

# church aflame



## *Defining Moments in the Life of the Early Church*

### **Why Study Acts?**

The book of Acts has to be one of the most exciting books of the New Testament. Picking up where the four gospels leave off, Acts follows the story of the early church and the missionary activities of the apostles, taking in dramatic miracles, mass conversions, persecutions and martyrdom along the way. The book of Acts is first and foremost a history book, the second volume of the gospel of Luke, but its major themes – the nature and mission of the church and the power of the Holy Spirit – are as relevant to the church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as they were to the church of the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

Our last series of studies in the book of James focussed primarily on personal faith and individual Christian character. By contrast the book of Acts deals with some more corporate themes, which will be pertinent to our church life and also to the community of each of our small groups. Rather than trying to study the entire book I will be picking out a number of what I have called “Defining Moments”: those God-ordained events which particularly shaped the thinking and practice of the early church. Why not encourage the members of your group to read through the book of Acts in its entirety to fill in the gaps.

### **Study Format**

Once again I have divided each of the studies into sections which can be led by different members of the group. Please can I encourage you to take this approach to leading meetings – it may take a little more forward planning but your group will be the healthier for it. As I write these studies I am assuming that you will give approximately equal time to each of the sections. Obviously there is some flexibility but please don't allow, for instance, the Bible study to take an hour and only leave five minutes for prayer.

Can I also draw your attention to the opening questions on each study. It is a fact of group dynamics that people find it far easier to contribute when they have already said something out loud, particularly if their previous contribution has been acknowledged and welcomed by the leader. The idea is to start each evening with a fairly light-hearted and non-threatening discussion question, to which everyone is invited to respond. This doesn't need to take ages, but if everyone speaks at the start there is a far better chance that everyone will contribute something in worship, discussion and prayer later on. Remember, a successful meeting is not one where one or two have given lengthy, theologically correct answers to the discussion questions, but one where every member of the group has participated and engaged with the subject.

### **Talk to Me...**

As ever, these studies are intended as a resource not a straight jacket. Please do give me feed-back if you don't find them helpful. Also, I am always on the look out for creative ideas for worship times and so on, so if you try something different that works well please let me know – you may well find it on the next study for everyone to try!