

"ACTS AS A RADICAL CHALLENGE TO TODAY'S CHURCH"

(Ajith Fernando)

Contemporary Christians who read Acts with an open mind will find themselves challenged with pointed applications by what happened in the early church. I will mention only a few here.

- To a society where individualism reigns and where the church also seems to have adopted a style of community life that "guards the privacy of the individual," the early church presents a radical community where the members held all things in common.
- To a society where selfishness is sometimes admired and each one is left to fend for himself or herself, Acts presents a group of Christians who were so committed to Christ and the cause of the gospel that they were willing to sacrifice their desires for the good of others.
- To a society where pluralism defines truth as something subjective and personal, Acts presents a church that based its life on certain objective facts about God and Christ—facts that were not only personally true but also universally valid and therefore had to be presented to the entire world.
- To a society that denies absolute truth and therefore shuns apologetics and persuasion in evangelism in favor of dialogue, Acts presents a church that persuaded people until they were convinced of the truth of the gospel. Instead of aiming at mutual enrichment as the main aim of inter-religious encounter, as many do today, the early church proclaimed Christ as supreme Lord with conversion in view.
- In an age where specialization has hit evangelism so much that we rarely find churches that emphasize healing also emphasizing apologetics, Acts presents a church where the same individuals performed healings and preached highly reasoned, apologetic messages.
- In an age when many churches spend so much time, money, and energy on self-preservation and improvement, Acts presents churches that released their most capable people for reaching the lost.
- In an age where many churches look to excellence in techniques to bring success, Acts presents a church that depended on the Holy Spirit and gave top priority to prayer and moral purity.
- In an age when many avenues are available to avoid suffering and therefore many Christians have left out suffering from their understanding of the Christian life, Acts presents a church that took on suffering for the cause of Christ and considered it a basic ingredient of discipleship.

