

Genesis of Leadership in the Church

Looking how leadership developed in the Acts of the Apostles

Introductory Thoughts

The Acts of the Apostles is the “Genesis of the New Testament.” Just as Genesis is the book of beginnings in the Old Testament, so also Acts of the Apostles is a book of beginnings in the New Testament. Though the 4 gospels tell about the life of Jesus, careful students understand that the events recorded all happened while the Law of Moses was still in effect for the Hebrew people.

Acts was written about 63 AD by Luke, as attested by introductions to both the gospel of Luke and Acts. It is the only inspired history book ever written about the church in the first century. If one wants to find out where, when, and how the church started, they are found in Acts. If one wants examples and principles of becoming a Christian, they are found in Acts. It is the sole book to which current students can go to tie identity directly to the Lord and his church.

The historical events can be divided into three sections: The Lord at work in Jerusalem (1-7), the Lord at work in Judea and Samaria (8-9), and the Lord at work to the uttermost parts of the earth (13-28). Some divide this book into two other interesting concepts: the Acts of Peter (1-12), and the Acts of Paul (13-28), since both men are featured so prominently in those sections.

Chapter 1 – **The Leadership of Choice** – 1:15-26

- A. It can be assumed that Peter was led by the Spirit to bring this matter before the 120 disciples of John gathered.
- B. It can be further assumed that the Spirit led Peter to ask for all the qualified men, i. e., those men who had accompanied the disciples from the baptism of John to the resurrection, especially being a witness to Jesus’ resurrection – vv. 21-22.
- C. Then the 120, “they,” exercised their leadership of judgment and choice and put forward the two qualified men – v. 23..
- D. The use of a 3rd person plural Aorist verb (e)/sthsan ESTASAN) indicates that Peter was not the single one to put these men’s names forward. (e)/sthsan is from i(/sthmi HISTEMI, which means “to set forth, appoint.”) - Moulton
- E. Thus, leadership began to be shown even before the church was activated by God’s use of the judgment of the 120 disciples. They chose the men known as qualified, God later showing His choice of the two by lot – v. 26.

- F. Let us consider that God had already made His choice of a successor, though it was not known until the casting of lots.
- G. This was a foundational office with no successors. They were the touchstones of the doctrine of the gospel, the purveyors of inspired traditions (2 Thess. 2:15), and their work, or office, along with that of other inspired prophets, was the foundation upon which the church was built (Eph. 2:20).

Chapter 2 – The Leadership of Courage – 2:4, 14-37, 42-43

- A. These 12 obscure, mostly men of menial circumstances and work, spoke out courageously to the assembled Jewish throngs, part of Peter's sermon is recorded, but the men continued to teach and work wonders and signs.
- B. One should remember that six of these men were fishermen (Peter, Andrew, James, John, and perhaps Philip and Bartholomew/Nathaniel) – John 20:2.
- C. Matthew was a publican/tax collector – Matt. 10:3.
- D. The occupations of the others are not known, but obviously they were from among the common men of Palestine.
- E. Now, inspired by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, these men become lions of the gospel, eagerly preaching, working miracles, and edifying the new Christians.
- F. It is of note that being baptized in the Holy Spirit did not take away the personal will and choice of these men, for inspired persons could still exercise control over their use of inspiration – 1 Cor. 14:32.
- G. These inspired men, exercising their own volition and choice, could have chosen not to speak in the face of possible persecution.
- H. Yet these new apostles showed courage in the face of extreme opposition; after all, just a few days previously the Jews had Jesus crucified.
- I. Leadership in the Lord's church demands courage to speak truth.

Chapters 3, 4, 5 – The Leadership of Suffering

- A. Because of continuing to heal and preach, Peter and John were arrested by the Jews – 4:3.
- B. Boldness was their watchword when put on trial – 4:13.
- C. Disregarding threats of punishment, they rejoiced while praying for boldness 4:29-31.
- D. They continued their work in public but all 12 were arrested; yet being released by an angel of the Lord, they went back into the temple and continued to preach – 5:17-21.
- E. Tried before the council/ Sanhedrin (5:27) they continued to speak boldly (5:29-31), and were beaten illegally – 5:40.

- F. Yet, with blood streaming down their backs and legs, they rejoiced they were worthy to suffer for Jesus, and they continued preaching every day that Jesus is the Christ – 5:41-42.
- G. The leadership of suffering must have had a tremendous effect upon the early disciples and upon those who would hear them speak.

Chapter 6 – **The Leadership of Delegation**

- A. Early on the church encountered problems in benevolence.
- B. It was such a problem that seemed to be tainted with racism, the Grecian Jews against the Hebrews – 6:1.
- C. The apostles no longer had time to administer to these needs if they accomplished their own work, though money was laid at the apostles' feet - 4:35, 37.
- D. The “apostles' feet” simply referred to a fund given to the church to be used for the needy. Today we would usually say “church treasury” or “church bank account.”
- E. The apostles had the qualifications to do a special work, while men of other qualifications could deal with benevolence; thus the plan to delegate these responsibilities was presented to the multitude (assembly or church) – 6:2.
- F. The apostles instructed the church, “Look ye out therefore, brethren, from among you...” – v. 3.
- G. The Christians concurred and 7 men were chosen to do the work, all of whom were from among the Grecian Jews, the aggrieved group (McGarvey) – 6:5-6.
- H. It should be noted that in such delegation, even by inspired apostles, the judgment of the church was sought – 6:2-4.
- I. It should also be noted that the church set men forth of their choice, as this was not the choice of the apostles – 6:5. The word used is a 3rd person plural Aorist verb (e)cele/santo EXELESANTO, from e)kle/gw EKLEGO), which means to choose or select – Moulton. The antecedent of the pronoun “they” is the whole multitude, not the apostles.
- J. Thus the leadership of the apostles included delegation of necessary tasks to qualified men who were chosen by the church, from among the church, to do special works for the church.
- K. One of the more pressing needs in leadership among us today is that of thoughtful, prudent, wise, and judicious delegation.
- L. Many fine persons can be used in great jobs for the Lord; why do leaders sometimes practice jealousy about delegation and thus hinder the work?
- M. Wise leadership has this inspired example of delegation, and those who are wise today will follow this lead.

Chapter 7 – **The Leadership of Commitment**

- A. Stephen, one of the chosen special servants (deacons?), was inspired of the Spirit and could work signs and wonders – 6:8
- B. It should be remembered that a person's own will and volition was involved in the use of inspiration, and Stephen surely had great commitment about this use.
- C. Arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin, lied about by suborned men, Stephen was given the opportunity to speak – 6:11-15.
- D. A marvelous sermon was recorded by Luke, at the close of which Stephen lost his life – 7:1-60.
- E. His closing remarks were straight to the heart of the problem of the blinded Jews, for he told them they did not even keep the Law which they claimed to revere and defend against Christians – 7:51-53.
- F. Undeterred, Stephen was given a vision of the Lord, but even as he gasped his last breath, he prayed to the Lord for the forgiveness of those who were killing him – 7:55-60.
- G. A commitment like that of Stephen is hard to imitate, much less emulate, but it serves as a magnificent example of leadership in giving one's self to Jesus.

Chapter 8 – **The Leadership of Commitment, Devotion, and Energy**

- A. Now that a great persecution was unleashed against disciples, there was a scattering into Judea and Samaria, for they were fleeing for their very lives – 8:1.
- B. In spite of the local persecution in Jerusalem, the disciples buried Stephen and made great mourning over him – 8:2. One wonders at what cost such a display was to those devout disciples?
- C. Those who were scattered were vibrant in their gospelizing; the persecutions in Jerusalem did not stop them, but rather, gave them more courage to continue in the name of the Lord – 8:4.
- D. Philip is recorded as a marvelous servant who went to Samaria and had a great success, so much so, that the apostles Peter and John were called to help – 8:1-24.
- E. Even on their way back to Jerusalem, these apostles preached to many villages of the Samaritans – 8:25.
- F. Philip was then called away to teach one person from Ethiopia, and even after that stirring experience, he preached all the way down to Caesarea, where he was an evangelist for many years – 8:26-40; 21:8.
- G. The persecutions in Jerusalem caused the disciples to scatter and preach the gospel over all of Palestine. Such agonies did not cause them to lose their faith, rather, it gave them more commitment, energy, and devotion.

- H. These examples should give great impetus for leadership throughout all centuries till Jesus comes again.

Chapter 9 – The Leadership of Humility, Helpfulness, and Steadfastness

- A. Saul of Tarsus, the leader of persecutions against the church begins another aggressive plan as far away as Damascus – 9:1-2.
- B. The Lord intervenes and this young man shows great humility and penitence – 9:3-9.
- C. Jesus sent a gospel preacher, relatively unknown, mentioned only once in scripture, and Saul responds in obedience of baptism – 9:10-19.
- D. His energies are now turned to the gospel, but he accedes to the wishes of the brethren and he escapes a plot to kill him and goes to Jerusalem – 9:19-25.
- E. His humility is shown as Barnabas has to vouch for him, but he again accedes to leave because of another plot to kill him, and he goes to Tarsus, where he stays for several years – 9:26-30.
- F. This is certainly not the last we hear of this dynamic young man, but his hopes and steadfastness are later put to the proof in mission journeys and leadership across Asia and Europe – 13-28.

Chapter 10 – The Leadership of Openness and Obedience

- A. Peter, filled with all the old Hebrew prejudices, is willing to be open to the instructions of the Lord, change his mind and practice from the last 10 years, and preach to a Gentile family – 10:1-23.
- B. This Gentile family is open to change when they hear the truth of the gospel, and they are baptized into Christ – 10:48. (That is, if it is all right to infer from the implication that Luke wrote in v. 48, since he does not record the baptisms as a historical event!)
- C. Major changes took place in the minds of Peter and Cornelius, and this changed their practices as well as the practices of the brethren – 11:1-20.
- D. Modern leaders, showing the best leadership, ought to be open to changes produced by learning more of the truth.
- E. Close-mindedness in the leadership has been the bane of many congregations, and has contributed to unjustified rebellious attitudes among young folks.

Chapter 11 – The Leadership of Cooperation

- A. Another severe case of need came to the attention of Christians in Antioch, and they met that need as best they could – 11:27-29.

- B. This time, some 10-12 years after the first case in Jerusalem, the money was sent to the elders in Judea – 11:30.
- C. This is one church cooperating with another church, helping the other church to do its needed work of benevolence.
- D. The work of the Antioch church was to send help. The work of the Judea church was to relieve the need directly with the needy persons. Neither one interfered with the other, neither one took authority over the other; it was simply cooperation to do the work of the Lord.
- E. Whether there was one congregation in Judea, or whether there were many, makes no difference. One church was helping another church, or many other churches, to do the work of the Lord that was needed.
- F. Good leadership today will not be stymied by brethren who devise patterns of their own making and then bind them on others.

Chapter 14 – **The Leadership of Appointed Elders**

- A. As Paul and Barnabas swung back across their tracks on this first missionary journey, they appointed “elders in every church.” – 14:23.
- B. That meant Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and Antioch of Pisidia had men who were experienced enough in word and life to be used in this special work.
- C. This establishes the leadership locally in each congregation. Such avoids district or regional leadership over churches, but it shows each group was independent and autonomous.
- D. This appointment procedure was done within only 1-2 years of their conversion, so there must have been mature men, experienced in spirituality under the Law of Moses, who only needed to learn the truth about Christ.
- E. One of the most pressing needs in the church today is that of godly elders. So many churches select men who are successful in their work and communities, but relatively illiterate in the Bible. This is why so many preachers today can dominate a pulpit and get away with preaching denominational error. Some elders just do not know enough about the Bible to know the difference.

Chapter 15 – **The Leadership of Discussion**

- A. When the Antioch brethren would not take the word of an inspired apostle, Paul, they sent Barnabas and Paul to Jerusalem to confer with the other apostles and elders – 15:1-2.
- B. The question had to do with circumcising male Gentile converts, such act of circumcision being a hangover from the Law of Moses.

- C. Numerous discussions took place, but the Holy Spirit led the final effort and a letter was sent out to inform these young congregations about the problem – 15:22-29. (Note particularly v. 28 as to the control of the entire discussions.)
- D. A great characteristic of leadership is seen when men, some even inspired of the Spirit, will discuss openly and fairly any differences of thought and study.

Chapter 20 – The Leadership of Helpers and Respect for Overseers

- A. Paul had toured Macedonia and Greece picking up contributions for a need in Judea, and he had 7 men who helped carry the money to Jerusalem on that journey – 20:1-5.
- B. Good leadership uses help when needed.
- C. Paul had a loving and tearful farewell meeting with the elders from Ephesus, leaving them with great words of encouragement and warning – 20:17-38.
- D. This leadership of loving respect is sorely needed by elders and for elders of today's congregations.

Chapter 20 – The Leadership of Warning and Encouragement

- A. Paul did not hesitate to give warnings about false teachers, both from within and without, to these elders – 20:28-31
- B. Paul was far more experienced than these elders and had the opportunity to give them some advance warnings.
- C. Next, Paul gave them strong encouragements, commending them to God and His Word – 20:32-35.
- D. He did this with great a spiritual attitude, prayer, and emotional farewell – 20:36-38.

Chapter 21 – The Leadership of Mistaken Judgment

- A. Upon Paul's arrival in Jerusalem, the elders requested Paul to take 4 men into the Temple, partake in purifying exercises, and help these men to complete their vows – 21:23-25.
- B. The elders wanted to show that Paul had not forsaken circumcision and the Law of Moses – 21:20-21.
- C. Paul acquiesced to what is obviously mistaken judgment, and this, of course, led to his arrest and trials.
- D. One should take into account that brethren were still in a state of transition from the Law of Moses to Jesus Christ, and they seemed to want to think both systems could mesh together.
- E. Paul had preached clearly no one could be justified by following Moses, but circumstances caused both the elders and Paul to lapse in their application of the truth – 13:38-39.
- F. Good leadership therefore must exercise all the more knowledge of the Bible lest they too come up with mistaken judgment.

Concluding Thoughts

We have looked at numerous principles involved with leadership in the Acts of the Apostles. The qualifications of elders are listed in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. It is interesting to see how they fit into what one sees in Acts. See if you can put a scripture citation by each of these ones that require such a principle:

- Choice
- Courage
- Suffering
- Delegation
- Commitment
- Energy
- Direction
- Humility
- Helpfulness
- Steadfastness
- Obedience
- Cooperation
- Appointment
- Discussion
- Helpers
- Respect
- Warning
- Encouragement
- Judgment

Very few citations give these principles exactly. Some can be assumed, but most of these things studied are not listed in 1 Timothy and Titus. It might be that the Lord was giving the spiritual qualities that should be checked among men who already showed the other qualities of leadership. The question seems to be, "We have men among us whom we respect and recognize as leaders; now let us determine if they meet the spiritual qualities the Lord gives for overseers in his churches."

Think about it!

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