



THE THEOLOGY OF DISCIPLESHIP IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

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Introduction

The church of the 21st century seems to be uncertain about how to make disciples¹. Her attempt to make disciples has been largely ineffective. This has led to large numbers of unhealthy churches, and especially, in America. Church growth experts estimate that 3,500 to 4,000 churches in America alone die annually.² The pathology report from dead and dying churches indicates an inadequate theology of discipleship. Research conducted by George Barna contends, that, “spiritually healthy churches are the exception rather than the rule.”³ Kennon Vaughan adds,

“A much needed conversation is taking place across the Western Evangelical Church on the nature of biblical discipleship. What is it? How can we restore it to the church? If we don’t act soon, the Western church will soon be a stereotype of the discipleship-less church. We need to advance both the conversation and discipleship action.”⁴

The church in the 21st century can reverse that trend through effective discipleship. A biblical theology of discipleship, based primarily on the book of Acts, which is implemented by local churches, will produce healthy growth spiritually and numerically. However, as Richard D.

¹ Greg Kedrovsky, *The Biblical Theology Of Discipleship*, ebook, 1st ed., n.d., accessed December 14, 2015, <http://www.greg.kedrovsky.com>.

² Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches For The 21St Century* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1998), 35.

³ George Barna and Mark Hatch, *Boiling Point* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 2001), 246.

⁴ Kennon Vaughan, Jonathan Howe and Brandon Smith, "The Reproductive Impulse Of Discipleship", *Gcdiscipleship.Com*, last modified 2015, accessed December 14, 2015, <http://gcdiscipleship.com/the-reproductive-impulse-of-discipleship/>.

Calenberg writes, “Discipleship has become one of those theological catch words or shibboleths which every card-carrying evangelical feels compelled to enthusiastically and repeatedly utter but which few have taken time to study and define biblically.”⁵ The approach to making disciples is often flawed because it does not follow the biblical model for discipleship. Dr. Joseph C. Aldrich, president of Multnomah School of the Bible states,

“Quite frankly, I’ve grown weary of the term “discipleship.” A grand biblical principle has been captured by cultural Christianity and distorted into a mechanistic, assembly-line process. I guess I’m tired of watching human rodeos—people herded into corrals, dehorned, vaccinated, branded and put out to pasture. High-speed, short-term, result-oriented: we have turned the mechanics of ministry into the ministry itself.”⁶

Millard J. Erickson in his book “Christian Theology” states, “Theology is necessary because truth and experience are related. While some would deny or at least question the connection, in the long run the truth will affect our experience”⁷ The condition of the church in the 21st century is a reflection of her theology of discipleship.

“The absence of the concept of discipleship from present-day Christianity leaves a vacuum which we instinctively try to fill with one or another substitute” says Tozer.⁸ Paul Helm explains some difficulties the church faces when forming her theology of discipleship. He writes,

“In the history of the Christian church the ideals and even the practice of Christian discipleship have tended to veer between extremes. For some being a Christian disciple has amounted to nothing other than a carefully cultivated and

⁵ Richard Calenberg, 'The New Testament Doctrine of Discipleship', 1981,

⁶ Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ, Disciple-Maker* (Old Tappan, N.J.: F.H. Revell Co., 1990), 7-8.

⁷ Millard J Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1986), 29.

⁸ A. W Tozer and Harry Verploegh, *The Set Of The Sail* (Camp Hill, Pa.: Christian Publications, 1986), 137-138.

controlled worldliness. Others have identified discipleship with the adoption of an ascetic discipline. This has been a feature of medieval Catholicism and of certain Anabaptist communities, and has been a recurrent tendency in Protestant pietism and fundamentalism. More recently discipleship has come to be thought of by some in wholly secular terms, as involving emancipation from “religion” in any of its forms. Such extremes indicate that the balance between a Christian disciple being in the world (Jn 17:15; 1 Cor 5:10) but not of the world (Jn 17:16) is difficult to achieve and to sustain.”⁹

If the church is not making disciples as commanded she will use her resources to do something else that will lead to ineffective weak dying churches. The central question the church must answer correctly is what is the primary task Christ assigned to the church? If this question is answered incorrectly the church will fail to fulfill her purpose for being in the world. One of the challenges with defining discipleship is that the actual word is not found in the Bible. Jesus made disciples and commanded disciples to make disciples. Discipleship is the process of carrying out the command of Christ to make disciples.¹⁰ The following article provides additional clarity on the subject;

“During Jesus’ earthly ministry, and during these days of the early church, the term that was used most frequently to designate one of Jesus’ followers was “disciple” (mathetes, 262 times). Hence, discipleship is a central theological theme of the Gospels and Acts. The situation is different in the Old Testament and in the rest of the New Testament. There is a curious scarcity of words for “disciple” in the Old Testament, and mathetes does not occur at all in the Epistles and Revelation. However, other terms and expressions point to abundant theological concepts of discipleship everywhere in Scripture. Discipleship enjoys its most concrete expression in Scripture when Jesus walked with his disciples during his earthly ministry. Yet the Old Testament prepares for that relationship, and the Epistles

⁹ Eduard Schweizer, *Lordship and Discipleship* (Naperville, Ill.: A.R. Allenson, 1960), 136.

¹⁰ Stephen Altrogge and Chuck Swindoll, "Disciple, Discipleship - Baker's Evangelical Dictionary Of Biblical Theology Online", *Bible Study Tools*, last modified 2015, accessed December 1, 2015, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/disciple-discipleship.html>.

and Revelation describe how that relationship was carried out after Jesus' ascension."¹¹

Baker's Encyclopedia of the Bible defines disciple as,

"Someone who follows another person or another way of life and who submits himself to the discipline (teaching) of that leader or way. In the Bible the term "disciple" is found almost exclusively in the Gospels and the book of Acts, the only exceptions being Isaiah 8:16 and less directly Isaiah 50:4 and 54:13, where the same Hebrew word is translated "learned" and "taught," respectively. Yet clearly wherever there is a teacher and those taught, the idea of discipleship is present."¹²

Jesus Christ made disciples and leading disciples was a pivotal part of his ministry.

Cottrel R. Carson provides this definition of discipleship:

"Discipleship is the process of devoting oneself to a teacher to learn from and become more like them. For the Christian, this refers to the process of learning the teachings of Jesus and following after his example in obedience through the power of the Holy Spirit. Discipleship not only involves the process of becoming a disciple but of making other disciples through teaching and evangelism."¹³

Darrell Mitchell defines discipleship by stating,

"Discipleship" is God's plan for reaching the world with the Gospel, and must be defined in terms of Jesus' Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20. It is more than spiritual growth, which, of course, is involved as an important aspect of discipleship. Through the Great Commission we see that "discipleship" demands that one become a "disciplemaker" –not just a disciple."¹⁴

¹¹ IBID.

¹² Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 629.

¹³ Chris Burley, 'Discipleship', *Lexham Theological Wordbook, Lexham Bible Reference Series* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

¹⁴ Darrell Mitchell, *Defining Discipleship*, ebook, 1st ed., n.d., accessed December 1, 2015, http://www.netbiblestudy.com/00_cartimages/christiandiscipleship.pdf.

These definitions are helpful because they point out the fact that discipleship is a multifaceted process. Defining discipleship is of vital importance because the definition will inform the praxis of most ministries. The position of this writer is that many churches are failing in discipleship because of an erroneous definition of the concept. A theology built on faulty premises will be a faulty theology. The book of Acts does not provide a clearly written definition of discipleship but it clearly defines the basis (Acts 1:8) and model for it. There are many other definitions some of which will be provided in a latter section of this paper. However, this question can best be answered by examining the way discipleship was understood in the Bible and especially the book of Acts. Therefore, the study of the book of Acts is essential in formulating a biblical theology of discipleship.

The objective of this document is to provide a brief study of discipleship in the book of Acts to determine what place discipleship played in the first century church. This will necessitate an examination of Acts from an historical perspective in addition to the theological implications. Luke selects the historical facts that he presents in order that the reader can see how the theology of discipleship is actually implemented. He seems to do so intentionally believing this format to be more helpful to the reader. Luke omits historical information that would be factual and interesting but not relevant to the point he is seeking to make. The document would be much too lengthy if he tried to tell everything that happened.

There has and continues to be debate as to whether the book of Acts is history or theology. Jim Park considered arguments from scholars including Conzelmann, Dibelius and Haenchen who were skeptical of the historical accuracy of Acts and read the counter arguments of Bruce, Gasque, Hengel and Marshall. Park concludes that a “synthesis between the two must

be present in order to nurture a Biblical faith.”¹⁵ Acts is both history and theology as the author has intentionally woven his theology of discipleship into his historical narrative. Therefore, the book of Acts is a theological narrative. Ronald Hesselgrave writes,

“The book of Acts belongs to that biblical genre called theological narrative. It has a story, with a plot, events, and main characters. Of course, it is not just any story. Unlike fictional accounts, theological narrative conveys truths about God’s interaction with humanity. Still, these truths are conveyed by means of narrative framework. Without a proper understanding of this framework we risk missing the whole point of the narrative.”¹⁶

The reader of Acts has the responsibility of unraveling the theological meaning within the framework of the selected historical facts. In the book entitled “*Witness of the Gospel*”, John Squires speaks of different levels of the Luke-Acts narratives. He seeks to discover the meaning that is within the text. The overall and broad theme of Acts, he contends is God’s plan.¹⁷ The writer of this paper is in agreement with him but believes that more specifically Acts is about discipleship in the plan of God. Luke is primarily concerned with the commission that Christ gives the disciples and how they responded. But because there are multiple levels in the narrative discipleship easily fits within the theme that Squires notes and develops. John Squire reaches this conclusion as it relates to the plan of God in Acts. He states,

“In the events which form the surface level narrative of Acts, this divine plan can clearly be seen at work. God’s will is done in the establishment of the church in

¹⁵ Jim Park, *Luke-Acts And The Holy Spirit*, ebook, 1st ed., n.d., 19, accessed November 30, 2015, <http://www.discipletree.com/04Resources/DiscipleshipResearch/LukeActs/LukeActs.pdf>.

¹⁶ Ronald Hesselgrave, *The Theology Of Mission In Acts 1:8*, ebook, 1st ed., n.d., accessed November 30, 2015, http://www.wciu.edu/docs/resources/C7E_Hesselgrave.pdf.

¹⁷ I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson, *Witness To The Gospel* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 1998), 19-26.

Jerusalem; the way the community serves and witnesses fulfil God's intention. God guides the expansion of the church beyond Jewish soil; the testimony to the gospel in Samaria and among the Gentiles proceeds in accord with a divine strategy. Divine providence can be seen in the life and work of key individuals: Peter (and the apostles), Stephen and Philip (and the seven), Barnabas and Paul (and other fellow missionaries). Each of these travels and testifies in obedience to God's purpose. Within Luke's story the plan of God comes to a climactic moment at the end of the volume, when Paul arrives at the Centre of the Roman Empire; his presence in Rome has been ensured by angelic messengers, miraculous rescues, and the guidance of the Spirit, for it is an entirely necessary outcome which fulfills Scripture."¹⁸

This paper purports to unravel the theology of discipleship in the book of Acts by examining certain historical facts that provide insight into the mind of Luke. Why did he include certain facts and why did he place those facts where he did in the document. Many themes surface in the book of Acts but they are presented in relationship to discipleship. Charles H. Talbert shares an interesting perspective on the focus of the prologue in the book of Acts. He contends that the reading of the text can focus on different subjects or doctrines with each reading. He states,

“Acts 1:3-14 may be read with either of two foci: Christology or discipleship. How? Theology done via narrative is by nature unable to make its multiple points simultaneously by means of systematic theology's “on the one hand, on the other.” Instead, narrative subtleties are communicated by rhetorical technique that serve as catalyst for the same narrative's being read first one way and then another. With each reading, a different slant is seen. Such techniques are found in both Greco-Roman and Jewish materials.”¹⁹

¹⁸ I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson, *Witness To The Gospel* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 1998), 36.

¹⁹ Charles H Talbert, *Reading Acts A Literary And Theological Commentary On The Acts Of The Apostles, Rev. Ed.*, 2nd ed. (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), 1-2.

The writer of this paper is approaching the reading from the slant of discipleship but will relate discipleship to major doctrines.

Another controversy concerning Acts, which is closely related to the previous one, is, whether it is descriptive or prescriptive. I. H. Marshall states, “A major issue in interpreting Acts is the extent to which it is prescriptive, saying how the church is always meant to be, or descriptive, telling us how the church was at this particular period.”²⁰ Is the book of Acts something the contemporary church should read as only describing what happened in an earlier period in time or it is a record of what we should be doing today? How one views this issue of course will have impactful implications for ministry in the 21st century church. If it is simply descriptive the church has great latitude to decide which parts, if any, the church should emulate today. However, if it is only prescriptive the church must ask if the 1st century church can be completely duplicated in the 21st century? Again, the answer must be that it is both. Hengel who considers Acts to be more theological than historical in emphasis or more prescriptive than descriptive, agrees Acts is both. Hengel states, concerning the writer of Acts, that he is an, “historian and theologian who needs to be taken seriously....We only do justice to the significance of Luke as the first theological ‘historian’ of Christianity if we take his work seriously as a source.”²¹

This paper will benefit the Christian community by helping it clarify the theological position it holds by engaging in theological reflection on the book of Acts. The desired effect will be evidenced in the way discipleship is viewed and implemented. There needs to be

²⁰ Kevin J Vanhoozer et al., *Dictionary For Theological Interpretation Of The Bible* (London: SPCK, 2005), 30.

²¹ Paul J Achtemeier, Joel B Green and Marianne Meye Thompson, *Introducing The New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2001), 149.

continuity between what the church says it believes and what it does or between her theology and praxis. This change will result in healthy churches which are characterized by spiritual and numerical growth. The prescriptive aspects of discipleship in the book of Acts are accepted.

Darrell Mitchell states,

“‘Disciplemaking’ fulfills the Great commission-in the city-in the country-in the suburbs-and in the ghettos! Whether it is in a primitive African village-or-and in a technological society, disciple making will work! It works for adults and young people-doctors and plumbers, carpenters and teachers, homemakers and salespersons-it will work! Discipling is viable in peacetime or war, under democracy or communism, in wealth or poverty!”²²

The theology of discipleship in the book of Acts supports Mitchell’s statement. The church should therefore use Acts as a textbook for making disciples in the 21st century. A more recent work on discipleship is a book written by Rick Warren entitled, “*The Purpose Driven Church*”. He concludes, from experience that if the church implements the model of ministry prescribed in Acts that church will have lasting church growth. He constructs the model his church practices primarily on Acts 2:42-47. Rick Warren clearly defines how his theology of discipleship, based largely on the book of Acts, is implemented in the church he leads.²³ Bill Hull authored a similar work entitled, “*The Disciple Making Church*”. Hull also centered much of his theology of discipleship on the book of Acts. He considers Acts 2:42-47 to be prescriptive for the contemporary church.²⁴ Hull and Warren both provide practical examples of how to apply the

²² Darrel Mitchell, *Defining Discipleship*, ebook, 1st ed., n.d., accessed November 23, 2015, http://www.netbiblestudy.com/00_cartimages/christiandiscipleship.pdf.

²³ Richard Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub., 1995), 48-49.

²⁴ Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church* (Old Tappan, N.J.: F.H. Revell Co., 1990), 64.

biblical model they believe Acts provides. More will be said about this in a later section of this document.

The writer of this paper purports to analyze the strategy used by the writer of Acts to describe his theological perspective on discipleship. The first section of the paper will discuss the theology of discipleship in Acts and the Gospel of Luke. Secondly, the theology of discipleship in Acts and the ministry of Jesus will be examined. Thirdly, the emphasis will be on the theology of discipleship in Acts and the role of the Holy Spirit. Next, the theology of discipleship in Acts and the ministry of Peter will be explored. The fifth section will focus on the theology of discipleship in Acts and the ministry of Paul. Finally, the theology of discipleship in Acts and the ministry of the church will be considered.

The writer of this paper contends that the book of Acts is a systematic presentation of the theology of discipleship. The order of presentation has great relevance. The writer of Acts is developing his argument by the way he focuses attention on events that prepare the reader for the next aspect of discipling. Acts details the history, in narrative form, of how the church in the 1st century understood and implemented discipleship in the 1st century. The writer of Acts in essence says, this is what they were told to do in the first eight verses and this is how they did it in the rest of the book. Darrell Mitchell states, “‘Discipling’ is not just a way of fulfilling the Great Commission. Discipling IS the Great Commission!”²⁵

This paper will discuss the strategy used by the writer of Acts to record the discipling efforts of the 1st century believers. Acts describes why they made disciples,

²⁵ Darrell Mitchell, *Defining Discipleship*, ebook, 1st ed., n.d., accessed December 1, 2015, http://www.netbiblestudy.com/00_cartimages/christiandiscipleship.pdf.

where they made disciples and how they made disciples. The previous statement might appear too simplistic to be helpful. However, the problem of the 21st century church might be that she has made making disciples too complex. The church will profit greatly by following this simple pattern in formulating her strategy of discipleship.

This paper will place great emphasis on the prologue of Acts and especially the first eight verses of chapter one. The prologue for this discussion is Acts 1:1-14. Eckhard J. Schnabel says, “There is no consensus where the prologue and/or the introduction end.”²⁶ The prologue of Acts provides the reader with an agenda for the rest of the book. The prologue also connects the book of Acts to the Gospel of Luke as a continuing narrative.

The Theology of the Book of Acts and the Gospel of Luke

Luke’s strategy for weaving history and theology together begins with verse one of the book of Acts. He immediately calls attention to the fact that this is the continuation of a discussion. Luke purposefully directs the attention of the reader back to the opening verses of the Gospel of Luke (Acts 1:1). Reading Acts without also reading the Gospel of Luke would prevent the reader from receiving the full impact of the book’s message and lead to a defective and dangerous theology.²⁷ Therefore the relationship between the two volumes will be examined. The opening verse of the book of Acts is the writer’s way of introducing himself. He does not state his name but the name of the recipient and the fact that he has written him previously. Theophilus is the recipient of the document and little else is known about him. There is a vast amount of conjecture and speculation concerning him which has some significance to the Study

²⁶ Eckhard J Schnabel, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2012), 67.

²⁷ Kevin J Vanhoozer et al., *Dictionary For Theological Interpretation Of The Bible* (London: SPCK, 2005), 30.

of Luke-Acts but not for the purpose of this paper. However, Luke's strategy, by referring to a previous letter, does link the two volumes. Luke obviously wants his audience to know that this is a two volume work and therefore Acts is a continuation or sequel. This is very helpful in developing a theology of discipleship in Acts because it raises the possibility and likelihood that there is additional information to consider. This is helpful because concepts that are not fully discussed in Acts may be treated more extensively in Luke. The first document when read, indicates a connection with other sources (Luke 1:1-4). Therefore the influences in the book of Luke may include more than the author's. Because Acts is the second document written it is reasonable to assume it would contain additional information that might provide greater insight into the first document.

The salutation of the Gospel of Luke contains helpful information about Luke and the first treatise he wrote (Luke 1: 1-4). He acknowledges that his information has come from a variety of sources. The additional written sources have been read and evaluated by him.²⁸ He emphasizes that his research has been very thorough and is an accurate and orderly account of the ministry of Jesus. The validity of the historicity of his gospel, as mentioned earlier, is questioned by some scholars. But it is generally accepted as historically accurate. This raises the possibility of information being supplied by other writers of gospels such as Mark and Matthew. Many scholars think it plausible that Luke had access to Mark and Mathew's gospels.²⁹ If the writer of Luke had access to the Gospel of Matthew that would explain the similarities as it relates to the commission given by Jesus. There is a strong probability but no certainty

²⁸ Eckhard J Schnabel, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2012), 67.

²⁹ R. C. H Lenski, *The Interpretation Of St. Luke's Gospel* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Ausburg, 1961), 25.

concerning this matter. He may not have quoted the other sources but rather synthesized the sources and produced the resulting ideas in his own words.

He also acknowledges that he determined the order in which the information was written. This would have provided an opportunity for him to provide an historical account while arranging it in a way to reveal his theology. Therefore, his history and theology would become one document. He assures Theophilus that what he is writing is true and that he can trust the contents. Therefore he considers his first document as an historical and theological document.

Since Acts is a sequel to the Gospel of Luke comparisons can be made among the two books on the subject of discipleship. The New Testament Commentary on Acts states, “The first two verses of Acts serve as a bridge between the Gospel account of Jesus’ life and ministry and the historical account of the developing church. In effect, Luke’s Gospel and Acts form one book in two parts; Acts is the continuation of the Gospel.”³⁰

Biblical theology is concerned with doctrine and the developmental stages of that doctrine.³¹ Luke structures Acts to systematically emphasize how the concept of discipleship evolved from the period of the gospels and epistles. He intentionally creates parallels that highlight the fact that what happened in the ministry of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke happens through the disciples in the book of Acts. Therefore, the theological study of discipleship in Acts should not be divorced from information on discipleship in the Gospel of Luke. A comparison

³⁰ Simon Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1990), 46.

³¹ Ronald Hesselgrave, *The Theology of Mission in Acts 1:8*, ebook, 1st ed., n.d., accessed November 30, 2015, http://www.wciu.edu/docs/resources/C7E_Hesselgrave.pdf.

of discipleship in Luke and Acts will aid in understanding the theology of Luke in Acts. A. Boyd Luter, Jr writes,

“ The great helpfulness of such a comparative handling of the Lukan writings is that they are of the same general literary type and describe events on opposite sides of the Cross and Resurrection. Such literary and theological considerations make the study of Luke-Acts an unparalleled opportunity to discern the differences that the epochal change from the Old Covenant to the New (Luke 22:20) makes, as we seek to understand the overall New Testament teaching on discipling.”³²

The prologues to both books focus on the actions of Jesus in his ministry and through his disciples in Acts (Luke 1 and Acts 1). He addresses both documents to the same person which would imply that he expects the recipient Theophilus to be familiar with the information from the first letter. Therefore some information would be left out of the sequel or perhaps stated in a more concise way. For example, it would not be necessary to go into great detail about what a disciple is or what Jesus had commanded them to do. He could simply resume the story where the last document ended. An example of this is that Luke ends with the commission from Jesus and Acts opens with the commission (Luke 24 and Acts 1). The command of Jesus to make disciples of the nations is not stated as explicitly in Acts as it was in Luke because it was already established in Luke.

However, it is apparent that Acts 1:8 is another way of saying make disciples of the nations which is very similar to what Matthew states in Matthew 28:18-20 and in Luke 24. The command in Acts adds more detail as to how to carry out the task of making disciples of the nations. He now includes a geographical strategy for accomplishing the task. In both books he

³² IBID.

commands that they start in Jerusalem and continue to the end of the nations (Luke 24 Acts 1:8). The Gospel of Luke records the Spirit's role in the public preaching ministry of Jesus in Luke 4:18 which states, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captive, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised." In Acts 1:8 he establishes the importance of the role of the Spirit in the life of the disciples. Luke records Jesus as saying to them in Acts 1:8, "But you shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Theophilus would not need to be informed about how disciples were to make disciples because he would have been aware from the Gospel of Luke about how Jesus made disciples. The fact that Jesus had been taken up or ascended back to heaven would signal that disciple making in Acts would be different than in Luke because Jesus was no longer physically present. The task of disciple making had created many enemies in the life of Jesus so it would not be surprising that disciple makers would face opposition in Acts. Jesus faithfully obeyed God's will in the face of persecution so it was not surprising that Luke would emphasize in Acts the willingness of the disciples to suffer as well. The Gospel of Luke records the rejection of the message of Jesus on several occasions and the disciple's message is often rejected in Acts. Jesus placed great emphasis on preaching and teaching according to Luke. Therefore, he selectively records several sermons and speeches in Acts. Jesus was faithful in the face of death and even unto death. The disciples were also faithful and Luke records in Acts the suffering and death that some disciples endured (Acts 7:59-60; 12:1). Jesus spoke to the masses and to small groups and so did the disciples in his bodily absence. The Gospel of Luke records Jesus expressing that the

goal of discipleship is for the student to be like the teacher (Luke 6:40). In Acts we see the students acting like the teacher. The enemies of Jesus became the enemies of his disciples but they also took note that the disciples had been with Jesus. The enemies saw the impact of discipleship in the lives of the disciples. Discipleship in both books is illustrated more than defined. The church in the twenty first century should look for more evidence that she is actually making disciples and not simply adding members to the role.

Luke uses this narrative to highlight several doctrines that are essential to understanding the theology of discipleship in Acts. He briefly discusses them in relationship to making disciples. The doctrines of Christology, pneumatology, and ecclesiology are alluded to in the prologue and enlarged upon in the remainder of Acts. Each of these doctrines helps the church better understand why she should make disciples. They will be considered individually and the relevance to discipleship shown.

The Theology of Discipleship in Acts and the Ministry of Jesus

Luke's Christological view is developed by his presentation of Jesus in both volumes of his work. Robert James Utley explains,

“Note that in Act 1:1 it is implied that *The Book of Acts* is the sequel to *The Gospel of Luke*. *The Gospel of Luke* records the works and the words of Jesus while He was here on earth and *The Book of Acts* records the continued works and words of Jesus (through the Holy Spirit through the church) after He went back to heaven.”³³

³³ Robert Utley, *Luke The Historian: The Book Of Acts, Vol. Volume 3B, Study Guide Commentary Series* (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2003), 9.

This section will focus on Christology as it relates to discipleship. In his book, “*Jesus Christ Disciple Maker*”, Bill Hull states, “Whatever making a disciple means, Jesus himself did it. Whatever a disciple is, the twelve were.”³⁴ The best way to understand discipleship is to study Jesus Christ as a disciple maker. What he did is what discipleship is. There are limitations in doing discipleship exactly as Jesus did because of the uniqueness of the person of Jesus. There are other limitations which shall be discussed later in this section. However, the epitome of a disciple maker is Jesus and Luke provides great details about the theology of discipleship taught and modeled.

The disciple making of Jesus is presented in narrative form and therefore some principles will be derived not only from what he said but also from what he did. Luke presents Jesus as a twelve year old boy in the temple courts discussing theology with the teachers of the Law (Luke 2:46). Jesus expresses a need to be committed to the will of God and arrange his life around God’s will or business (Luke 2:49). Luke is portraying Jesus from the beginning as one who is committed to following the will of God. This will be foundational to the theology of discipleship in Luke. Jesus will model through his life what he expects of those who follow him. Jesus is not content to simply discuss the will of God but to commit his life to it.

Luke through the ministry of John the Baptist creates and expectation of the one who will come and baptize people with the Holy Spirit and fire (Luke 3:16). The fulfillment of this would not be fully understood until Luke writes the book of Acts. However it does create a sense of expectancy among the hearers. John also pointed out that the one he was preaching about was the Christ or the Messiah. This is significant because the process of discipleship will start with

³⁴ Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ, Disciple-Maker* (Old Tappan, N.J.: F.H. Revell Co., 1990), 10.

proclamation or someone serving as a witness as to whom Jesus is and why he has come. John was in a unique position to do this because God had revealed it to him (Luke 3:2).

Luke continues to stress the obedience of Jesus to the will of God by recording the fact that Jesus submits to being baptized (Luke 3:21). Baptism is a vital part of the ministry of discipleship and will be expound upon in the book of Acts. The water baptism of Jesus sets a precedent for those who will follow him later. Next Luke records the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus. Luke is very specific in describing this occurrence and states, “And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son: in thee I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22 KJV). The fact that the Spirit descends upon Jesus in a visible way before he officially starts his ministry of discipleship will have a parallel in the book of Acts (Acts 2:1-4).

The fact that Jesus is full of the Holy Ghost at the start of his ministry is highlighted at the start of the fourth chapter of Acts. Opposition to the will of God is now introduced along with the temptation to forsake the will of God for personal preferences. This pattern will continue for the remainder of the two volume narrative. The opposition and tempter is referred to as the devil and will continuously oppose the work of disciple making. This information forewarns the reader of what one must face to be a faithful follower of God.

The emphasis shifts to Jesus and the ministry of the word of God. He goes to the synagogue as was his custom, Luke notes. The interesting parallel in Acts is to note what his followers do as it relates to meeting for public worship and study. Luke to this point has not introduced the term disciple but rather illustrated through the commitment of Jesus to God the Father what discipleship will involve.

Luke uses the eighteenth verse of chapter four as a way of informing the reader of how Jesus viewed his ministry and assignment from God. Jesus clearly has a divine commission in mind. He is clear about his purpose for being in the world.

He also understands the purpose of the anointing of the Holy Spirit upon his life. Luke seems to intentionally call attention to the fact that Jesus depended upon the Holy Spirit for effective ministry (Luke 4:18-19). Jesus displays his understanding of the nature of the scripture. He understands that his ministry has been spoken of in advance and now the plan of God is being fulfilled in him. Jesus says in Luke 4:21 that the scripture he has read is fulfilled in their hearing. Luke will repeat this scenario often where he in essence says this is that. The book of Acts will continue to record the understanding of such fulfillments.

Luke alerts the reader to the fact that the faithfulness of Jesus to God brings human opposition to him. The opposition is violent even to the point of attempting to kill him (Luke 4:23-30). The demonic forces and their antagonism against the cause of God are mentioned next. The narrative reveals that Jesus has power over the demonic beings and provides deliverance to some people (Luke 4:31-41). This relationship between Jesus and the demonic will continue throughout Luke's narratives.

Luke reiterates the commitment that Jesus has to proclaiming the kingdom of God to all that will listen. Jesus again explains his understanding of God the Father's will, by saying that he was sent to preach the Kingdom of God (Luke 4:43). The personal ministry of Jesus has been established before Jesus calls any disciples. The disciples will join him in what he is already doing. The agenda for the ministry of Jesus has already been set and expressed. Jesus has already shown the commitment that he has to the assignment given unto him. There is no indication

given by Luke that anybody has joined Jesus in ministry up to this point in the narrative. Jesus has worked alone and not been influenced by anybody but God the Father. It is his mission that others will be invited to join and not something that is open for negotiation. Whoever will follow Jesus will have to accept the same mission of following God's plan.

Now Luke will introduce the first disciples into the narrative. It is interesting that Luke would choose to start his recording of the disciples of Jesus with Simon. Simon of course will be given a prominent role in both volumes of Luke's work and serve as an illustration of the process of discipleship. The focus remains the ministry of the word of God and Simon is approached by Jesus initially to use his boat for preaching purposes. He asks Simon to put the mission of God ahead of his mission of catching fish. He submits himself to Jesus and does as instructed. Jesus does the work of God then provides an abundance of fish for Simon and has fellow fisherman. Luke is weaving into the text how Jesus went about the process of making disciples and the kind of people he discipled. Simon Peter identifies himself as a sinner (5:8) and is still eligible for becoming a disciple.³⁵

Simon Peter referred to Jesus as master, which would indicate that he had heard of Jesus as a teacher (Luke 5:5). This term was also one associated with discipleship. Jesus indicates that he will teach them to catch men. This is what Luke will show Peter doing in the book of Acts as one of the most prominent figures. They forsake all and follow Jesus which signals that they have entered into a life changing relationship with Jesus. Luke is certainly teaching through narrative that following Jesus requires more than speaking about him or even referring to him as

³⁵ Paul J Achtemeier, Joel B Green and Marianne Meye Thompson, *Introducing The New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2001), 150.

master. Paul J. Achtemeier states, “The call to discipleship in Luke is fundamentally an invitation for people to align themselves with Jesus’ mission and thus with God’s purpose.”³⁶

The stage has been set for discipleship because Luke had recorded what Jesus was doing before the disciples met him. Now Luke records what it is like to be a follower of Jesus. This will be educational for these new disciples and it will not be necessary to go into great detail in the second volume about what it means to follow Jesus. Their theology of discipleship is being forged by observing how Jesus disciplined them. Later when commanded to make disciples they will be able to refer to their experience with Jesus. Paul J. Achtemeier remarks, concerning the apostles in the gospel of Luke,

“Mostly, they are simply “with” Jesus; never are they assigned their own defining portfolio in the service of the kingdom of God. One must wait until the opening of Acts for the disciples to come into their own, so to speak, and to understand and embrace their particular contributions to the mission of God”³⁷

The disciples continue to be exposed to the power of God being displayed through the work of Jesus. They do not have this power but they can see that Jesus does. Luke uses many examples in his second volume to show that the disciples have power to do the works that Jesus did.

Luke records the calling of another disciple and the same pattern is followed. Luke makes note of the fact that the man named Levi is also a sinner and yet is eligible for discipleship. The command of Jesus is for Levi to follow him just as he told the other followers. Levi complied

³⁶ Paul J Achtemeier, Joel B Green and Marianne Meye Thompson, *Introducing The New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2001), 151.

³⁷ Paul J Achtemeier, Joel B Green and Marianne Meye Thompson, *Introducing The New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2001), 152.

with the call of Jesus and forsook everything to follow Jesus (Luke 5:27-28). Luke is again highlighting a pattern for discipleship being a life changing experience that starts with meeting Jesus.

These followers of Jesus are first referred to as disciples in Luke 5:30. Therefore follower and disciple are implied to be synonymous terms. The followers were called disciples by others who took notice of the fact that Jesus was their master or leader. From this point forward the term disciple and disciples is frequently used by Luke to describe those who are following Jesus (Luke 5:33; 6:1, 13). Luke 6:13 reveals that Jesus now has many disciples and calls them together and selects twelve of them and designated them as apostles. This term will be used many times in his second volume and is the subject of debate as to what the distinction of apostle infers. The term apostles set them apart from the other disciples and Luke shifts the focus to this group. Therefore much of what is learned in the third gospel about Jesus and discipleship will come from his engagement with the twelve.

Luke records a brief statement that Jesus spoke to reveal the goal that he had for discipleship. Jesus is quoted in Luke 6:40 as saying, “The disciple is not above his master: but everyone that is perfect shall be as his master.” The goal of discipleship is to be like Jesus by following his teaching and lifestyle. Luke uses the term teacher which implies in another way that the disciples are the students of Jesus. The teaching of Jesus in the verse indicates that a time should come when the disciples and apostles, especially apostles, should be like him. They should be able to do the work he is doing now. They should be an extension of his ministry.

Luke calls to the reader’s attention the fact that Jesus does place demands upon his disciples. He does this by selecting several statements made by Jesus to would-be disciples. Luke

9:23-27 is a record of Jesus clearly and emphatically expressing demands upon those who desired to be his disciples. Three demands Jesus spells out are self-denial, taking up a cross daily and following him. Luke 9:57-62 cites Jesus also responding to a man who pledges to become a disciple but was not prepared to fully commit to Jesus once he heard the demands. Jesus warned that people who would not fully commit to him could not be his disciple (Luke 14:25-27). He set the standard so high that disciples had to love him more than anybody else, including him or herself, or they could not be his disciple. The apostles were hearing the words of Jesus and formulating their theology of discipleship. Kennon Vaughan, regarding the disciples responding to the command from Jesus to make disciples states,

“There probably wasn’t a lot of Q and A regarding discipleship. Why? Because the idea of “going and making disciples” was something they had experienced for three years. Making disciples was precisely what Jesus had just done with them.”³⁸

Luke concludes his gospel with the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. He chronicles the impact that the arrest and crucifixion had on the disciples (Luke 22:47-61). Luke strategically shows the weakness of the disciples so that he can show how Jesus continues to disciple them after the resurrection. Luke uses Luke 24 and Acts 1:1-14 as a transition in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus commissions them and is taken up to heaven (24:44-53)

Luke resumes the narrative with Acts 1 and provides additional details about how Jesus continued to disciple the apostles. He records that Jesus is still teaching and giving instructions

³⁸ Kennon Vaughan, Jonathan Howe and Brandon Smith, "The Reproductive Impulse Of Discipleship", *Gcdiscipleship.Com*, last modified 2015, accessed December 14, 2015, <http://gcdiscipleship.com/the-reproductive-impulse-of-discipleship/>.

about the Kingdom of God. Jesus focused on the Kingdom of God in Luke and the Acts begins with Jesus teaching the disciples about the Kingdom. The work of the Kingdom must continue through them. Luke seems to add that information to show the mindset of the disciples moving forward. Raymond Brown comments on Acts 1:3-7 and states, “If the end were coming immediately, it would not be sensible to write a book for future readers or to envision a mission that would reach the whole world.”³⁹ Baker’s Dictionary adds,

“The roots of biblical discipleship go deep into the fertile soil of God’s calling. God has called his people to represent him on earth, to be with him in every circumstance of life, to be transformed in personal character to be like him. That calling is at the heart of biblical discipleship, both in the Old and New Testaments.”⁴⁰

Jesus spends forty days with his disciples after the resurrection. It is noteworthy that much of the time is spent in a teaching setting. There is no way to ascertain all the information that Jesus shared but Luke selectively points out that it concerned the Kingdom of God. The disciples had intensive learning experiences with Jesus before his death and yet needed to learn more from the one whom they followed. This is both descriptive and prescriptive because they will follow his example throughout the narrative and teach others to do the same.

Jesus is teaching teachers who will teach others. It is a pattern that can be duplicated in any century and done without the physical presence of Jesus. He builds upon what they have

³⁹ Raymond E Brown, *An Introduction To The New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 281.

⁴⁰ Stephen Altrogge and Chuck Swindoll, 'Disciple, Discipleship - Baker's Evangelical Dictionary Of Biblical Theology Online', *Bible Study Tools*, last modified 2015, accessed December 1, 2015, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/disciple-discipleship.html>.

already learned from him before his death from being his students. Luke intentionally highlights the fact that Jesus reminds them of what he taught them and now makes the practical application.

The ascension of Jesus shifts the focus from the ministry of Jesus on earth in his body to the ministry of Jesus from heaven. This notifies the reader that there will be a drastic change in the ministry of Jesus to his disciples. The discipleship ministry of Jesus as recorded in the Gospel of Luke is now obsolete in that Jesus is no longer physically present. There is no longer a physical Jesus to follow and no one can replace Jesus as a disciple maker using the model found in Luke's gospel. Something different would have to take place for disciples to be made and follow Jesus as the disciples did.

The death of Jesus had rendered the disciples of Jesus totally ineffective as disciple makers. They were taught to anticipate his death and still were not prepared when it took place. The disciples had been devastated when they were separated from him through death. They had forsaken him and the cause. Some of the disciples outside the twelve had lost confidence that Jesus was the Christ (Luke 24:21). Jesus presents himself alive and hope is restored. He has to teach them more about the Kingdom of God before he leaves them again physically. They must understand how Jesus leaving them again fits into God's plan for the Kingdom. Jesus obviously engaged in what today might be called follow-up (Luke 24:44-53). The church will profit greatly by following this simple pattern in formulating her strategy of discipleship.

Luke uses the structure of the narrative to present his theology of eschatology but only as it relates to making disciples. He is not interested in giving a full treatment of the doctrine because he wants to stay focused on discipleship. The Kingdom of God would have been on their minds because it was the Jewish hope and Jesus had been teaching about it. Stanley D. Toussaint

states, “In the disciples’ minds the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the coming of the promised kingdom were closely associated. And well they should be, because the Old Testament frequently joined the two (cf. Isa. 32:15–20; 44:3–5; Ezek. 39:28–29; Joel 2:28–3:1; Zech. 12:8–10).”⁴¹ They along with many others had looked to him as the messiah who would restore the nation of Israel and defeat her enemies. Now that Jesus is resurrected their focus is again on the restoration of the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:6). Luke selectively records a segment of the conversation where Jesus redirects their thinking from the restoration of the Kingdom now to the mission that he has for them (Acts 1:7-8).

Jesus switches the conversation to the ministry of the Holy Spirit and discipleship. He does not reprimand them for asking about the restoration of the Kingdom but informs them that the Father has decided when the Kingdom will be fully restored. The Kingdom will continue to play a great role in the thinking and motivation of the Parousia but they are made to understand what they must do while they await his physical return. This is prescriptive for the 21st century church because she too must work while she waits.

They are told to wait in Jerusalem. This is where they are to start their public ministry according to the gospel. Luke has recorded in the Gospel of Luke chapter 24 that their mission will start in Jerusalem. Therefore, it is in Jerusalem that the story will resume after the ascension of Jesus.

Luke mentions the death and resurrection of Jesus but again does not elaborate in the prologue because the 1st volume of the work has covered it sufficiently. The implication is made

⁴¹ Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 354.

early in the second volume that what Jesus began to do and teach he continues to do. Jesus is still discipling the disciples and has a continuing purpose for their lives. The death, burial and resurrection will be the focal message concerning the salvation of God through Jesus. However, it will be the disciples who through the power of the Holy Spirit deliver the message.

Luke's Christology includes not only what Jesus did while on earth but also what he continues to do after the ascension. Michael Morrison states,

“Acts of the risen Jesus” might also be an appropriate name for this book. Luke tells us that his first book (the Gospel of Luke) was “about all that Jesus *began* to do and teach until the day he was taken up to heaven” (Acts 1:1-2). Acts is the second volume of Luke's history-writing project; it is about what Jesus did after his ascension into heaven – he directed and taught the apostles through the Holy Spirit.”⁴²

The Theology of Discipleship in Acts and the Holy Spirit

Pneumatology is mentioned not to fully treat the subject but rather to show the relationship between the Spirit, the ministry of Jesus and the disciples. In Acts 1:2, Luke uses the phrase “through the Holy Spirit” to express the mystery of the relationship of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Kistemaker and Hendriksen comment on this phrase explaining that,

“In the Greek, the phrase though the Holy Spirit can be taken with either the preceding words had instructed or the following verb he had chosen. In view of Luke's emphasis on the work of the Spirit in chapter 1, scholars prefer to link the phrase to that which precedes. Writes Donald Guthrie, “Luke clearly show that he sees his book as the outcome of the revelations of the Spirit from the risen Lord to the apostles.” The Holy Spirit dwelled in Jesus, for Jesus breathed on his disciples and gave them the Holy Spirit (John 20:22). In their ministry, he direct

⁴² Michael Morrison, "Exploring The Book Of Acts: Introduction | Grace Communion International", *Gci.Org*, last modified 2015, accessed December 14, 2015, <https://www.gci.org/bible/actsintro>.

his apostles through the Holy Spirit (see, e.g., 16:7). The Spirit of Jesus is the Holy Spirit.”⁴³

By mentioning the Spirit in the prologue he points back to his first volume as a reminder of the role the Spirit has taken in the ministry of Jesus. He refers to the Holy Spirit to direct attention to the previous work of the Spirit as a preview of his present work. This also prepares the reader for the continuing ministry of the Spirit in the lives of the disciples.

“All that is said and done, by means of preaching and teaching the Word of the Lord, declaring the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ in power, signs and wonders, and the phenomenal growth and development of the Church numerically, plus the Doctrine, Grace and Gifts and Word – All is found in the operation of the HOLY SPIRIT. He is “the key” to the Books of Acts!”⁴⁴

Jim Park has written a book on the ministry of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts that explores the parallels of the ministry of the Spirit and the earthly ministry of Jesus. Parks states,

“This paper seeks to buttress both the biblical and theological foundation of making disciples by studying the seminal importance of the Holy Spirit and discipleship as portrayed in Luke-Acts. In this regard: “Luke 4:16-21 has, for all practical purposes, replaced Matthew’s ‘Great Commission’ as the key text not only for understanding Christ’s own mission but also that of the church” (Bosch 1991: 84). As such, Luke 4:16-21 is seen as “being of programmatic significance” (Marshall 1971:91). The same Spirit which rests upon the Messiah will soon be promised and given in abundance to the waiting and praying community of disciples at Pentecost.”⁴⁵

⁴³ Simon Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 17, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1990), 47-48.

⁴⁴ Kevin J Conner, *The Book Of Acts* (Portland, Ore.: City Bible Pub., 1992), 1.

⁴⁵ Jim Park, *Luke-Acts And The Holy Spirit*, ebook, 1st ed., n.d., accessed November 30, 2015, <http://www.discipletree.com/04Resources/DiscipleshipResearch/LukeActs/LukeActs.pdf>.

Max Turner adds, “The Spirit is not merely from Jesus but of Jesus: ‘the Spirit comes to the believer as the Spirit of Jesus’”⁴⁶

Several scholars contend that the book of Acts could have been named the Acts of the Holy Spirit because Acts is primarily a narrative about how the Spirit worked through the disciples to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Newman and Nida comment on Acts 1:6-11 concerning the acts of the Spirit.

“This section, along with the following section (1:6-11), serves as a transition between the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. Whereas the Gospel indicates the mighty things that God did in and through the person of Jesus Christ, the book of Acts represents the continuing activity of God through the Holy Spirit. In fact, the focus of the Acts of the Apostles might be said to be upon “the acts of the Holy Spirit,” and it is not without significance that the Holy Spirit is introduced twice in this initial paragraph, both in terms of the “commandments” given to the apostles and the “baptism” which is to come.”⁴⁷

The disciples had been chosen through the Holy Spirit. He had been involved in the discipling process from the beginning. The work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit has been a cooperative effort. Luke is expanding the reader’s theological understanding of Christ and the Holy Spirit while keeping the focus on the discipling process through the disciples.

He alerts the audience of the treatise to the fact that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is indispensable to the ministry of the disciples as disciple makers. The command of Jesus to them is to wait before starting their disciple making ministry, which hints at the dependence they will

⁴⁶ Max Turner, *Power From On High* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 69.

⁴⁷ Barclay Moon Newman and Eugene A Nida, *A Handbook On The Acts Of The Apostles* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 16.

have on the Holy Spirit. This is certainly prescriptive for the church because no believer can be effective as a disciple maker without the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Luke gives a lot of details about how the disciples have responded to the death and therefore physical absence of Jesus. The last chapter of Luke (24) and the prologue of Acts (1:1-14) help remind the reader of why the disciples need the Holy Spirit to continue the mission.

The disciples have reason to be excited because they have Jesus in their presence once again. They find renewed strength by being in his presence. Jesus has always proven to be more than sufficient and capable of directing them in every situation. The disciples have now spent time with Jesus, Luke says, over the last forty days. The disciples have come out of hiding to meet Jesus. This has been a time of enlightenment as they are forced to admit that the word of Jesus, about his resurrection, came to fruition. Luke noted in Luke 24:12 that when Peter looked into the empty tomb of Jesus he was still perplexed as to what it meant.

Luke informs the reader that even after observing his resurrected body, they still needed additional proof. Luke describes them as “many” infallible proof. This is disturbing because Jesus had expressed to them on many occasions, as Luke recorded in his gospel, that he would die and in three days be raised again (Luke 18:31-34; 13: 31-35; 9: 43-45; 22:15-23; 36, 37).

The eleven disciples had to be found by others who had walked with the Risen Lord on the Emmaus Road (24:33). Luke writes that when they saw the Risen Savior suddenly appear in their midst they were frightened and assumed they had seen a spirit (24:36-37). Jesus has to settle them, allow them, and invite them to touch him (Luke 24:38-40). Jesus had to convince them that he was not a spirit even though they were looking at him alive and well. The disciples were relieved and joyful but still bewildered because they did not expect to see him (Luke

24:41). Next, Jesus asked for some food and ate in their presence to reassure them that he was not a ghost. He also reminded them that his death, burial, and resurrection had been written in the Law of Moses, and the prophets, and in the Psalms. He reminded them that all of that prophecy was concerning him (24:41-44). Even after showing those proofs they still did not understand so Jesus had to open their understanding. Luke said Jesus had to open their understanding so they could understand. They had the proof in the presence of Jesus and the proof of fulfilled prophecy and they still needed Jesus to help them (24:45). He teaches and explains more concerning his death, burial and resurrection (Luke 24:46). Finally, Jesus informed them that according to the scripture, repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:46-47). This is a commission he is giving them to make disciples of the nations, starting at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47). Luke implies that Jesus is depending on this group to see to it that disciples are made all over the world. This small band of disciples comprise the plan of Jesus for impact the world. Luke provides that portrait of the disciples to Theophilus as a background for the first chapter of Acts.

Jesus calls the disciples “witnesses” of the things he has talked about and particularly his death, burial and resurrection and the remission of sins that is now made possible. They are now witnesses because they have the facts and personal experience with Jesus (Luke 24:48).

The promise of the Father is the next topic that Jesus teaches them about. He says he will send the promise of the Father (Luke 24:49). Luke does not elaborate at this point about the promise. He does add, however, that they were told to wait in Jerusalem. They were told to stay in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high. They were to wait but only until they received power from on high (Luke 24:49).

Luke concludes his first volume with Jesus ascending to heaven and out of their presence and the disciples returning to Jerusalem to wait for power from on high. They were worshipping while they were waiting in Jerusalem (Luke 24:49-53).

Acts 1:1-14 is a recapitulation of the closing events of Luke 24. Luke has selected the information he wants shared about the events that took place between the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

Luke quickly introduces the subject of the Holy Spirit. He does not seek to develop a full theology of the Holy Spirit but rather call attention to a transition in how discipling will be done in the absence of Jesus.

The fact that Jesus is leaving calls for change in the process of discipling. The absence of Jesus for any reason has, at times, been problematic for the disciples, as evidenced in the last few chapters of Luke. The issues of Christology, pneumatology and discipleship are certainly raised for the Christian community to consider. How does Jesus give commandments and work through the Holy Spirit? The apostles had never had to follow Jesus without being able to have physical contact and sight. The ministry of Jesus through the Spirit is a subject that disciples of Christ in the 21st century deal with today.

The disciples have always associated discipleship with fellowship and now they have to learn to follow Jesus without being able to see him. They had received teaching about the Holy Spirit but they have not had to totally rely upon the Spirit. The church must make note of this change and realize that it is not possible to duplicate completely the method of discipleship practiced by Jesus in Luke. However, because Jesus is alive and still actively involved in the

affairs of humanity he is able to have relationship with his people through his Holy Spirit. The mission of Jesus Christ and the salvation story will continue through the disciples of Jesus.

The disciples and apostles have knowledge and experience and yet they are not released for ministry but rather told to wait. Jesus at least implies that knowledge and experience alone is not enough to be effective spiritually. They need special power and they are to wait until they receive it. The book of Acts is the continuation of the narrative in Luke but, more importantly, Jesus continues with his mission to save souls and thereby make disciples.

Luke again mentions the promise of the Father which Jesus had talked to them about before (Luke 24:49). The promise of the Father was also tied into the history and future restoration of the Kingdom. Jesus reminds the disciples of the baptism of John with water but as John the Baptist had stated the Messiah would be baptized with fire and the Holy Ghost (Luke 3:16).

The disciples have not yet fully understood the mission of Jesus and because Jesus had mentioned the promise of the Father and the Holy Spirit their minds have focused on the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel. By asking about the restoration of the kingdom they acknowledge him as the Messiah. Jesus does not reprimand them for being kingdom focused, he simply re-directs them to the present mission (Acts 1:2-8).

Luke repeats the words of Jesus about receiving power from on high. He points out that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them (Acts 1:8). The power of the Holy Spirit is essential if they were to be effective disciplers which would include being a witness or evangelizing. Jesus teaches that believers would be dependent upon the Holy Spirit. No group of believers can have enough knowledge or experience to be a witness for Christ through word and deed.

The disciples have recently experienced not having Jesus with them and so they wait together prayerfully for the arrival of the Holy Spirit. The transition of the ministry of Jesus with his disciples is about to take place. The church in the 21st century needs to follow this model starting with evaluating the difference between the way Jesus disciplined the twelve disciples while bodily in their presence and how he does it through the Spirit. Only one of those options is truly available for the 21st century church.

The words of Jesus make it clear that in this context the power is for the kingdom agenda. If the church has no kingdom agenda it would not need the power of the Holy Spirit. The disciples and apostles are waiting because the power is to be transforming and produce what could not be experienced without the Holy Spirit. Jesus chooses not to send them forth on their mission without the power and presence of the Spirit. The church of the 21st century does not have to wait on the Spirit but she does need to be led and empowered by the Spirit.

They are to receive power and they are to be witnesses. The task is to be witnesses which is to initiate the process of discipleship through witness or what we may call evangelism. Evangelism, we will notice in the remainder of the document, is not all they did. They had been with Jesus and they understood that the goal was to lead people to be like Jesus (Luke 6:40). They would lead people to live for Jesus. That was the mission that they would be empowered to do. That would include evangelism, prayer, fellowship, teaching and worship.

They were to make disciples of the nations of the world as led and empowered by Jesus through the Holy Spirit. They would start at Jerusalem and move outward to the farthest parts of the world. The events or actions and speeches that follow in the narrative would reveal whether

or not they were obedient to the command. The church of the 21st century has the same task or assignment and access to the same power.

The Theology of Discipleship in Acts and the Ministry of Peter

Luke shifts his focus to Peter after the ascension of Jesus and coming of the Holy Spirit. Peter will be the leading character for the first twelve chapters of Acts beginning with Acts 1:15. The last mention of Peter is in Acts 12:19. Peter's ministry will be centered primarily in Jerusalem and mainly to the Jews. However, he will also minister to a lesser degree in Judea and Samaria. Kevin J. Conner states concerning Peter,

“Acts 12 is the last mention we have of Peter in Acts particularly, and brings the scene to a close on the activities of the Church in Jerusalem which had reached out from Jerusalem, to Judea and to Samaria.”⁴⁸

Therefore, starting with Acts 1:13, Luke emphasizes the words and actions of Peter more than anyone else. Luke, through Peter's speech, reveals the Spirit's impact upon Peter's life. He makes it apparent that Peter's mind has been illuminated as to the salvation plan of God.

Peter is expressing more clarity about the Holy Spirit's ministry and credits the Holy Spirit with speaking through David. He now is beginning to see that this is that which the Spirit has spoken about in the past.

Peter was obviously committed to obeying the command of Jesus. The command we are certain of in the book of Acts is to be a witness. In order to understand what Peter's interpretation of that was, Luke records some of his actions and some of his sermons. Peter was in the inner circle of Jesus and knew him well. He knew what Jesus expected of his disciples.

⁴⁸ Kevin J Conner, *The Book Of Acts* (Portland, Ore.: City Bible Pub., 1992), 4.

Peter did not try to make his disciples but rather disciples of Jesus. The idea was not to make people become like himself but to make them understand how to have a relationship through faith with Jesus. Luke does not indicate in any way that Peter wanted people to follow him as they would a master. Rather he wanted them to follow Jesus by faith and through the Holy Spirit. He never competed with Jesus for disciples. Contemporary leaders must shun the temptation to clone people after themselves.

Peter and those with him were baptized by the Spirit and Peter had a boldness that allowed and, maybe, compelled him to stand up and be a witness for Christ. Luke selected events at the end of his gospel that revealed the weakness and fear of Peter when Jesus was arrested. Now he is in the same city but has boldness and strength. Luke has created a comparison of Peter before the crucifixion and after baptism of the Spirit. Peter preaches in the power of the Spirit and people believed and are saved. Luke records the next events after people are saved. He describes the process the disciples and apostles are using to disciple people. His evangelistic preaching which centered on Christ was the beginning of the process, but, it continued by immediately including them in the community of believers where they could learn how to live out their commitment to Christ. This process would be repeated. Luke lists some of the specifics of what happened within the community of believers. There are churches in the 21st century who use Acts 2:41-47 as a model for their church. More will be said about that in the section on the church.

Peter faces opposition for preaching about Jesus, just as Jesus faced opposition when he was preaching and teaching. Luke is able to provide an example through Peter of a disciple becoming like the teacher, which is what Jesus had as a goal for Peter (Luke 6:40).

Peter performs wonders and signs through the power of the Holy Spirit just like Jesus did. Luke is revealing the ministry of Jesus through the Spirit and through his disciples. Peter is simply doing what he has been commanded, empowered and trained to do. Luke does not define discipleship but he does record it. The 1st century church was discipleship in action. Most of what is revealed about the 1st century church is prescriptive for the 21st century church.

Peter, while mainly focusing on the Jews with his disciplemaking efforts, does minister to some Gentiles as well. Luke calls attention to some of the difficulties of making disciples worldwide. The believers are confronted with the issue of race in the community of believers. Jesus discipled (teaches) Peter how to handle the case of race while making disciples worldwide. Peter and the church are forced to re-evaluate ministry to non-Jewish people. Jews have, for the most part, not had many dealings with non-Jewish people from a religious point of view (Acts 10:28). The Spirit (Acts 10:19) led Peter through the experience and gave him a new perspective on ministering to non-Jewish people (Acts 10:28-48). This experience leads to a meeting with other believers upon his return to Jerusalem and a new understanding of God's ministry to the Gentiles. Luke selects this historical scene to help Jewish Christians understand that salvation is available to anyone who will accept Jesus, regardless of their nationality or race. If Peter and other Christians would only reach the Jews then Acts 1:8 would have become an impossibility for all non-Jewish people with the possible exception of Jewish proselytes. Luke informs the reader of how the church continued to expand because of the obedience of the disciples to the mandate of Christ. The church of the 21st century should use this experience as a reminder that we must cross all racial and ethnic boundaries if we are to be faithful to the task.

Peter and the other apostles are faced with some administrative issues among the community of believers. Luke uses the narrative to teach that discipleship requires some form of

structure for administration. Luke shows that administrative structure is established in order to keep the primary emphasis on discipleship (Acts 6:1-7). Luke illustrates that even believers committed to discipleship can still face administrative challenges. The church was growing (Acts 6:1) because the apostles were focused on making disciples. But while they were trying to make new disciples, they experienced problems among those who were already disciples. This was something they had not experienced while they were with Jesus because there was no church. This could have possibly derailed the discipleship focus and the church would have become imbalanced. The church could have become internally focused at the expense of her external focus. Both were needed and Peter and the other eleven disciples had to solve the dilemma. They needed to stay focused on the ministry of the Word and prayer but not leave other facets of discipleship undone. They solved the problem by enlarging their administrative structure and having the group of disciples select men to address the concerns. The apostles stayed focused, the issue was addressed satisfactorily, and the church continued to grow. This is instructive for churches today who need to balance administrative concerns with reaching new disciples and nurturing the church. Churches can also, through this experience, be reminded to keep their leaders free to focus on the Word and prayer. Peter is able to continue in ministry because he addressed administrative issues. Commentators point out that, “The Twelve recognized their proper priorities in the ministry of the Word of God and prayer” (cf. v. 4). Peter faces the challenge of reaching out to unbelievers while growing a large number of believers. Discipleship had also mandated more structure among the apostles as leaders of the believers.

Luke records instances of Peter following up on new believers. Peter seems to have understood that even though preaching was his primary task, discipleship would require more than preaching. In chapter 9 of Acts beginning at verse 32, Luke records the fact that Peter is

visiting local churches in the area. He is maintaining contact with people who are believers. This is important to note because it makes it obvious that Peter did not think the commission was to just evangelize. He followed up on those who were saved and on the occasion just mentioned, he did it personally.

Luke focuses on Peter obeying Jesus' commission and the results of that commitment. Peter simply obeyed and Jesus led him by the Spirit to handle situations they faced. Luke makes the point that Jesus is still teaching and doing through Peter.

The Theology of Discipleship in Acts and the Ministry of Paul

The central character in the last half of the book of Acts is the Apostle Paul who was initially referred to as Saul. Luke highlighted Peter for discipling primarily in Jerusalem. He highlights Paul for discipling among the Gentiles. Luke shows discipling expanding toward the ends of the earth or to all the nations. Kevin J. Conner explains, "PETER, in his Ministry, reaches from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria. PAUL, his Ministry, reaches to the Uttermost Part of the Earth."⁴⁹

Luke gives the reader accounts of the Holy Spirit ministering to Paul but he presents a dramatic account of Jesus interacting with Paul before he became a believer. Luke would weave that account into the story more than once (Acts 9:1-30; 22:1-21; 26:1-20). Luke tells the story of Paul's conversion as a way of declaring the gospel message and showing the grace of God. The story reveals that God can soften the hardest heart and bring them to salvation. The heavenly ministry of Jesus is highlighted again because it reveals Jesus is still involved in the

⁴⁹ Kevin J Conner, *The Book Of Acts* (Portland, Ore.: City Bible Pub., 1992), 4.

salvation work of God. Jesus is still calling disciples and, in this case, an apostle as well. The story also provides the credentials of Paul. He along with the other apostles has seen the risen Christ.

The experience also displays how Jesus was working through other disciples to minister to Paul as a part of the discipling process. Paul asks Jesus the question saying, “Lord what will thou have me to do?”(Acts 9:6). This was Paul’s way of submitting and forsaking all to follow Jesus. Paul became a disciple but the church had to include him in the life of the community. The church of the 21st century needs to evaluate how well she takes responsibility for new disciples. Jesus directed this process of discipleship from the beginning and it serves as an example for every generation. Jesus, continuing to minister from Heaven, contacts another disciple named Ananias, about ministering to Saul (Paul) on behalf of Jesus (Acts 9:10-12). Ananias is already a disciple but he is instructed by Jesus to help another new disciple in the process of discipleship. Many churches are failing in this area because they do not take new disciples (converts) to the next step of discipleship. The hesitation of Ananias is based on the history and reputation of Saul (Paul). It is difficult to accept the fact that someone who persecuted the church of Jesus Christ could now be a member of it (9:13-14). Luke also uses the story of Saul (Paul) meeting Jesus to reveal that Jesus has definite plans for Paul and that he will reveal those plans to him. Jesus is still discipling from Heaven (9:15-16). This experience also provides a way to explain Paul’s future ministry to the Gentiles and ties Paul to the plan detailed in Acts 1:8. Jesus is directing the plan and his witnesses to make disciples of the nations.

Luke has alerted his readers to the fact that Paul will speak about Christ before non-Jewish people, kings and Jews (Acts 9:15-16). Therefore, Luke follows through by keeping records of the journeys Paul made to the Gentiles which will consume most of the last 16

chapters of Acts (Acts 13-28). The record of Paul before King Agrippa is also a fulfillment of the words of Jesus. The experiences of Paul will be a result of obeying the commission of Jesus to reach the world and make disciples for Christ (Acts 1:8). Paul will also reach out to the Jews, Jesus says. He does not say how successful he will be with any of the people mentioned, but he does say that he will tell Paul how much suffering he would endure for Christ's name sake (Acts 9:16). Paul would understand people suffering for Christ. Luke has documented that Paul has caused many Christians to suffer for Christ's sake (Acts 8:1-9; 2).

Paul received some degree of spiritual nurturing immediately after his conversion. Luke uses Paul as an example of how one believer can help train another believer for service as a part of the discipleship process. Barnabas is highlighted in Luke's account primarily because of his relationship with Paul. Luke used Barnabas to reveal that even though Jesus has personally chosen and spoken to Paul, he still uses disciples to help with the discipleship process (Acts 9:26-31). Paul has been preaching but when he goes to Jerusalem and tries to join in with the disciples, they were afraid because they doubted he was really saved. The Bible says in Acts 9:27, "But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus (KJV)." Commentators remark concerning this verse,

"In Jerusalem (9:26-30). 9:26-28. Saul had left Jerusalem an inveterate enemy of Christianity to persecute the church in Damascus; but in God's sovereign grace he joined the believers and preached the gospel in that very city. He joined the work in Jerusalem, but the believer there refused to trust him (cf. Ananias' similar fear, v. 13). In Damascus Saul needed a friend, Ananias; in Jerusalem he needed another, Barnabas. He whose name means "Son of Encouragement" (4:36) proved to be that for Saul. Barnabas is seen in Acts on four other occasions. (a) 11:22-24; (b) 11:30; 12:25; (c) 13:1-2, 50; 14:12; (d) 15:2, 12, 22, 25, 37. The believers in Jerusalem, convinced by Barnabas that Saul had in fact been converted, allowed Saul to stay with them. In Damascus he preached fearlessly in

the name of Jesus, and in Jerusalem he was speaking boldly in the name of the Lord (cf. comments on “boldly” in 4:31).”⁵⁰

This is instructive to the contemporary church that people need help of a friend as they progress as disciples. Paul and Barnabas served together in ministry and many disciples were made because Barnabas reached out to him (Acts 12:24-25; 13; 14; 15). Peter was recognized more for preaching to crowds but Paul became more recognized for his journeys to Gentile lands. Paul and Barnabas formed a team and the Holy Spirit guides the church in sending them out for ministry (Acts 13:1-3). The Holy Spirit spoke to certain prophets and teachers at Antioch and had them set Barnabas and Paul aside for a mission to make disciples. Luke again records the Spirit’s leadership in fulfilling the commission of Acts 1:8.

Paul and Barnabas separate after a dispute (Acts 15:36-41) and Luke’s emphasis stays on Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles as it had on Peter as the apostle to the Jews. But before their separation to different ministry fields, they engaged in what today might be called follow-up. Acts 15:36 states, “And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, “Let us go again and visit with our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.”” Luke cites a similar situation in Acts 14:21-22 which states, “And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, confirm the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” Luke emphasizes follow-up

⁵⁰ Stanley Toussaint, “Acts,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition Of The Scriptures*, Ed. J. F. Walvoord Nd R. B. Zuck, Vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 378.

with new converts as a part of the discipleship process. He is not simply seeking a decision; he is making disciples.

In chapters 16, 17 and 20, Luke chronicles three separate tours, or journeys, to make disciples. The records Luke kept of these journeys provide background information for the letters Paul later wrote to established churches. The word “disciple” seems to have been replaced with other terms in the epistles. However, the letters are part of the discipleship process. The writer of this paper concludes that many local churches in the 21st century do not understand the importance of helping Christians grow and, thereby, become more like Christ. Paul’s entire ministry clearly reveals that even though he was not with Jesus during his earthly ministry, Jesus certainly disciplined him through the Spirit.

Paul like Peter suffered at the hands of the enemies of Jesus. Paul kept his commitment to his Lord Jesus Christ. Commitment to Christ, even with the threat of suffering or death, is a quality Luke uses to illustrate Paul’s ministry. The writer of this paper has intentionally limited this paper to scriptures in Luke and Acts with few exceptions. But because of the many times that Paul suffered for Christ, the account of his suffering in 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 is referenced. It states, “Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.” (2 Cor. 11:23-27). Paul stayed consistent throughout his ministry as recorded by Luke.

Luke ends the story of Paul’s ministry in Rome. He has preached to the Gentiles, stood before King Agrippa and preached to the Jews as Jesus said he would (Acts 9:15). He suffered greatly, as Christ said he would (Acts 9:16). But the point Luke has sought to make is that the 1st century church has continued to obey the command, make disciples everywhere. And now the church has reached Rome (Acts 28: 16-31). Kevin J. Conners comments on this saying, “Thus the Gospel begins in Jerusalem, the Religious hub of the world. It ends in Rome, the Political hub of the world.”⁵¹ He wants to emphasize how amazing it is that in 30 years the church in the 1st century, despite opposition, made disciples as far as Rome. It should challenge the church in the 21st century to focus more intensely on making disciples. Conner writes again with emphasis,

“Now from Jerusalem – “Beginning at Jerusalem” – the Gospel of the Crucified, Resurrected-Ascended-Glorified-Exalted Son of God, the **LORD JESUS CHRIST**, goes into all the world, and it ends in Rome, in Caesar’s Court, by Paul, a **JEW!**”⁵²

The Theology of Discipleship and the Church

The church must have a correct understanding of the assignment Christ has given her. Gene A. Getz, former adjunct professor of Pastoral Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary says, “Anyone who attempts to formulate a biblical philosophy of the ministry and develop a contemporary strategy, a methodology that stands foursquare on scriptural foundations must ask

⁵¹ Kevin J Conner, *The Book Of Acts* (Portland, Ore.: City Bible Pub., 1992), 5.

⁵² IBID, 6.

and answer a very fundamental question. Why does the church exist? Put another way, what is its ultimate purpose? Why has God left it in the world in the first place?”⁵³

The early church answered the question correctly. They understood the assignment was to make disciples starting with evangelism but continuing to progress in their relationship with God and fellow believers. Kennon Vaughan contends that,

“The birth of the church set into motion a pattern that continues throughout the book of Acts and in the letters of Paul. For instance, in 1 Thessalonians 2, Paul, Silas, and Timothy do life with the new believers in Thessalonica (Acts 17, 1Thess. 1-3). They disciple them right where they are, in life, not in a classroom. They didn’t do classes on discipleship; they made disciples.”⁵⁴

The task is clear even though as the 1st century believers discovered it can be difficult. However, because it is the Lord’s plan, it has access to the Lord’s power in the person of the Holy Spirit. Believers, individually and collectively, should live intentionally for the Lord. The book of Acts is the story of believers who took the assignment seriously and intentionally engaged in the process of discipleship. The goal was life transformation with Christlikeness being the goal.

The 1st century church did not have all the answers and Luke records some of the problems they faced but they were committed to making disciples. They never lost sight of what they were supposed to be accomplishing. Luke does not provide instances of when the church became distracted and made disciplemaking a secondary issue with the exception of Acts 6:1-7.

⁵³ Gene A Getz and George W Peters, *Sharpening The Focus Of The Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 21.

⁵⁴ Kevin J Conner, *The Book Of Acts* (Portland, Ore.: City Bible Pub., 1992), 4.

The issue was addressed by administrative changes consistent with the overall objective of making disciples and the church's growth exploded.

The 1st century church also established church government or polity. Luke records instances of the Jerusalem council meeting to make leadership decisions about requirements associated with discipleship (15:1-35). The apostles and, especially Paul, set up churches and led them in securing elders. Paul is also noted by Luke to have returned to areas where new believers were and established them in the faith.

The concept of discipleship chronicled by Luke in the book of Acts is used successfully in the 21st century. Saddleback Church in the state of California is an example of a contemporary discipling church. The pastor, Rick Warren, has written a book entitled, "*The Purpose Driven Church*". The book was written at the close of the 20th century in 1995 and, twenty years later, countless churches and seminaries use it as a resource for becoming more effective as discipling churches. The book is based primarily on the account given by Luke in Acts 2:42-47. Warren states,

"Healthy, lasting church growth is multidimensional. My definition of genuine church growth has five facets. Every church needs to grow *warmer* through fellowship, *deeper* through discipleship, *stronger* through worship, *broader* through ministry, and *larger* through evangelism."⁵⁵

He bases his comments on Acts 2:42-47. Warren continues, "In Acts 2:42-47, these five facets of growth are described in the church at Jerusalem."⁵⁶ The emphasis is on the

⁵⁵ Richard Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub., 1995), 48.

⁵⁶ IBID, 49.

process of discipleship. Warren lists discipleship as one of the five facets of growth. The writer of this paper would label that facet nurturing and the entire five facet process as discipleship. The writer of this paper does agree completely with the following statement by Warren,

“Church growth is the natural result of church health. Church health can only occur when our message is *biblical* and our mission is *balanced*. Each of the five New Testament purposes of the church must be in equilibrium with the others for health to occur. Balance in a church does not occur naturally; in fact, we must continually correct in balance.”⁵⁷

The 21st century church has to fight against making what we call evangelism, the whole task and de-emphasizing other components of discipleship, as described in this paper as being the process of carrying out the commission of Christ. Rick Warren speaks to this by saying,

“It is human nature to overemphasize the aspect of the church we feel most passionate about. Intentionally setting up a strategy and a structure to force ourselves to give equal attention to each purpose is what being a purpose-driven church is all about.”⁵⁸

The church as described in Acts was certainly a purpose-driven church and the purpose was to obey the commission given by Jesus. There are other writers of the latter part of the 20th century that have written widely read books on how to apply what is recorded in the book of Acts. Bill Hull, who was mentioned in an earlier section, has written a book on discipleship. The

⁵⁷ IBID, 49.

⁵⁸ Richard Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub., 1995), 49-50.

cover of the book reads, “The Disciple Making Church Applying the Dynamics of the First-Century Church to Your Church Today”.⁵⁹

The church of the 21st century is thought by some, including the writer of this paper, to have drifted away from the purpose for which she was called. Hull emphasizes this point by saying, in the introduction of his book,

“Somewhat ironically, to return it to the Great Commission, today’s church has required a radical movement with the sole purpose of returning the church to a serious commitment to making disciples, as Christ commanded.”⁶⁰

The book gives a detailed approach of incorporating the teachings of Christ on discipleship in the gospels and the example of the 1st century church into the local church of the 21st century. A book entitled, “*We Build People*”, is an excellent document on how to apply the principles of the 1st century church today. The book provides step by step details for implementing the concepts to become a church that obeys Christ by focusing on discipleship.⁶¹

The 1st century church as presented in Acts had no blueprint for ministry other than the Word of God available at that time. They relied on the model and teachings of Jesus and the empowering guidance of the Holy Spirit. From these sources they formed their theology of discipleship.

⁵⁹ Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church* (Old Tappan, N.J.: F.H. Revell Co., 1990), 8.

⁶⁰ IBID, 8.

⁶¹ Michael H Clarensau, Sylvia Lee and Steven R Mills, *We Build People* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Pub. House, 1996).

The effectiveness of the 1st century church is evidenced by the number of people who were saved (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 6:7) and by the witness of the believers individually. Many believers were scattered abroad from Jerusalem but they went everywhere spreading the word (8:4). The church was effective in discipleship to the extent that people associated them and their lifestyle with Jesus (Acts 4:13; 11:26). The term “Christians” is only used once in the Bible and the term “Christian” twice. The term appears to have been used mostly by non-Christians to describe the Disciples of Christ. Two of the three occurrences are in Acts (11:26; 26:28) and one in I Peter (I Peter 4:16).

The church did move as commanded from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth or at least as far as Rome. Luke explained that some of the expansion happened because of persecution (8:4) and, through the journeys of Paul, some happened despite persecution.

Conclusion

The findings of the research of the Book of Acts, the Gospel of Luke and other cited resources indicated that the theology of discipleship held by the church of the 1st century is still relevant for the 21st century church. Theological reflection by churches, and especially pastors, on their presuppositions about discipleship is needed if churches in a state of decline and plateau are to become vibrant, healthy congregations. Constructs of discipleship that are not biblically based have proven to be detrimental to churches.

Biblical and effective contemporary models of discipleship should continue to be studied. Methodology should follow theology and not the reverse. Courage will be needed by church leadership to lead wayward congregations into compliance with the mandate of Christ to make

disciples. The praxis of the Bible based discipling church will impact the home, church and world as more people become Christ-like in thinking and deportment.

Studying the book of Acts serves as a reminder to the church that the head of the church, Jesus Christ, has given her a specific assignment. The assignment can be successfully completed because of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit leads and empowers the church to accomplish the task of making disciples. The writer of this paper hopes that this study of the theology of discipleship in Acts has been informative and motivational for the church of the 21st century.

This document acknowledges the need for further research in the area of discipleship. However, the information contained in this document should prove beneficial to church leaders and the congregations they serve.