

ACTS

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MISSION UNSTOPPABLE



10 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR
SMALL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS



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matthiasmedia

Mission Unstoppable

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» HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THESE STUDIES

1. What is an Interactive Bible Study?

Interactive Bible Studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city. They take you through a particular part of the Bible, helping you to know where to start, pointing out things along the way, suggesting avenues for further exploration, and making sure that you know how to get home. Like any good tour, the real purpose is to allow you to go exploring for yourself—to dive in, have a good look around, and discover for yourself the riches that God’s word has in store.

In other words, these studies aim to provide stimulation and input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do plenty of the exploration and discovery yourself.

We hope that these studies will stimulate lots of ‘interaction’—interaction with the Bible, with the things we’ve written, with your own current thoughts and attitudes, with other people as you discuss them, and with God as you talk to him about it all.

2. The format

The studies contain five main components:

- sections of text that introduce, inform, summarize and challenge
- numbered questions that help you examine the passage and think through its meaning
- sidebars that provide extra bits of background or optional extra study ideas, especially regarding other relevant parts of the Bible
- ‘Implications’ sections that help you think about what this passage means for you and your life today
- suggestions for thanksgiving and prayer as you close.

3. How to use these studies on your own

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to what he is saying in the Bible, and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it.
- Work through the study, reading the text, answering the questions about the Bible passage, and exploring the sidebars as you have time.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the ‘Implications’ and ‘Give thanks and pray’ sections at the end. It is important that we not only hear and understand God’s word, but also respond to it. These closing sections help us do that.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you’ve learnt.

4. How to use these studies in a small group

- Much of the above applies to group study as well. The studies are suitable for structured Bible study or cell groups, as well as for more informal pairs and triplets. Get together with a friend or friends and work through them at your own pace; use them as the basis for regular Bible study with your spouse. You don’t need the formal structure of a ‘group’ to gain maximum benefit.

- For small groups, it is *very useful* if group members can work through the study themselves *before* the group meets. The group discussion can take place comfortably in an hour (depending on how sidetracked you get!) if all the members have done some work in advance.
- The role of the group leader is to direct the course of the discussion and to try to draw the threads together at the end. This will mean a little extra preparation—underlining the sections of text to emphasize and read out loud, working out which questions are worth concentrating on, and being sure of the main thrust of the study. Leaders will also probably want to work out approximately how long they'd like to spend on each part.
- If your group members usually don't work through the study in advance, it's extra important that the leader prepares which parts to concentrate on, and which parts to glide past more quickly. In particular, the leader will need to select which of the 'Implications' to focus on.
- We haven't included an 'answer guide' to the questions in the studies. This is a deliberate move. We want to give you a guided tour of the Bible, not a lecture. There is more than enough in the text we have written and the questions we have asked to point you in what we think is the right direction. The rest is up to you.

5. Bible translation

Previous studies in our Interactive Bible Study series have assumed that most readers would be using the New International Version of the Bible. However, since the release of the English Standard Version in 2001, many have switched to the ESV for study purposes. For this reason, we have decided to quote from and refer to the ESV text, which we recommend.

6. Before you begin

We recommend that before you start study 1, you take the time to read right through Acts in one sitting. This will give you a feel for the direction and purpose of the whole book and help you greatly in looking at each passage in its context.

» STUDY 1

THE ACTS OF THE ~~APOSTLES~~ RISEN CHRIST

[ACTS 1:1-2:41]

1. What do you already know about the book of Acts?

ON SATURDAY 2 SEPTEMBER 2000, the Sydney 2000 Olympic torch relay came through the town in which I live. The Olympic torch had originally been lit by the sun's rays at a special ceremony in Olympia, Greece. When the flame finally arrived in Australia it stayed for 100 days, being carried by 11,000 torchbearers through more than 1,000 towns. The torch visited every state and territory, and it journeyed within one hour's drive of 85% of the Australian population. Apart from

the traditional runners, the torch travelled via train, plane, bicycle, stock horse, camel, tram, road train, row boat, Chinese dragon boat, canoe, ferry, solar-powered vehicle, surf boat and the Royal Flying Doctor Service. And on a wet, overcast Saturday morning, the torch came through my town.

What was interesting was the massive excitement the Olympic torch relay generated, especially amongst the torchbearers themselves. One of them told me, "It's such a privilege to be involved

in an event this big. I may never do anything else, but I'll be able to tell my children that at least their mum carried the Olympic flame." Another commented, "Going to work each day, doing the washing, watching the TV, it's all so small. But to carry the Olympic flame even for a little while, it's so much bigger than anything else I've done. I wanted to be part of the relay because I wanted to be part of something bigger than my life."

Do you sometimes feel like that? The alarm goes off in the morning, you roll out of bed for another day and it's the same old routine. Everything seems so mundane and small scale. Do you sometimes feel that it would be nice to be

caught up in something a bit more spectacular than what your life usually seems to be?

The book of Acts is a wonderful book, because it helps us to see that when we are followers of Jesus we actually are caught up in something much bigger than ourselves. As Christians, we are caught up in a worldwide movement that makes the Olympic torch relay pale into insignificance. We are involved in the passing on of a message that has been transforming people's lives in every single country on the face of this earth for thousands of years. What's the key to seeing this? Realizing that Acts is a book all about Jesus Christ.

Read Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-3.

2. In what ways are the books of Luke and Acts similar? In what ways are they different?

3. What is the significance of the word 'began' in Acts 1:1?

Optional question

Skim back over chapter 1, and list as many examples as you can of Jesus being the one in charge and controlling all the action.

Welcome to the sequel

ACTS IS THE SECOND VOLUME OF A two-volume work. The first volume is the Gospel of Luke. It's unfortunate that our English Bibles usually place John's Gospel between the two, as Luke and Acts belong together. They are two volumes that focus on the same person: Jesus Christ. Luke's Gospel is about what Jesus *began* to do and teach. Acts is about what he *continues* to do and teach.

It will be helpful to bear this in mind during these studies, for it will stop us misapplying the text. For example, in the book of Acts, Luke describes many unusual and extraordinary events, and there is a danger of thinking that these events should also happen to us. We need to realize that Luke may be recording something simply because that's what happened then, and not necessarily because it's what should happen for us now. We take this for granted at certain points. For example, in Acts 1 we have just read of Jesus telling his disciples to wait in Jerusalem. Does that mean we are all to fly to Jerusalem and wait for a word from the Lord as well? Of course not—we realize that, in this respect, the apostles are unique. They are specific people in a specific place at a special point of history.

Realizing that Acts is essentially about Jesus will help us to avoid that danger. As we read through Acts, we must keep asking ourselves the question: what are we discovering about the risen Jesus Christ?

One of the big lessons in chapter 1 is that the ongoing work of the risen Christ involves the spreading of his gospel to the ends of the earth (1:8). This is a vitally important work because of what we discover about Jesus in the next chapter.

Read Acts 2:1–13.

8. What happened to the apostles when they were first filled with the Holy Spirit? How does this fit with Jesus' mission briefing back in 1:8?

Read Acts 2:14–21.

9. According to verse 17, the filling of the apostles with the Holy Spirit reflects that the "last days" have now commenced. According to verse 20, what do these last days precede?

10. The "day of the Lord" is a reference to the final judgement when God will punish all sin. What is it necessary to do during these last days preceding the day of the Lord (v. 21)?

Read Acts 2:22–36.

In these verses, Peter tells the crowd some crucial things about Jesus. Let's tease out the main points of his speech.

11. According to verses 22–24, what did men do to Jesus? What did God do?

12. According to verse 27, what did the Old Testament predict about God's coming king? In the light of your answer to the previous question, what does this tell us about Jesus?

13. According to verse 33, where is Jesus now and what has he done?

14. According to verse 34, what else did the Old Testament predict about God's coming king? What does this tell us about Jesus?

15. Peter has been drawing some parallels between Jesus and the Christ predicted in the Old Testament. Verse 36 now comes as Peter's punchline. Try rewriting it in your own words.

Read Acts 2:37-41.

16. What is the crowd's reaction? What does Peter say they should do, and why?

Apostles behaving strangely

ON THAT FIRST PENTECOST FEAST after Jesus' resurrection, the apostles are certainly doing some strange things: even speaking in different languages that they're not meant to know! However, the key issue is not whether we should do what the apostles did—the key issue is what we discover about the risen Christ. In fact, we discover something of enormous importance about Jesus.

The apostle Peter explains that the apostles are acting strangely so as to signal that “the last days” have arrived (2:17). In other words, the clock is now running and God's judgement is coming. The “great and magnificent” day of the Lord is approaching (2:20)—the day when God will judge and punish all sin. The good news is that in these last days people can escape God's judgement by calling on the name of the Lord (2:21). The bad news for the people of

Jerusalem, however, is that the Lord they're meant to be calling on is actually the man they killed a couple of months back (2:36)!

Jesus has shown himself to be the Lord by rising from the dead. Peter says that God predicted it (2:25-31) and he himself has seen the risen Christ (2:32). This Jesus whom they crucified is therefore both Lord and Christ. They need to call on him for help before it is too late!

This emphasizes the importance of Jesus' mission plan (1:8). No wonder it's important for the news of Jesus to be spread in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Jesus' death and resurrection have ushered in the last days. Now is the time to call on Jesus for help, before it is too late. Now is the time to warn and plead with others, before it is too late.

» Implications

(Choose one or more of the following to think about further or to discuss in your group.)

- In what ways are we different from the apostles? In what ways are we similar?

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- In what ways are we different from the crowd in Acts 2? In what ways are we similar?

 - Where do we fit into Jesus' mission plan of 1:8? What difference should this mission plan make to us?

 - Is there any one truth about the risen Christ that has especially struck you from this study? How should it shape the way you live?

» Give thanks and pray

- Thank God for his long-laid plan to send Jesus so that everyone who calls upon his name will be saved.
- Praise God for revealing this plan to humanity through his word in the Old and New Testaments, through his filling Spirit, and through the signs and wonders performed by the Son.
- Ask God to help you fulfil your role as a Christian in these last days by spreading the news of Jesus' death and resurrection.

MISSION UNSTOPPABLE



Acts of the apostles? A better way to describe Luke's second volume would be 'the acts of the risen Christ'. He wants his gospel to go out to the ends of the earth, and neither persecution nor opposition is going to stop him. The mission on which Christ sends his apostles is truly **Mission Unstoppable**.

These ten studies take us through the book of Acts, examining the biblical text in detail and drawing out the implications for our lives.

An ideal study book for individuals and small groups.

