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EARLY CHURCH GROWTH

A Study of the Book of Acts

A GUIDED LEARNING BOOK

**BY
WELDON E. VIERTEL**

NEW TESTAMENT

EARLY CHURCH GROWTH

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

by Weldon E. Viertel

CARIB BAPTIST PUBLICATIONS



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PREFACE

The purpose of this guide is to introduce Bible students to the contents of the Book of Acts and to lead them to an understanding of the victories, struggles, and development of the early Church. Attention is focused on the evangelistic outreach and doctrinal issues of the young Church which had been commissioned to carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth. She experienced the power of the Holy Spirit in sharing her faith.

No attempt is made to treat the text of Acts with the thoroughness of most standard commentaries. Critical problems are mentioned but are not dealt with in detail. Students who desire to do a deeper study can find a number of excellent books suggested in the Selective Bibliography.

A knowledge of the Book of Acts is essential for understanding the messages of the Pauline and General Epistles. The Book gives a brief history of the origin of many of the Churches to which the Epistles were addressed and reflects the beginning of doctrinal, racial, and moral issues which became the major subjects of the Epistles.

This study guide contains the material for the second course in New Testament studies. It is designed for use in a ministerial training programme in which the student himself is responsible for the mastery of the subject. An emphasis on home study replaces lectures. The textual material is designed to help students understand the message and meaning of events in the Book of Acts, but the study guide is not intended to replace the Bible or to be studied without reading the parallel Scripture references. Questions have been placed on the right side of each page to assist the student in focusing on the key points of each paragraph. The questions at the end of each lesson enable a student to evaluate the degree of his mastery of the lesson content.

The Bible and this study guide are the only books required for Levels 1 and 2. Parallel reading assignments are made for Level 3 students in *The Book of Acts* by Frank Stagg. Students of all levels will profit from doing supplementary reading in other books.

Valuable assistance has been received in the preparation of this study guide from Mrs. Gladys Nelson, Mrs. Josie Smith, and my wife Joyce. They have done all of the adjunct programming and typing and have made valuable suggestions for the improvement of the book. Although a number of books have been helpful, I am especially indebted to *The Book of Acts* written by Frank Stagg. The reading of this book a number of years ago greatly increased my understanding of the situation in life of the New Testament Church and gave a needed background for the study of the New Testament Epistles.

El Paso, Texas
January, 1973

WELDON E. VIERTTEL

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MINISTERIAL TRAINING BY GUIDED STUDY

Ministerial Training by Guided Study is designed to introduce students on various levels of academic preparation to the Bible and related areas. This is not a correspondence course, nor the traditional lecture system, but a new approach in education. The goal of the programme is to make quality theological training available to all students. Family and church responsibilities and lack of academic prerequisites and finances prevent many men and women who have been called of God from improving their ministry through training. These obstacles can be overcome by an approach which emphasizes self-study and weekly small group discussions. The study guides are designed for students on three levels of preparations:

1. Students with some primary education
2. Students with some secondary education
3. Students with some university qualifications

Although this course is designed primarily for pastors and ministerial candidates with no seminary training, laymen and lay preachers can also benefit from some of the courses. Pastors with divinity degrees might use some of the study guides as refresher courses while serving as leaders of study groups and conveners of the weekly seminars.

Study guides are used to direct private and group activities in the mastery of the content of a subject. They contain the basic content for each subject and recommend supplementary sources for a more advanced study. Questions are included to direct the attention of the student to the important facts in the lessons and to provide an immediate response to the material read. Weekly seminars of approximately an hour for each subject provide opportunities for the discussion of issues related to the subjects and their practical application in contemporary life. A teacher or tutor guides the seminar discussions, but the students from all three levels present and discuss their ideas. When students come to the seminar with a basic understanding of the lesson, the seminar can be dedicated to enrichment of the subject and to discussion of the practical use of the material in the life of the Church.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING THE STUDY GUIDE

Text and Learning Activities

The Study Guide is designed primarily for home study. When the Guide is opened, the text appears on the left side of the page, and questions requiring an immediate response to the material read are on the right. The student should read a paragraph before reading and answering the question or questions for that paragraph. If there are no questions for a paragraph, he may wish to make a few notes on that paragraph and move on to the next. The questions and answers should be covered with a strip of paper (see following page) until the paragraph has been read and the student is ready to answer each question. Then the cover sheet should be moved down the page far enough to enable the reading of the question and the writing of the answer. The answer according to the text appears immediately under the question. After the student has written his own answer, he may then compare it with the given answer. If the two are not the same, the paragraph in the text should be read again.

Home Study Assignments

A **Home Study Assignment** appears at the end of each lesson. The Study Guide contains the basic content for each lesson, and the questions of the **Basic studies** are to be answered by all three levels. After reading the text and doing the learning activity on each page, the student should be able to answer most of the home study questions without further reference to the text. These questions are self-testing exercises. If a student is unsure of the correct answer, he has not adequately learned the material in that particular section, and he should review until he is sure that he understands the content. Some questions call for more extensive answers and require concentrated effort for mastery. The completed questions serve as a summary of the lesson and should be helpful as a review.

Students on *Levels 2 and 3* are required to do **Supplementary activities** in addition to the basic exercises. The supplementary activities sometimes include a reading assignment in another book with questions to be answered.

Level 3 is required to do **Advanced activities** in addition to the basic and supplementary work. This work will vary according to the availability of library resources. Sometimes there will be questions over a parallel reading assignment in a recommended resource book. At other times, the questions will require independent or individual research. Bible dictionaries, encyclopaedias, and books on the subjects of the study guide are sources which should be consulted. A **Bibliography** indicates where additional material may be found.

Seminar Discussion

It is suggested that the students of all three levels in a geographical area meet for an hour each week with a teacher or tutor to discuss the lesson with reference to:

1. problems encountered in home study in answering questions or in understanding the textual material;
2. the application of the lesson to the practical work of Christian ministry and conduct;
3. the significance of the lesson as a whole and its place in the total programme of ministerial training.

The fragmentary questions of the lesson may sometimes be answered without getting a picture of the lesson as a whole. It is also possible to learn the facts about Christianity without seeing their application in the life of the Church. The student is responsible for getting the detailed information of the lesson in his home study. Understanding the overall meaning of the lesson and its practical application should be the goal of the seminar.

Some seminar questions have been included with each lesson. Their purposes are:

1. to stimulate interest (some are controversial questions which have not been resolved by scholars);
2. to guide in the beginning of the seminar discussions;
3. to direct attention to problems related to the materials studied;
4. to require original thinking which will lead to suggestions for the practical application of the material.

Teacher or Tutor

The teacher or tutor may offer other seminar questions which are more relevant in a given situation. He should feel free to use any approach he chooses as long as the discussion remains related to the material of the lesson. It is his responsibility to prevent the seminar discussion from departing from relevant issues.

The teacher may find that a brief test at the beginning of the seminar will be helpful. The test will encourage students to more adequately prepare their home study assignments and enable the teacher to evaluate the progress of each student. Two or three questions from the basic studies should be sufficient. Students who are not making satisfactory progress may need personal help and encouragement in preparing their lesson. They should not be overlooked!

LEARNING ACTIVITY

Use this sheet of paper to cover the learning activity on each page.

When you have finished reading each paragraph, slide the sheet down just far enough to expose the learning activity for that paragraph.

If there is no activity, continue to the next paragraph.

Write your answers

Then slide the sheet down farther to expose the suggested answers.

Compare your answers with the suggested ones.

If they do not agree, reread the paragraph.

Continue to the next paragraph.

Cut to separate

LEARNING ACTIVITY

Use this sheet of paper to cover the learning activity on each page.

When you have finished reading each paragraph, slide the sheet down just far enough to expose the learning activity for that paragraph.

If there is no activity, continue to the next paragraph.

Write your answers

Then slide the sheet down farther to expose the suggested answers.

Compare your answers with the suggested ones.

If they do not agree, reread the paragraph.

Continue to the next paragraph.