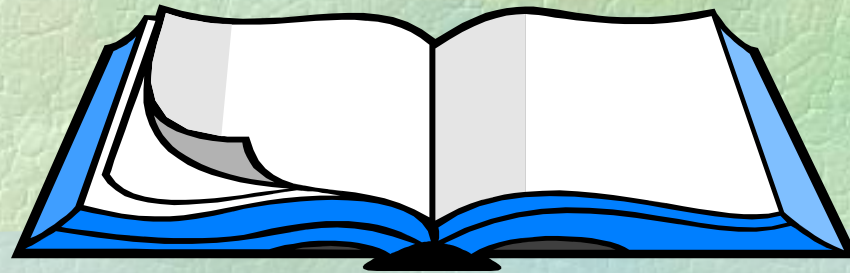


# How To Read The Bible



For All Its Worth!



# Goals For This Class

- To give a basic approach to understanding the biblical text
- To examine historical methods of interpretation
- To consider other methods of interpretation
- To promote unity of shared understanding
- To relate elders' views on interpretation



# Not Goals For This Class

- To ensure everybody believes what I do
- To ensure everybody believes the same thing
- To debate controversial passages of scripture
- To negate or endorse any particular interpretative approach
- To confuse, frustrate, or agitate truthseekers



# The Acts of the Apostles:



The Question of Historical Precedent



# Our Interpretative Approach to Acts

- Should be analogous to Old Testament narratives
- We seem to treat Acts differently
- It serves as the normative model for the church of all times
- Protestant Restoration Movement mentality
- Lack of hermeneutical precision leads to division



# Diverse Practices Supported from Acts

- Infant baptism
- Baptism of believers only
- Congregational and episcopalian church polity
- Necessity of weekly communion
- Choice of deacons by vote
- Selling of possessions and sharing property
- Ritual snake handling



# The Exegesis of Acts

- Author: Luke, a Gentile physician
- Recipient: Theophilus
- Likely written around AD 63
- Example of Hellenistic historiography
  - written to encourage or entertain
  - written to inform, moralize, or as apologetic
- Luke's intent for writing



# An Overview of Acts

- Luke's interest in Peter (Acts 1-12)
- Luke's interest in Paul (Acts 13-28)
  
- Spread of Gospel in Jerusalem (Acts 1-7)
- Spread of Gospel in Samaria and Judea (Acts 8-10)
- Spread of Gospel to ends of earth (Acts 11-18)



# Summary Statement Division of Acts

- 1:1-6:7 Description of early church
- 6:8-9:31 1st geographic expansion to Jews
- 9:32-12:24 1st expansion to Gentiles
- 12:25-16:5 1st geographical expansion to Gentile world
- 16:6-19:20 Further westward Gentile expansion
- 19:21-28:30 Expansion of Gospel to Rome



# Luke's Purpose in Writing Acts

- Luke seems to be interested in the Spirit-led movement of the church from Jews to Gentiles
- He does not give us biographies, org charts, or other directional expansion
- He does not seem to be interested in standardization of church practices
- He seems to focus on the triumphant, joyful, Spirit-led expansion as God's intent for the church



# Acts 6:1-7

<sup>1</sup>In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. <sup>2</sup>So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. <sup>3</sup>Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them <sup>4</sup>and we will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”



# Acts 6:1-7 continued

<sup>5</sup>This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. <sup>6</sup>They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

<sup>7</sup>So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

(NIV)



# Observations From The Text

- Gives us a picture of life in early church
- Shows its expansion within Jerusalem
- Hints of tension in early church
- Tension appears between Aramaic and Greek-speaking Jews
- There was official recognition of leadership of Greek-speaking Jews



# Historical Background of Text

- Hellenists were Greek-speaking Jews of the Diaspora, now living in Jerusalem
- Many returned to die and be buried by Mount Zion, but their widows had no regular means of sustenance
- These widows were cared for by daily subsidies that created economic strain
- The Hellenists had their own synagogue in Cilicia where Stephen and Saul were members (v9)
- The early church had made inroads into this synagogue - “their widows”
- The seven men are never called deacons - They are to oversee food subsidies but are also clearly ministers (Stephen, Philip)



# Interpreting Acts 6:1-7

- Luke focuses on one of the Seven as a key figure in the expansion outside Jerusalem
- He tells us Stephen's martyrdom has this result (8:1-4)
- The Greek-speaking Jews share the Word "throughout Judea and Samaria."
- His intent is *not* to tell us about church organization into clergy and lay deacons



# The Hermeneutics of Acts

- Do the narratives in Acts function as precedents for the later church?
- Are they normative?
- If so, how does one decide?
- If not, what do we do with precedents?
- What role, if any, does precedent play in Christian doctrine?



# A General Hermeneutical Assumption

Unless Scripture explicitly tells us we must do something, what is only narrated or described does not function in a normative way -- unless it can be demonstrated on other grounds that the author intended it to function in this way.



# Some General Hermeneutical Principles

- The Word of God that may be regarded as normative for Christians is what the narrative was *intended* to teach
- What is *incidental* to the narrative does not have the same value as what was intended
- Historical precedent, to be normative, must be related to the author's intent



# Some Specific Hermeneutical Principles

- It is probably never valid to use an analogy for determining biblical authority
- Biblical narratives do have illustrative value
- Biblical precedents may sometimes be regarded as repeatable patterns -- even if they are not understood to be normative.



# Questions or Comments?





**Next Week:**

**The Gospels: The Greatest Story Ever Told**