

## **ACTS & THE EPISTLES: The Life of the Church**

### **Acts through Jude**

The book of Acts begins after Jesus has been resurrected. He is preparing his disciples and other followers for life in the kingdom when he ascends to heaven. Specifically, he has announced to them the coming of the Holy Spirit that will coincide with the birth of the church that will last “until” he comes again (Acts 2.14-36; 3.21). The book of Acts and the letters that follow contain transforming and corrective teaching to the early church. The new community needed all the help it could get!

#### **Acts –**

The book of Acts was designed to be the second half of a two-volume work by Luke, completing the story begun in Luke’s Gospel. Acts shows how the coming of the Holy Spirit was the initial goal of Jesus’ ascension (2.14-36); he was the continued presence of Jesus on earth to proclaim his kingdom. Acts solidly demonstrated how the Spirit would preserve and empower the gospel message through people who followed the sometimes hard road of worldwide evangelism.

#### **Epistles: The New Testament Letters**

God inspired some of the early church leaders to write letters of encouragement and instruction to various individuals, churches and other groups of believers, twenty-one such letters are often divided into three sections:

1. Paul’s letters to churches (Romans through Thessalonians).
2. Paul’s letters to other leaders (Timothy, Titus and Philemon).
3. General epistles written by several authors to other groups (Hebrews through Jude).

Almost all of these letters were written during the time spanned in the book of Acts. James was written first. Paul wrote during and after his missionary journeys. The general epistles were authored in late 60 A.D. around the end of the book of Acts.

The instruction contained in these letters cover a variety of issues. But much of the teaching focuses on providing greater clarity about the person of Christ and his relationship to believers and the church. Specific emphases include:

1. *The person of Christ* (Colossians 1.13-29; Hebrews 1-3).
2. *Living like Christ* (Philippians 3.7-16; 1 Peter 3.8-22)
3. *Being in the body of Christ* (Ephesians 4.7-16; 1 Corinthians 3)

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, **rebuking, correcting and training** in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3.16-17*

Paul wrote that Scripture was profitable for three primary purposes. These purposes, with some texts that represent them, are:

1. The teaching of doctrine: Romans 3
2. Rebuking and correcting error: Galatians 1
3. Instructing in godly living: Ephesians 5