

WEEK 2 Acts discussion and James background

**ACTS discussion**

Bible discussion questions

What did you think was the theme of Acts ?

What picture do you have of the church/believers after reading Acts ?

How is that the same/ different from our experience today?

Which passages encouraged you?

Which passages challenged you?

What did Jesus teach the apostles about their future work before he ascended?

What were the disciples doing while they were waiting for the promised Spirit?

I was surprised at the small number of believers (120) that there were.

What happened to the thousands, or at least the ones He had healed?

How does Peter seem different from before the resurrection? why do you think that is?

How soon did persecution begin? What was its effect on the believers?

What do they ask for in their prayer in 4:24-30? how is it answered? v. 31

Why do you think they were rejoicing after being flogged in 5:40-42?

They were suffering just like their Rabbi!

How did Paul respond to persecution?

What can we learn from the story of Ananias and Sapphira?

What personal application can we get from the story of Paul's conversion?

What can we learn from the character of Dorcas?

What was the believing Jews' reaction to Gentiles being saved and being allowed into the church?

Look at 11:17-18—how deep-seated was their feeling about the Gentiles?

“even the Gentiles”

How is Barnabas an example to us?

What do you think about what happened to Herod?

What can we learn from the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) that we can apply today?

Why does Paul insist that Titus NOT be circumcised, but have Timothy circumcised?

What would a modern equivalent be?

How does Paul use different approaches with different people, for example with

Jews and with Greek philosophers?

What can we learn from the life of Apollos (Acts 18)?

I'm struck with how many "unsung heroes" are mentioned in Acts—people that  
no one names their children after, but who are commended.

How did Paul's imprisonments affect his ministry?

How was prison part of God's plan for Paul (how does it affect us today)?

We have the prison epistles because of his time spent there,  
when he was unable to travel.

## JAMES

### Who was James?

4 James' in New Testament: son of Zebedee/brother of John, son of Alphaeus,

half-brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55, Mark 6:3, Galatians 1:19), "James the lesser"

This epistle most likely written by oldest half-brother of Jesus; brother of Jude (book of Jude)

?Not a believer during Jesus's life, but Jesus appeared to him after the resurrection

(1 Cor. 15:7)

Was leader of Judean (Jerusalem) church (Acts 21:18, Galatians 2:9,2:12), so influential

among Jews and church

Peter sent a message to him when Peter was released from prison

( James son of Zebedee had been killed at this point)

Called "James the Just" by other Jews, considered an unusually good man

Said he spent so much time on his knees in prayer that they were hard and calloused

Was married

A very strict Jew, but author of the tolerant letter to the Gentile Christians in Acts 15:13-21

Endorsed Paul's work with the Gentiles, but his ministry was mainly to the Jews

### Timeline

~33 Peter is leading ~120 followers, after the ascension (Acts 1)

Lots cast to replace Judas; Matthias chosen

Time mainly spent praying

Pentecost: sitting in a house, then probably went to the Temple (Acts 2)

Holy Spirit comes, preaching heard in many languages

Peter's sermon

3000 new believers baptized

Time spent teaching, fellowship, breaking bread (communion), prayer

Many miracles and signs done

Believers held all things in common

Met daily in Temple courts

Peter and John heal lame man (Acts 3)

Peter preaches to Sanhedrin

Peter and John jailed by priests and Sadducees (Acts 4)

Believers now ~5000

Peter and John before Sanhedrin, threatened then released

Believers pray for boldness, house shaken

All things held in common, \$ given to apostles

Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5)

Many miracles being done

Meet at Solomon's colonnade

Crowds come for healing, line the streets

Apostles arrested by Sanhedrin

Angel releases them, tells them to preach in Temple courts

Brought before Sanhedrin; Gamaliel persuades Sanhedrin to let them go

Apostles flogged and released, rejoicing to be worthy of suffering

Daily in Temple courts and houses, teaching

Deacons chosen to oversee care of widows (Acts 6)

# of disciples in Jerusalem increases rapidly, large # of priests become believers

Stephen does great miracles

Stephen brought before Sanhedrin, false witnesses testify

Stephen's sermon (Acts 7)

- 35 Stephen stoned; cloaks laid at feet of Saul  
Great persecution in Jerusalem (Acts 8)  
All except apostles scattered thru Judea and Samaria, preach the word everywhere  
Saul goes house to house, dragging off believers and imprisoning them  
Philip goes to city in Samaria, great joy about message  
Simon the sorcerer believes  
Peter and John sent to Samaria, pray for Spirit, He comes on the believers  
Simon rebuked for trying to buy the Spirit  
Peter and John return to Jerusalem  
Angel sends Philip to meet Ethiopian eunuch
- 37 Saul heads toward Damascus to arrest believers (Acts 9)  
Saul meets Jesus on road, blinded  
Ananias sent to heal Saul and baptizes him  
Saul goes into Arabia
- 40 Saul spends several days with believers in Damascus, begins preaching in synagogues  
After many days, plot by Jews to kill him  
Followers lower him over wall in basket, he goes to Jerusalem  
Jerusalem disciples afraid of him  
Barnabas takes him to the apostles, and he stays with them and preaches  
Grecian Jews try to kill Saul, brothers take him to Caesarea, sent to Tarsus  
Peter travels country, all Lydda and Sharon turn to Lord  
Peter raises Dorcas from dead  
Peter stays in Joppa  
Cornelius has vision, sends for Peter (Acts 10)  
Peter has vision of unclean/clean animals

Peter goes to Caesarea

All who hear message believe, are filled with Spirit, and baptized

Peter returns to Jerusalem, criticized for associating with uncircumcised Gentiles (Acts 11)

When story told, they accept that God has also called Gentiles

Scattered disciples preach to Greeks in Antioch & many believe

Barnabas sent there from Jerusalem

Barnabas brings Saul from Tarsus to Antioch

Famine predicted

Disciples decide to send help to Judean brothers; sent with Saul & Barnabas

45 James

#### About the epistle

A general epistle: addressed to believers everywhere, which was likely Jewish Christians  
at that early time, who were scattered abroad

#### About the church

Must have been a good many rich in the church

They were making the poor feel unwelcome

They were too concerned with worldly pleasures

#### Other info

Anointing with oil was a recognized medical treatment, to be reinforced by prayer

5:17 "Elijah was a man just like us" references to Elijah usually referred to his

overwhelming passion for the Lord and the things of the Lord.

If someone was "like Elijah", they showed a full-hearted commitment to follow

God and spread His message. Elijah was the one who took on all the prophets

of Baal in a showdown, who outran the king's chariot 20 miles back to the city... He was the pattern of someone with an intense commitment to the Lord. He gave everything he had, holding nothing back.

### Difficult passages

2:14-26 This doesn't contradict the teaching of salvation by faith alone. It is not talking about "works of the law" where we try to gain salvation by following the law. It is talking about works or deeds of faith, which are the outward sign of an inward change. Faith is expressed in deeds, not just in words, saying "I have faith"

Vs 24 "justified" not the same meaning here as in Paul's writing (declaring us righteous in the sight of God); here means "show to be righteous" before God and men. Faith and deeds are the two halves of a train ticket; neither one is good without the other.

People in the Greek-Roman world didn't see a relationship between their religion and how they lived. Religion was to please the gods so you would be successful, etc.

Morality didn't matter; other actions didn't matter.

### After the epistle

Martyrdom of James: before Jerusalem destruction

Jews in large numbers becoming Christians

High priest, scribes, and Pharisees commanded James to proclaim in Temple that

Jesus was not Messiah

James cried out that Jesus was Son of God and Judge of the world

They threw him to the ground and killed him with clubs while he was praying that

God would forgive them