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**A0803 – January 20, 2008 – Acts 1:1-8 – The Transitional Nature
Of Acts**

This morning we begin a study in the Book of Acts. The Book of Acts is the most abused book of all Scripture. Every dimwit that ever came along has used Acts to grind his axe and the result has been that Acts is very confusing; to interpret Acts is very confusing, and oftentimes Christians who are not acquainted with the book of Acts handle themselves extremely poorly when they meet some of these fanatics. Three illustrations of how Acts is misused today, we have the charismatic group with their little pick and choose methodology, picking what Scriptures they want and then dismissing the other ones unfavorable to their cause. And the book of Acts we often has someone just climbs in chapter 2 or chapter 8 or chapter 10 and they pull out this little pearl and they make this the eternal norm and standard for the entire Church Age. That's wrong, it's the wrong interpretation of Acts and I hope at least after this morning you'll be forewarned about that little operation. Another example of the misuse of Acts are the Campbellites, you know them as the Church of Christ started by Joseph Campbell in the early 1800's and these people camp on Acts 2:38 and 22:16 and argue that you have to get water baptized in order to go to heaven, ignoring hundreds of other verses in this book to the contrary. So, this is another group that uses the pick and choose methodology. Finally in our own camp we have disagreement on when the Church began and we debate Acts 2, Acts 9, Acts 13 and Acts 28? Obviously some are more extreme than others but this has caused confusion on what the gospel is. Do I have to repent and believe? What's the difference? Are there different gospels, the gospel to the Jew and the gospel to the Gentiles? And if you get real extreme with this and push for Acts 13 or 28 as the beginning of the Church then you make certain epistles irrelevant to the church, you get rid of some of the ordinances and so you have to be very

careful to demarcate when the church began lest you malign certain epistles claiming their not written to us. We'll get into all of it.

We're also dealing with the first 30 years of church history. Yeah we have Josephus and he talks about the resurrection of Christ and we have Tacitus but these are later. Acts is the only record of the first 30 years of church history. Luke doesn't mention every event that happened but he does mention all the key events, the big things that are a part of his argument because Acts is not just a history book, it records the historical events that supplement his argument. Many of you have read Acts but you've never pieced together why these particular events are mentioned and it's because he's making an argument that this movement, Christianity, was not orchestrated by men. If you read the book you find that any movement outward from Jerusalem is forced. They didn't go out of Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria because they wanted to. They were saying no, no, no but God was saying yes, yes, yes and so God pushed them out of Jerusalem, forced them out eventually to the Gentiles, the dogs, and Paul takes it all the way to Rome. So the gospel goes out but it's not because these people were so spiritual and they were positive to the word of God, no, it's because God is pushing them out. So the Book is called Acts but it's not really human acts that are being recorded. It's really the *Acts of the Holy Spirit*. People are involved, especially Peter and Paul and for that reason some have called it the *Acts of Peter and Paul* and they are the human actors but it's the Holy Spirit who's on center stage. Other's have called it the *Acts of the Apostles* but Stephen wasn't an apostle and his speech is pretty important so I still prefer the *Acts of the Holy Spirit*. Some others, since it is Luke's second volume, really Luke and Acts are volume 1 and 2 of a set and because of that they say Luke is the *Acts of Jesus Present* and Acts is the *Acts of Jesus Absent* but still I think it's a lot better to call it *Acts of the Holy Spirit*. That title really sums up the argument of the book. God is starting a new program called the Church but this requires Christ's departure and the Spirit's arrival. And it's an argument for the validity of this movement, that it's of God and not of men. Like Acts 5:38-39. Here's Gamaliel and he's well known teacher of the Law, a member of the Sanhedrin, the governing body of Jews, and they're having a meeting about "What are we going to do with this movement that's gaining all these followers?" They are wanting to crush it but he says, v, 38, "So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of

God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God.” So, that’s why I call it *The Acts of the Holy Spirit*. That’s the argument Luke is making. Men didn’t start this thing. Think about how it all got started. Jesus Christ has just died on the cross and the followers of Christ were shocked by this! This was a big surprise and we think, “What was wrong with these guys? I mean of course He died on the cross. Well it’s easy to say that Monday morning quarterback but these guys were looking at the OT and they had these passages about the social, political kingdom the Messiah would bring in, all the glories and here’s our Messiah and He got crucified? What? And it’s really astonishing because who do you see at the cross? Are the men hanging around? No, the women are there. What about the tomb? Are the men standing around tapping their watches waiting for the resurrection? No. The women are. Why’s that? Because apparently the women were more with it spiritually. The guys couldn’t get their mind off the oppressive rule of Rome and “Let’s get liberated from this thing, here’s our King and what, He’s dead?” Bummer, back to square one. But that’s what happens when you only look at one line of testimony in Scripture. They were all interested in the glories of Messiah, the coming Kingdom, all that, and we can’t blame them much, if we were there we’d want to be liberated from Rome too, but they forgot the other line of evidence in the OT that of the sufferings of the Messiah; He’d be despised and rejected, and killed. But they were too involved in political expedience and they missed that. But the women were with it. This is a wake up call to the guys, very depressing one; the girls were more with it spiritually than the guys.

Let’s look at the nature of the *Acts of the Holy Spirit*. This is a totally unique book in the NT because it’s dealing with a transitional period. This is so crucial because if you think about it, transitional periods are by definition abnormal. When you move from one home to another that’s an abnormal time of life, you can’t find anything, it’s frustrating, it’s confusing, let’s just get settled down, lets get back to normal. My wife was pregnant twice and we got three kids and I’m so glad that pregnancy is not the normal. That’s a transitional period of life and it’s anything but normal and that’s the Book of Acts, it’s a transitional book so you can’t go in there, pull out a few miraculous events and make them the eternal norm. That’s how people get all wrapped around the axel in Acts. Just because something happened in history doesn’t mean it’s going to keep on happening in history. In Moses’ day

the Jews walked up to the Red Sea and it divided. Now are we going to say that every time a Jew walks up to a body of water it will divide? Transitions are not normal so you can't pull out a few transitional verses and build a whole doctrine on it; tongue's speaking, second baptism of the Spirit, water baptism for heaven and all the rest of it. Just more of the pick and choose method of interpretation. So, the major thing to keep in mind is that Acts is by nature a transitional book. We will show a chart again and again as we study the book of Acts to show this. First we have the gospel period. During that gospel period the kingdom of God is proclaimed and offered. Remember John the Baptist, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand," and that kingdom includes the social, political and geographical but the social, political and geographical fruit of the Kingdom are contingent upon first the people responding to God's spiritual prerequisite, which is the acceptance of Messiah. And so over and over again Jesus said the same thing, "Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand". It isn't here but if you will just accept Me as your Messiah you can have your kingdom, you can have your political freedom, you can have your land and all the rest of it, all that is yours if you'll accept Me and bow your knee to Me as the authority. And so the kingdom was offered time and time and time again. But Israel rejected Him; the nation rejected the Messiahship of Jesus and Jesus pronounced judgment on that generation. And He told them, you're not going to see me again until you accept Me as the Messiah.

Then, in the first chapters of the book of Acts the kingdom of God was reoffered to the nation Israel. This is something you want to be careful of because Acts 2 and Acts 3 are not evangelistic sermons. It is not a simple evangelistic sermon that Peter gets up on the day of Pentecost and preaches. What he is doing is not only preaching the gospel but he is reoffering the kingdom to the nation and that's why he says be saved from this perverse generation, Jesus is the Messiah and this generation crucified Him but if you repent you're sins will be forgiven, you'll receive the promise of the Holy Spirit and the times of refreshing will come. That's the millennial kingdom. He's officially confronting the nation on its official capital grounds, the city of Jerusalem. And yes, you've crucified Christ, yes He has gone to be at the Father's right hand, but heaven has received Him until the time of the restoration of all things. And that time can come now if you will accept Him. So in the early chapters of the book of Acts the kingdom is offered again and again it's rejected. Through the whole book of Acts it's rejected. And in AD70

what happened? The Romans destroyed the Temple and that was judgment on that generation. Grace, grace, grace and then judgment.

So the book of Acts is a book of transition. Now on the day of Pentecost, we can look back on it now but remember we are Monday morning quarterbacks looking back on it. We can look back on it now and say “Yes, the Church began on the day of Pentecost;” however, though the Church was in existence on the Day of Pentecost, few knew about it. They hadn’t realized it yet; in fact, it didn’t dawn on them for decades until Paul finally came around and straightened everybody out as to what really happened back there on the day of Pentecost. It took time for those early disciples to understand that they were living between one age and another. They expected the dispensation of law to end and the dispensation of the kingdom to begin. They didn’t know a thing about this dispensation of the Church. And so there was this transition happening and the Church grew and grew until finally now in the epistles the Church is fully revealed and the Church fully replaces that prior offer of the kingdom. As the book of Acts goes on you have less and less of the spectacular and more and more of the teaching of doctrine. You have less and less emphasis on the kingdom and more and more emphasis on the Church. Why is that? Because the book of Acts is a book of transitions. And this is what’s so wrong and so foolish about people that go into the first part of Acts and they say look at those miracles, why the reason we don’t see miracles today is because we’re people of so little faith and if we had more faith we’d see more miracles. Bologna! The absence of miracles has nothing to do with faith. Do you know why? Elijah and Elisha pulled off the greatest set of miracles in a totally unbelieving generation. So the frequency of miracles is not related to the faith of a generation. The frequency of miracles is related to what God’s program is, regardless of the faith of any given generation.

Now I said from this chart that the major theme of the book of Acts is this transition. I want to break this down and give you seven ways in which the transition is occurring. We’ll trace these seven transitional themes through various verses. All of this is to help you when we get into Acts so you won’t lose the forest for the trees and you’ll interpret passages in the overall framework and not lose it, and get all hung up on one or two verses. Remember Acts is an argument; Luke is proving a point, he’s not just teaching history.

First, there is a doctrinal transition; at first they don't have a clue as to what went on at the cross, Yes, they're saved, they know Christ personally but they don't know that much about His person and consequently they don't understand the atonement; somehow He dealt with the sin problem but it's not really pinned down as to what was going on on the cross; that is developed as we go through the book of Acts. So first about the major theme of transition and that is there's a transition in doctrine, a development from the naïve simple to the more mature and complex.

The second transition is a communal transition; you have the doctrinal transition and the communal transition. At the beginning of the book of Acts you have the Christians as part of the Jewish community; they are a sect inside of Judaism, they teach in the Temple, they meet in synagogues (3:8, 11; 5:25, 42; 8:3; 24:14; 25:19; 28:22). By the end of the book of Acts Christianity is a movement on an equal or greater par than Judaism. It has stepped outside of the community of Judaism and has formed a new community neither Jew nor Gentile. And so you have a transition between being a community inside Judaism to a becoming a community outside of Judaism. Communal transition.

A third transition besides the doctrinal and communal is the focal transition. You start off with the focus on the Kingdom but the focus shifts to the Church. Turn to Acts 1:6, at the very beginning of the book of Acts the disciples still are imbued with the idea of that social, political and geographical kingdom. Christ has died, yes; Christ has risen, yes, but where's the kingdom? The kingdom, that's the issue. And so in Acts 1:6, "So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" So they are still thinking in terms of the kingdom. But Christ answer them in verse 7, "He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." What Christ is doing in verses 7-8 is saying "The kingdom will come but don't you get all bent out of shape waiting for it right now; the kingdom is not the issue, the Spirit has some work to do with the kingdom but the work of the Spirit in a few days has nothing to do with that kingdom directly, so just put the kingdom out of your mind boys and let's concentrate on what the Spirit is

doing in a few days.” He doesn’t say the kingdom is never going to come; He just says the kingdom right now isn’t the issue, right now it’s another work of the Holy Spirit and that’s why I call this book *Acts of the Holy Spirit*. What is this work of the Holy Spirit and how does Luke track it? He has a phrase every time. Turn to Acts 6:7. Time and time again throughout the book of Acts Luke takes us back to this same old slogan, this same old phrase and it’s to pinpoint the fact of the work of the Holy Spirit. “And the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem.” Turn to Acts 12:24, “But the word of God grew and multiplied.” Acts 19:20, “So mightily grew the Word of God, and prevailed.” What strange thing is this that’s happened? The kingdom hasn’t come but God’s word goes out? Why is this happening. Well, this is where you see a link between the Church and the Kingdom.

Now I’m a dispensationalist and I’m frequently accused as a dispensationalist of making such a violent division between the Church and Israel that they never get together. Now just listen; the dispensationalist simply points to these verses; there are two movements going on but they’re not absolutely disconnected, they’re joined and they’re joined in this way. The Church or the body of Christ is growing to doctrinal maturity so they can become co-heirs of Christ in the kingdom and reign with Him. But before that kingdom can come there must be a nucleus of people trained to be loyal to Jesus Christ. We must learn loyalty to the King of light while we dwell in the kingdom of darkness. Thus the warnings about the angelic conflict taking place behind the scenes and believers warring for Christ with these principalities and powers. And that’s the lesson for the Church, and that’s why the Church precedes the kingdom, because we must be doctrinally trained so that we make the word of God the issue, plus nothing else. We don’t get any fringe benefits now politically and socially from the kingdom because that’s in the future. And the whole creation is groaning awaiting that day when this loyal nucleus will be revealed.

We have a fourth thing; we’ve had the doctrinal transition from immaturity to maturity, the communal transition from inside Judaism to outside Judaism, the focal transition from Kingdom to the Church, and now we have the geographical transition, the transition from Jerusalem to Rome.

Physically the Church moved, it started in Jerusalem and moved out. Acts 8:1, this is the day Stephen was martyred for his great speech in Acts 7, “And

on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria,” So, the plan of God is moving out. Where’s it going? Acts 23:11, Paul’s defense to the Sanhedrin, “But on the night *immediately* following, the Lord stood at his side and said, “Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also.”

So, this is, incidentally why Christianity became a European religion instead of an Oriental religion. And you’ll see over and over that it wasn’t because men just wanted to go that way. It wasn’t because every body was so anxious to get the word out. Did you ever notice that when you’ve read the book of Acts? It’s not a picture of the great loyal believers going out with the word of God, from Jerusalem to Samaria to the uttermost parts of the world, all by their own little volition. Not at all. Every one of those stages from Jerusalem to Samaria to the uttermost parts of the world has to be fought over. Every time they make a transition God has to say do it, do it, do it, do it, do it, and they say no, no, no, no, no, no, and it starts with Saul, the missionary theologian that takes the movement to Rome, and what had to happen to him? He had to go on the road to Damascus and get smashed. God had to smash him to wake him up. So how did the Church’s key theologian get started? Because he was such a great man who was so positive to the Word. Not at all; because God had to come down in a confrontation with him to straighten him out. Time and again you see this and it’s because Luke’s argument is that this geographical transition from Jerusalem to Rome happened only because God intervened, God intervened and changed us and forced us to keep moving out and out and out and out and it did not come naturally; we had to be led to it by one severe crisis after another. And that’s a sub-theme that goes along with this transition.

The fifth transition is a theological transition from Christ present to the Spirit present. In Acts 1 Christ is there in His resurrection body teaching His disciples about the kingdom of God and in v 9 he takes off, the ascension, “And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.” Jesus is gone back to heaven because His people rejected Him. But if you remember back in the Upper Room, what did Christ tell them the night he was betrayed? I won’t leave you alone I’m going to send a Helper but I’ve got to leave first (Acts 15:26; 16:7). So, Jesus departs and what happens in Acts 2? The Spirit arrives. And this is connected to another thing that up to that time that the Spirit had been *with*

them but now He was going to be *in* them. That's a brand new thing that started on the Day of Pentecost and it's apparent because just weeks before you have Peter and the other apostles denying Him and freaking out and surprised at the resurrection and suddenly they are speaking out boldly, they're confident before the authorities, they stand up to them. Obviously somethings happened and part of it is no doubt they'd been with the resurrected Christ but you have to give the majority of the credit to the Holy Spirit indwelling them. Their whole demeanor changed and that's evidence of the transition from Christ present to the Spirit present.

The sixth transition , after we've looked at the doctrinal transition from immature to mature, the communal transition from being a sect within Judaism to a separate community, a geographical transition as we move from Jerusalem to Rome, the theological transition from Christ present to Spirit present and the focal transition from kingdom to church now we want to bring in a related transition to all this and it's the program transition from Israel to the Church. This is so clear but it doesn't really become clear till Paul, early on with Peter he's still offering the kingdom and so the kingdom offer is sort of phasing out and at the same time a new entity has begun called the Church, the body of Christ. Early on the church is distinction Jewish, it started in Jerusalem on Pentecost and then as God forces them to move out they go into Judea and Samaria and Phillip is there preaching and these Samaritans, half-breeds, are responding and they send Peter to check things out. I mean what is going on here? Then Peter has to get a vision of this sheet with unclean animals and God tells him to rise and eat and this is like rubbing crud in Peter's face. I'm going to walk into a Gentile's house and eat this unclean stuff? Yeah right. And he has to get the message three times. And what's happening is God's shifted the program and Peter's still confused about all this. So you have to have Paul come in later in the Epistles and clear all this up by explaining the baptism of the Spirit and how that's what puts you in the Church, not Israel, that's a separate program a separate people, the Church is a new entity composed of Jew and Gentile but in Acts you just have these childish disputes about the Gentiles coming in. So, that's the program transition from Israel to the Church.

Another transition, the seventh, related to this is the national transition from a Jewish majority to a Gentile majority. At first you had Jews in Acts 2 and the Jews who are believing in Jesus and their numbers increase daily but

then they get forced out to Samaria and some Samaritans believed in Acts 8 and finally the Gentile Cornelius and his household in Acts 10-11, they believe and, incidentally, those are the only three times tongues are mentioned as occurring and it's always when a new group entered the Church. Lots of people become believers in Acts but only when a new group comes in do you have tongues so that's very significant for the whole supposed tongues phenomena today. But once Paul gets loose things just blow up and very quickly the Jews are outnumbered by the Gentiles in the Church, that's a national shift from being within Israel to being scattered among the Gentiles. And with Paul's ministry which really starts in Acts 13 you see something really interesting, when he goes to a new city he goes to the Jew first and then the Gentile (cf Rom 1:16). It's a consistent pattern, Acts 13:46, "Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles." Acts 18:4-6, "And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul *began* devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood *be* on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." Acts 28:28, here again he's speaking to Jews, these live in Rome, "Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen." So, it goes out to the Jew and when the Jews reject then he turns to the Gentiles so by the end of Acts there's a transition from a Jewish majority to a Gentile majority but the Jews are never excluded.

So, again, Acts is transitional by nature and we've looked at seven of these transitions, there are others, but we pointed out the doctrinal transition, from naivety to maturity, the communal transition from inside Judaism to outside Judaism, a focal transition from kingdom to Church, a geographic transition from Jerusalem to Rome, the gospel is going out, a theological transition from Christ present to the Spirit present and lastly a national transition from Jewish majority to Gentile majority.

Now there is one minor theme in the gospel of Luke; this doesn't play much of a doctrinal role but it will explain many passages and tie these together for

you. This is something else to watch for as you read. You'll see that time and time and time again Luke goes into almost abnormal lengths describing the reactions of high government officials to the Christian faith. Here's why. In Luke's day the Jewish religion had been offered special privileges under Rome. It goes back to the book of Daniel. The reason why is that the Romans had the Parthians on their eastern frontier and the eastern frontier of Rome was always vulnerable and the worst place to be, to have these hothead Jews in between the Parthians and you. This was a potentially very unstable area. Plus the fact Rome had come to power and had gone into Israel right after the Maccabean problems and they knew "Boy, if you go in and start trying to get those Jews to integrate with your religious culture you're going to have a war on your hands and we can't stand having a war on our eastern frontier with the Parthians just beyond." So the political and historical pressures of Judaism forced Rome to compromise at this point and the Jews, wherever they went were allowed to have their kosher laws and they were allowed to worship YHWH as the only God and refuse to worship Caesar on the coin. They were the only group in the empire that had this privilege.

Now here's the question that Luke had to grapple with and this is a minor theme of the book of Acts. The Christians came out of the Jewish community. Do the Christians share the same position *vis a vis* the Roman government? So there's a political question being dealt with all through the book of Acts: does the Christian church share the privileges of Judaism within the Roman Empire?

This is why you'll see such passages as these; turn to Acts 18:12; there are many passages in the book of Acts like these, I'll just show you two or three samples. "But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat, saying, "This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law." But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you; but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters." And so you have a high government official refuse to intervene and distinguish Christianity from Judaism; hands off, that's a religious issue, we Romans aren't going to deal with the fine points.

Next passage similar to this one is Acts 19:31, here Paul is in danger, “Also some of the Asiarchs who were friends of his sent to him and repeatedly urged him not to venture into the theater.” These are Roman officials and they say Paul, for heaven’s sake, don’t go in there. Verse 32, “So then, some were shouting one thing and some another.” Paul was right in the middle of a big riot, and verse 35, “After quieting the crowd, the town clerk said, “Men of Ephesus, what man is there after all who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is guardian of the temple of the great Artemis. So, since these are undeniable facts, you ought to keep calm and to do nothing rash. “For you have brought these men *here* who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess.” So you have again a high official saying Paul has not violated any law worthy of our law code; get him out of here.

And we could go on and on, Acts 23, Acts 24, Acts 25, Acts 26, and Acts 28 all contain similar encounters with Roman authorities; same theme, and it’s helpful to see this when you read Acts. So, the major thing today is transition; Acts is a transitional book. The minor theme is Christianity has a right in the political empire to political respect; we are not undermining Roman authority, we are living peacefully within the system. That’s part of Luke’s argument; Christianity is not a violent religion, it can operate peacefully within the Roman system.

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