnesses**, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (NLT)

One popular outline of the book of Acts is based on this key verse (Acts 1:8).

- I. **Witness in Jerusalem (1:1-8:4)**
- II. **Witness in Judea & Samaria (8:5-12:25)**
- III. **Witness to the Ends of the Earth (13:1-28:31)**

(Bruce Wilkinson in *Talk Thru the Bible*).

The book of Acts is the only historical record of the birth of the church and the beginning of the spread of Christianity. The book of Acts described the first 30 years of the church’s existence.

The stories of Acts show that the early Christians did not have an easy time in fulfilling God’s mission to be his witness. They often faced hostility, physical abuse, and for some, martyrdom. Yet, the book of Acts shows us that **the Holy Spirit is at work through Christians to continue what Jesus began to do.** The Holy Spirit is at work through tough times to advance the Gospel and God’s purposes. The book of Acts helps us to see what the Christian life looks like when Christ-followers are filled (that is, **controlled, directed, and empowered**) with the Holy Spirit

Central Lesson:

God works through tough times to advance His Kingdom.

I. **Witness in Jerusalem (1:1-8:4)**

Principle: EVANGELISM should start at home and radiate out to all surrounding areas—Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.

Acts 2:37-41 NLT

*“³⁷ Peter’s words pierced their hearts, and they said to him and to the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what should we do?’ ³⁸ Peter replied, ‘Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit... ⁴⁰ Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, ‘Save yourselves from this crooked generation!’ ⁴¹ Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—**about 3,000 in all.**”*

The Holy Spirit descended upon the believers (2:1-13), Peter preaches the Gospel, and thousands turn to Christ (2:14-41). The first Church is born and established in Jerusalem (2:42-47).

II. **Witness in Judea & Samaria (8:5-12:25)**

Principle: EVERY Christian is to be a **WITNESS.**

Acts 8:1, 4 NLT

*“1...A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem; and all the believers except the apostles were **scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria.**” ⁴ But the believers who were scattered preached the Good News about Jesus wherever they went.”*

Acts 11:19-21 NLT

*“¹⁹ Meanwhile, the believers who had been **scattered** during the persecution after Stephen’s death traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch of Syria. **They preached the word of God, but only to Jews.** ²⁰ However, some of the believers who went to Antioch from Cyprus and Cyrene began preaching to the Gentiles about the Lord Jesus. ²¹ The power of the Lord was with them, and a large number of these Gentiles believed and turned to the Lord.”*

God used the persecution to scatter the early Christians to motivate them to share the Gospel with the surrounding areas of Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, they were letting the Apostle do the preaching. After the persecution and scattering, the people began to take the responsibility and shared the Gospel.

The *Life Application Study Bible*, explained: “Persecution forced the Christians out of Jerusalem and into Judea and Samaria, thus fulfilling the second part of Jesus’ command (see 1:8). The persecution helped spread the Good News. God would bring great results from the believers suffering.” (8:1-4)

“Persecution forced the believers out of their homes in Jerusalem, and along with them went the Good News. Sometimes we have to become uncomfortable before we’ll move. We may not want to experience it, but discomfort may be the best thing for us because God may be working through our hurts. When you are tempted to complain about uncomfortable or painful circumstances, stop and ask if God might be preparing you for a special task.” (8:4).

III. **Witness to the Ends of the Earth (13:1-28:31)**

Principle: Every Church should be a part of sending out **MISSIONARIES.**

Acts 13:2-4 NLT

*“² One day as these men were worshiping the Lord and fasting, **the Holy Spirit said, ‘Appoint Barnabas and Saul for the special work to which I have called them.’** ³ So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and **sent them on their way.** ⁴ So Barnabas and Saul were sent out by the Holy Spirit. They went down to the seaport of Seleucia and then sailed for the island of Cyprus.”*

Every church should contribute to the support and sending of missionaries. Missions should be supported by prayer, finances, missionary education, and challenging young people to answer God’s call to become missionaries.

Warren Wiersbe wrote, “Until now, Jerusalem had been the center of ministry, and Peter had been the key apostle. But from this point on, Antioch in Syria would become the new center (Acts 11:19ff), and Paul the new leader. The gospel was on the move!” (*The Wiersbe Bible Commentary*, 364).

Central Lesson: God works through tough times to advance His purposes.

► Accept Christ as your Savior. ► As a Christian, dedicate your life to Christ. ► Invite someone to next Sunday’s study. ► Attend a small group. ► Read the Bible this week & journal meaningful verses. ► Pray for friends that need Jesus.