

# ***AN INDEPENDENT STUDY FROM THE BOOK OF ACTS***

*(A bridge from the Old Testament to the New Testament)*



*Peace Bridge – Buffalo, N.Y.*

*The Peace Bridge connects the towns of Buffalo, NY and Fort Erie, Ontario. It is approximately 5800 feet in length and it takes about 10 minutes to cross over the Niagara River using this bridge. The Peace Bridge is just a little more than one mile in length, but consider the changes that happen during that mile. You will change countries, governments, laws, rights, and even to some extent, languages. Bridges connect things. Sometimes the things that are connected are very different from each other.*

***The book of ACTS is also a bridge. It is a bridge between:***

- A. Christ in the flesh and Christ as the risen head of the church.*
- B. God's dealing with Israel and God's dealing with the church.*
- C. Emphasis from the Jewish nation to the Gentile nations.*
- D. From Old Testament law to New Testament grace.*
- E. From the center of activity in Jerusalem to the center being in Antioch.*

*Even the placement of the book in the Bible is a natural place for a bridge. It is between the gospels (which are a record of Christ's time on this earth) and the epistles (which give instructions to the church.) Both its' location and its' contents serve as a bridge.*

*Acts is primarily a history book. It records all of the special events that took place immediately following the ascension of Christ into heaven. The Holy Spirit comes to indwell believers for the first time. The church, the bride of Christ, comes into existence. Believers worldwide are united; there is no longer any division between Jews and Gentiles, men and women, slaves and freemen. Paul's life is chronicled for us. The transitions recorded for us are amazing.*

*It is best to remember that Acts is foremost a history book. It was not written to teach us doctrine. Certainly we can study the pattern of things that were set into place in the early church and benefit from that record, but we need to understand the book in its context. This was a unique time; it is a place in church history that can never be repeated. God sees fit to show us both the good and bad things that were done, the successful and the poorly planned. Throughout the book we see God's plan for His church emerging and solidifying.*

*The book has three main divisions:*

*Chapters 1:1 – 8:3 are the Jewish period, recording their reaction to the gospel.*

*Chapters 8:4 – 12:25 are the Jews under persecution and carrying the gospel message as they are scattered.*

*Chapters 13:1 – 28:31 record the Gentile period with Paul and the city of Antioch now in the spotlight.*

*Read Acts 1:1-14 and answer these questions:*

1. *Define the word "treatise" (use a dictionary, if necessary)*

*The books of Acts and Luke are written to "most excellent Theophilus". Look up and read Luke 1:1-4. The books were to be orderly accounts of all that had happened and were to give understanding to this man who is probably a new Christian. We are indebted to Theophilus for desiring to know.*

2. *What do we presume was the "former treatise" and who is the author of both books?  
see Luke 1:3*

*The man named Luke is referred to only a few times in Scripture – look up and read 2 Tim 4:11, Philemon 24 and Col. 4:14. He was a physician. Since Paul had some physical ailments, he was no doubt thankful for Luke's companionship. Galatians 4:15 insinuates that Paul had eye problems. He had also stoned and beaten, which probably left him with numerous physical problems. The book of Acts is often written as a first person account, so we can assume that during those times Luke was physically with Paul and apparently stayed with him all through his imprisonment.*

3. *The book of Luke begins chronologically at what point? Luke 1:5-25*

*The book of Acts begins with \_\_\_\_\_ . (Acts 1:1-9)  
and ends with \_\_\_\_\_ .(Acts 28:30 & 31))*

4. *The book of Acts covers a period of about 30 years. If we include the gospel of Luke with it, about how many years are covered? ( Jesus lived on this earth for about 33 years.)*

*Verse 3 says that Jesus appeared to the apostles over a period of 40 days and talked to them about the kingdom of God. Can you imagine these encounters with the risen Savior? Can you envision them sitting around a table and hearing Him talk? They would be giving Him their full attention as they learned about things they never understood before; things that would thrill and excite them.*

5. *Who chose the apostles?(vs. 2) See Acts 12:2 & John 6:70*

*They were to be the foundation of the church. They wrote Scripture and had authority that no other group has had since. Look up Acts 2:43, 4:33 and Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5. There were and are many “disciples” of Christ, but the apostles were a specifically chosen group of 12 men.*

6. *How does Luke describe the proofs that Jesus gave them of His authenticity?(vs. 3)*

*We know that one of the proofs He gave to them was that He could eat. It seems like having Him sitting there in front of them would be proof enough, but He wanted them to realize that he wasn't just an apparition. Jesus had a body. He had been resurrected not just as a spirit, but with a physical body. We will see many times in the book of Acts that Paul's preaching about the resurrection was one of the things that brought him trouble. I Peter 1:3-9 talks about the hope that Christians have because of the resurrection of Christ. Because of His resurrection, we know that we will also be resurrected, because we will be like Him. (I John 3:2) His resurrection gives us confidence that we have an eternal inheritance waiting for us in heaven. The apostles needed to have absolute confidence that Christ had been resurrected with a physical body. They were going to be the foundation of the church and they needed to be able to preach and teach about this with complete authority.*

7. *Compare vs. 3 with Luke 24:27, 32, 44. See also John 16:12-15. What important thing is being emphasized in these passages?*

*This was of utmost importance since they were to be the first teachers, instructors and answer men in the new church. They would be establishing principles and setting precedents. God supernaturally gave the apostles understanding. The Holy Spirit brought to mind things that Jesus had said to them and then gave them understanding of what was meant. When we read the New Testament we can be assured that what they recorded for us is truth. Understanding of the scriptures is still vitally important for all Christians.*

*Consider II Tim. 3:16 and John 17:17. The Bible is inspired by God and preserved for us through all of these centuries. It is our spiritual food and our ultimate authority.*

8. *What were the apostles to do first in Jerusalem? vs. 4 \_\_\_\_\_ What important lesson can we learn from this? Consider John 15:5 in your answer.*

*God's work is only effective when He does the work. We must constantly lean on Him. John 15:5 tells us that we are branches of the vine that is Christ. Can a branch that is cut off from the vine expect to grow any kind of fruit? We stay connected to the vine by studying His word and then obeying it and by communing with Him in prayer.*

9. *What was the promise? (vs. 4) cp. John 14:16-18.*

*This was to be a new blessing for believers. Until this time, the Holy Spirit was present in the world, but did not indwell believers. In the Old Testament, the spirit sometimes came upon people temporarily for a certain task. Read John 16:7. The spirit could not come until after Christ's ascension. This is one of the distinguishing marks of the church. The church is described as the bride of Christ and consists of believers in Christ, all of whom have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We will see the birth of the church in the next chapter. Consider these verses about Christ's relationship with the church: Eph. 5:22-33, Rev. 19:7, Rev. 21:2 & 9*

10. *Why was His coming so important to the disciples? cp. John 14:26, John 16:7-15, and John 15:*

*The Holy Spirit is the one that Jesus promised to send to them after His death. The Holy Spirit would be the power that they needed to do their important work. Without the Spirit, they would not have an understanding of the scriptures. The spirit would help them to recall what Christ had said, would be there when they were writing the scriptures of the New Testament, would comfort, direct, convict and guide. The Spirit also intercedes in prayer for us. (Romans 8:26 & 27) Trying to do spiritual work without the Holy Spirit is like trying to use a flashlight with batteries. You can go through the motions, but without the source of power, nothing will be accomplished.*

11. *How long did Jesus say they would have to wait? (vs. 5)*

*How long was it before the Spirit came? Compare Acts 1:3 and Acts 2:1-4  
(note - Pentecost was celebrated 50 days after the Passover)*

*Passover day is day zero. Jesus was in the grave for 3 days and for 40 days He made appearances. This totals 43 days. Forty three days from the 50<sup>th</sup> day of Pentecost leaves 7 days of waiting. God has a master plan for the universe. From the beginning of creation, He knew that Pentecost would represent the coming of the Holy Spirit. Nothing that the apostles did or did not do could change the time of His coming.*

12. *What were they referring to when they asked about the kingdom being restored?  
cp. Isaiah 60:14, 15, 18, and 21 and also Zach. 14:4*

*They knew the prophecies about Israel gaining the respect of the other nations, about Jerusalem being the city of the Lord, about not being despised any more but envied, that there would be no more wars and destruction, and about the people being righteous and inheriting the land.*

*Even at this point the disciples knew nothing of the church or the setting aside of Israel, or the Gentile period, or how long it would be until Christ returns. They were still expecting Him to return any day and set up His kingdom and elevate Israel to its' promised place of prominence.*

13. *How did Christ answer their inquiry?*

*Why? How would it have impacted their ministry if they had known? How would it impact us today? Christians should always be prepared and waiting anxiously for the return of the Lord. It is as certain as His first coming. It has been planned from eternity. God is in control and no prophecy that He has spoken will fail to happen.*

14. *They would receive power to do what?*

*What does a witness do? He tells what he knows and what he has seen – nothing else. Witnesses don't pass judgment and are not responsible for the results. They may not even know the whole story, but they tell what they know. The apostles had seen and witnessed many many things. What a story they have to tell!*

*What is our most effective witness today?*

*People can argue about the scriptures, but they can't argue about what has happened in our lives. Even a new believer knows the changes that God has brought about in their lives.*

*We can tell about how our thinking has changed, how our desires have changed, about the peace we experience. As people hear our story and then observe it in our lives, they receive a powerful witness.*

15. *Describe how Jesus ascended.*

*How should we expect Him to return?*

*The scene describes a quiet majesty – symbolic of Him being at the right hand of God. It also showed that His appearances were now over; there was no reason to keep expecting physical appearances from Him after this time.*

*Notice that when Jesus returns to set up His kingdom, people will see Him descending. The rapture of the church happens before this. No one will see Christ when He comes for His*

church. There are two different occasions. Compare I Thes. 4:13-18

16. What group is listed in Acts 1:13? cp. Luke 6:13-16

17. What circumstances drew these people together so that they "were in one accord?"

*They shared the camaraderie of shared grief and troubling circumstances. They had all lost their Savior and they had all seen the miracle of the resurrection. They were all fearful of persecution and no doubt ridiculed by outsiders. Those who hadn't been present when Jesus met with them for forty days would be anxious to hear every word and every detail of what had happened. They knew that they were waiting for something to happen, but they didn't know exactly what that was going to be.*

Read Acts 1:15-26

18. How was Judas, the man who betrayed Jesus, prophetically portrayed by David? see Ps. 41:9 and John 13:18-19

*Judas was chosen as one of the twelve, but Jesus always knew who would betray Him. This, too, was part of God's eternal plan.*

19. Vs. 18 says that Judas purchased a field with the "reward of iniquity". Matt. 27:3-5 says he returned the money. Explain the discrepancy. See Matt. 27:3-10

*The priests took the money that Judas returned and bought the potter's field. This was literally a field owned by a potter, probably where he would dig for clay.*

20. Why did Peter feel it necessary to appoint a replacement for Judas? cp. vs. 20 and 21 with Matt. 19:28

*Peter and the others were no doubt overwhelmed with Jesus' decree that they would be witnesses throughout the world. He was probably working on a master plan during those 7 days of waiting. If he had known what all the Spirit would be doing for him, he might have rested a little easier! He knew there needed to be 12 apostles because Jesus referred to them as sitting on 12 thrones in the future, so it was only natural that they should choose a 12<sup>th</sup>. Peter still had some lessons to learn about letting God lead in the plans!*

21. Is there any indication that these instructions came from God?

*This seems to be just an idea that originated with Peter – a logical move, except that we don't plan spiritual things without the help of the Spirit!*

22. In Acts 1:22, what did Peter say was the apostles' primary purpose?

*If one of the requirements to be an apostle was to be an eye witness of the resurrection, can there be apostles today? (no) The apostles were a unique group that formed the foundation*

*of the church. Look up Eph. 2:20 and 3:5. See also Acts 2:43*

23. *Who else considered himself to be an apostle? See Ro. 1:1, I Cor. 1:1, II Cor. 1:1, Gal. 1:1, Eph 1:1, Col. 1:1, I Tim. 1:1*

*Paul started his letters by introducing himself as an apostle of Christ. He wanted to remind them of who had given him authority. He had a difficult time convincing people that he was indeed the 12th apostle. Compare I Cor. 9:2 and 2 Cor. 11:5. See also Acts 9:15 and notice the word "chosen". God chose Paul, just as He chose the other eleven apostles. He confirmed Paul's apostleship with signs and miracles.*

24. *Can there be 13 apostles? see Rev. 21:14*

*Even the city of New Jerusalem gives evidence and honor to the apostles for their role as the foundation of the church. Each foundation of the city has the name of an apostle written on it. Also, in Matt. 19:28, Jesus says that the twelve apostles will sit on twelve thrones in the kingdom of heaven. If Matthias was an apostle and Paul was an apostle, that makes 13! It appears that Mathias was never God's choice for a replacement. It is interesting to note that he is never mentioned again in scripture.*

25. *Was Paul a witness of the resurrection the therefore qualified to be an apostle? see I Cor. 15:8 & 9*

*Paul says that he was like one born out of due time, but he did see the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus.*