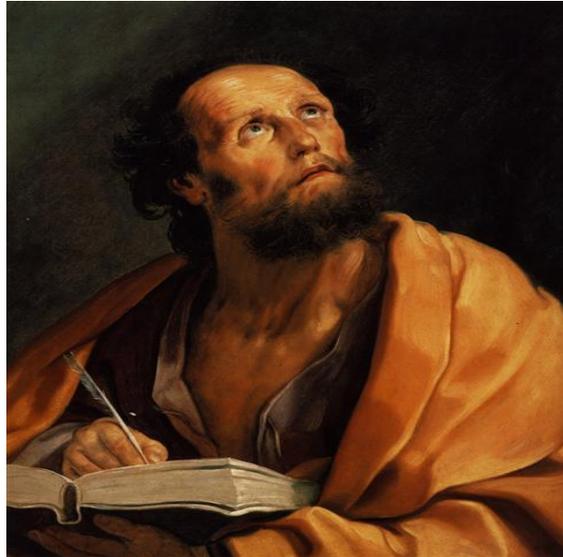




McMaster Divinity  
College



## The Mission in Acts NT 2XA3

**Instructor:** Rev. Karl L. Armstrong, PhD (cand)  
**Email:** armstrkl@mcmaster.ca

**Summer 2019**

**Monday and Wednesday** evenings: 6:30–9:30PM  
May 27th, 29th, June 3rd, 5th, 10th, 12th (six classes in total)  
Room: TBA

**Specializations:** BS (Biblical Studies), CW (Christian Worldview), PS (Pastoral Studies)

**Programs:** MDiv, MTS, Cert CS

### **Course Description**

This course examines the mission of the church in the book of Acts with the expressed purpose of realizing and applying that mission into our present-day ministry context. The student will engage the pericopes relating to the early church's birth, mission, expansion, from Jerusalem "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The purpose of the course is not only to inform emerging and seasoned Christian leaders but to encourage and inspire them with the mission in Acts that God has called them to in our post-Christendom context. "Mission is more than and different from recruitment to our brand of religion; it is alerting people to the universal reign of God" (David J. Bosch, *Believing in the Future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture*, 33).

## Course Objectives

### *Knowing:*

1. To provide students with a solid understanding of the church's birth, mission, and expansion in Acts.
2. Become familiar with the dynamics of the house church model in Acts.
3. To help Christian leaders understand the relevance of the mission in the early church for the present day.

### *Being:*

1. Be able to study the book of Acts with a renewed sense of confidence and competence.
2. Be personally transformed by the mission in Acts.
3. Be inspired by the example of the early church leaders as they engage a diverse cultural and religious population across the Roman Empire.

### *Doing:*

1. Be able to effectively discuss the historical, theological and interpretive issues relating to the mission in Acts.
2. Be better equipped to support the mission of the church in our post-Christian context.
3. Develop your own practical approach to mission in light of the readings, assignments and class discussion.

### Required Reading:

1) Please read the book of Acts in its entirety from chapter 1 through 28 carefully and prayerfully for your benefit *before* the class begins. Be sure to pay attention and take notes regarding the major events throughout with particular attention to those passages that reflect the mission of the early church.

2) Gallagher, Robert L., and Paul Hertig, eds. *Mission in Acts: Ancient Narratives in Contemporary Context*. ASMS 34. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004.

3) Frost, Michael. *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006.

4) The following four selected essays:

Armstrong, Karl L. "The End of Acts and the Jewish Response: Condemnation, Tragedy, or Hope?" *CBR* 17 (2019) 209–30.

Larkin, William J. Jr. "Mission in Acts." In *Mission in the New Testament: An Evangelical Approach*, edited by William J. Larkin Jr. and Joel F. Williams, 170–186. ASMS 27. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998.

Stenschke, Christoph. "Mission in the Book of Acts: Mission of the church." *Scriptura: International Journal of Bible, Religion and Theology in Southern Africa* 103 (2010) 66-78.

Trites, Alison A. *The New Testament Concept of Witness*. SNTSMS 31. Reprint, London: Cambridge University Press, 2004 (please read chapter 9 [pages 123–53]: "The Concept of Witness in the Book of Acts").

\*These essays will be available upon registration (via email or the course website at Avenue2Learn).

\*All required textbooks for this class are available from the College's book service, READ On Bookstore, Room 145, McMaster Divinity College. Texts may be purchased on the first day of class. For advance purchase, you may contact READ On Bookstore, 5 International Blvd, Etobicoke, Ontario M9W 6H3: phone 416.620.2934; fax 416.622.2308; email books@readon.ca. Other book services may also carry the texts, but we encourage you to use READ On.

### Course Requirements:

**1. (15%) Reading Report:** Each student is expected to critically read Acts, Gallagher, Frost and the four selected essays and be prepared to show evidence of this in the assignments and the class discussion. Ideally the readings should be completed by the last class (June 12th) however, due to the busyness of work and life the report is **due on July 12th**.

**2. Assignments** (more details will be provided on the first day of class):

**a) (30%) Topical Essay:** In this essay (8–10 pages double spaced), reflect on the book of Acts in light of your own church and ministry context. Also reflect on the readings and the ways that the book of Acts is both a *history* of the early church and also a *blueprint* for the mission of the church today. Honestly and authentically consider the current missional thrust of your own church or ministry and how the book of Acts might inspire you into a new season of growth. A short bibliography is required. **Due on June 19th**.

**Biblical Studies:** For this stream attention should be given to the interpretive issues related to the texts. The essay should have a clear thesis and methodology that addresses the grammatical, linguistic, historical or text-critical issues.

**Christian Worldview:** Students may wish to focus on developing a contemporary framework for engaging people with different religious and cultural backgrounds. The book of Acts provides plenty of examples to draw from for this specialization.

**Pastoral Studies:** Students within this specialization can either adapt this research into a well-researched sermon or a mission strategy paper for their church (or para-church) leadership board.

**b) (40%) Research Paper or Project: 1)** Produce a major research paper (12–15 pages double spaced) on a current issue pertaining to the mission in Acts or from one of the six subject areas

discussed in the class sessions (see **Course Schedule** below). The essay should reflect both the research interest of the student and their chosen specialization (<http://mcmasterdivinity.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/MDiv-MTS-Specializations-and-Outcomes-rev.-June-2016.pdf>). 2) Students will be given the option (i.e. those serving in missions, pastoral or para-church ministries esp.) of writing a well-researched sermon (full manuscript required), creative presentation, or they can design a small group or mission focused initiative that will enhance their local church's missional goals. The second option must also include footnotes and a bibliography. It is highly recommended that topics be discussed with the professor beforehand. **Due on July 12th.**

**c) (15%) Final Reflection Paper:** Students will provide a final reflection paper (3–5 pages) that outlines the major lessons learned from the lectures, readings, and assignments. Alternatively, students may take the lessons learned and use it as a sermon outline or develop a mission and vision statement for their congregation or organization. **Due on July 12th.**

### **Course Assessment**

The final grade given will reflect the degree of participation and completion of the course components explained above. Active class participation and the successful completion of all the assignments will to a large degree enable the student to achieve top marks for the course (along with attention to MDC's style guide). A grading rubric will be provided on the first day of class. Late assignments will be penalized at 2% per day unless prior arrangements have been made with the professor.

### **College Style for Submission of Written Work**

All written work—unless informed otherwise by the professor—is to be submitted in accordance with the *McMaster Divinity College Style Guide for Essays and Theses*, available on the McMaster Divinity College website. 10% of every assignment will be based on the successful adherence to the style guide. Please also note that essays that go beyond the beyond the page or word length will be subject to grade reduction in relation to its length.

### **GRADING SUMMARY**

Reading Report 15%  
 Topical Essay 30%  
 Major Research Paper or Project 40%  
 Final Reflection Paper 15%  
 Total 100%

### **Course Schedule**

#### **May 27: Acts and the Birth of the Church**

This class includes a discussion of the course objectives, assignments and due dates, expectations, and grading rubric. The remaining class lecture and discussion focuses on an introduction and overview of Luke's account of the birth of the church and how that relates to our present day context. Additionally, the role of the Holy Spirit in Acts is explored in the relation to the church's birth and expansion and how this should preclude any discussion of church growth today.

### **May 29: Acts and the Mission of the Church**

Here the emphasis will be on the mission of the church as defined in the book of Acts. The lecture and group discussion will endeavor to address the question of how the mission in Acts and the concept of witness continues to offer a practical guide for ministry leaders in the present day.

### **June 3: Acts and the Expansion of the Church**

Luke's narrative offers a roadmap of church growth that not only informs our own ministry contexts but with God's grace has the potential to multiply and expand our church's vision beyond our existing expectations. This class examines the growth and geographical expansion of the early church in Acts from Jerusalem to Rome and how this continues to be of practical relevance for the church today.

### **June 5: Acts and the House Church**

The house church model in Acts is discussed within its literary and archaeological contexts. This model offers the church a practical guide for ministry in our post-Christendom culture. As a group, we will explore the missional question of *how* we can translate the first century church experience into our modern day context. This session also explores the essential roles that men and women played in the expansion of the early church and how that informs our mission today.

### **June 10: Acts and the Shipwreck of Paul**

The narrative account of Paul and his shipwreck in Acts 27 offers not only a unique window into the hazards of ancient travel but it also provides many important life lessons for mission and ministry. The Apostle Paul's sea voyage and shipwreck on the island of Malta is given fresh consideration in light of the most recent literary and historical research.

### **June 12: The End of Acts and the Mission of the Church**

Very few New Testament passages have been discussed and debated as much as the end of Acts. This last class discusses the relevance of the history of interpretation on the end of Acts while proposing a paradigm for the church in the present day. At the end of Acts, the picture of the 'unhindered' Paul offers the church a compelling model for the next generation of Christian leaders.

### **Statement on Academic Honesty**

Academic dishonesty is a serious offence that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one's own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on one's academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College. Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty ~ <https://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/programs/rules-regulations>.

### **Gender Inclusive Language**

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all of its publications. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of

the original expressions and the names of God should be respected. The NRSV and TNIV are examples of the use of inclusive language for human beings. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments.

### Recommended Resources

Alexander, Loveday C. A. *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Context: A Classicist Looks at the Acts of the Apostles*. London: T&T Clark, 2005.

Barrett, Charles K. *The Acts of the Apostles*. ICC. 2 vols. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998.

Bosch, David Jacobus. *Believing in the Future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture*. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995.

Bruce, Frederick Fyvie. *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990.

Cadbury, Henry J. *The Book of Acts in History*. London: Black, 1955.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Making of Luke-Acts*. New York: Macmillan, 1927.

Cole, Neil. *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005.

Fitzmyer, Joseph A. *The Acts of the Apostles*. AB 31. New York: Doubleday, 1998.

Frost, Michael. *The Road to Missional (Shapevine): Journey to the Center of the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Surprise the World: the Five Habits of Highly Missional People*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2016.

Frost, Michael, and Alan Hirsch. *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*. Rev ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013.

Harnack, Adolf. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Translated by J. R. Wilkinson. London: Williams & Norgate, 1909.

Hemer, Colin J. *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*. Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1989.

Hengel, Martin. *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity*. Trans. J. Bowden. London: Fortress Press, 1979.

Hirsch, Alan. *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006.

- Jennings, Willie J. *Acts. Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017.
- Keener, Craig S. *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*. 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015.
- Larkin, William J., and Joel F. Williams, eds. *Mission in the New Testament: An Evangelical Approach*. ASMS 27. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998.
- Longenecker, Richard N. *The Acts of the Apostles*. EBC. 12 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981.
- Marguerat, Daniel. *The First Christian Historian: Writing the "Acts of the Apostles."* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Marshall, I. Howard. *Luke: Historian and Theologian*. Exeter: Paternoster, 1979.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Acts of the Apostles*. TNTC. Reprint, Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2008.
- Porter, Stanley E. *Paul in Acts*. Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007.
- Puskas, Charles B. *The Conclusion of Luke-Acts: The Significance of Acts 28:16–31*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009.
- Rackham, Richard B. *The Acts of the Apostles: An Exposition*. 9th ed. London: Methuen, 1922.
- Tannehill, Robert C. *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*. 2 Vols. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1990.
- Trites, Alison A. *The New Testament Concept of Witness*. SNTSMS 31. London: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Troftgruben, Troy M. *A Conclusion Unhindered: A Study of the Ending of Acts within Its Literary Environment*. WUNT 2/280. Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2010.
- Williams, David J. *Acts*. NIBC. Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002.
- Winter, Bruce W., ed. *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*. 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993–96.

\* **Disclaimer:** This syllabus is the property of the instructor and is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions up to and including the first day of class.