

Week of May 7 - 13

Introduction to Acts

The Book of Acts was written about A.D. 60 by Luke, the doctor and gospel writer, and is volume two of a work of what we call the Gospel of Luke. It was written to Theophilus, a person we don't know, to build a bridge between Luke's Gospel and the Book of Acts. At the close of his Gospel, the disciples were in the Temple, praising God. Now he picks up the story and explains what happens next.

It is an account of the work of the Holy Spirit in the church, telling what Jesus continued to do and teach through the church.

The disciples aren't the same men we read about in the four Gospels. They look the same and have the same names and faces, but they are different. They have changed from doubters and arguers and fearing for their lives because they came face-to-face with the resurrected Jesus. They now have a drive within them that isn't from this world but is from within by the Holy Spirit which indwells them. Acts 1:8 says, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The Ascension (Acts 1:1-14)

Luke tells Theophilus that his first book provided the story of what Jesus began to do and teach when he walked on this earth and that his present book (Acts) is a continuation of what Jesus did and what he said through the church.

The time between Jesus' resurrection and his ascension was forty days, and during that time, he issued some instructions about the church and the coming kingdom of God. The sword would not establish it, but by the witnessing of the disciples, now called apostles. Then he rose into the sky and disappeared into a cloud.

Matthias Chosen to Replace Judas (Acts 1:15-26)

Then the apostles proceeded to elect Matthias to replace Judas. Peter guided them as they attempted to choose someone who had been with them constantly from their first association with the Lord, from the time John baptized him until the day he was taken from them to Heaven. Two men were nominated, Joseph Justus and Matthias. They prayed for the right man to be chosen. Then they drew straws, and Matthias was selected to become an apostle with the other eleven.

The Gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-13)

Only ten days had passed between the Ascension and Pentecost as the apostles and believers waited for the power of the Holy Spirit to come upon them. On the day of Pentecost, as they waited in their usual place, not knowing when the power would come, there was a sound of a rushing wind. As they looked at each other, they saw what looked like flames or tongues of fire settling on their heads, and they began speaking in languages they didn't know. This giving of the Holy Spirit had occurred as promised by Christ before he ascended.

Peter's Pentecostal Sermon (Acts 2:14-36)

When they asked what this all meant, Peter spoke to them, explaining that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection happened according to God's plan. He quoted Joel's prophecy referring to the Day of the Lord, fulfilled with the coming of the Holy Spirit. He said the real meaning of this event is that these are the last days; the Day of the Lord is at hand. He also quoted two Psalms to prove God's hand was in the resurrection of Jesus and that Jesus was superior to David.

Lastly, Peter accused his audience of direct responsibility for the murder of Jesus. As Jews, they were responsible for the actions of their fellow Jews.

Overwhelming Acceptance of Peter's Message (Acts 2:37-47)

Peter's sermon cut to the heart. They asked what they should do. Peter told them to turn from sin, return to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. Then they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The response to Peter's invitation was overwhelming; about three thousand people accepted his message and were baptized.

The New Testament church had begun. The new converts were being taught, they continued to worship in the Temple, and they were unified economically and spiritually. Finally, God was continuing to add to their number daily. The church was not only surviving, but it was also growing.

The Healing of the Lame Man (Acts 3:1-10)

Since the Christians continued to worship in the Temple, Peter and John's presence there was not a surprise. Peter and John healed a beggar who had been lame from birth in the name of Jesus. The man jumped up, walked, and praised God as he went into the Temple with them. Those looking on were amazed at what the lame man could do.

Peter's Sermon in the Temple Area (Acts 3:11-26)

Peter saw the opportunity and addressed the crowd. He said that God had glorified Jesus, whom they had denied when Pilate would have set him free. But God raised him from the dead and it was through faith in Jesus that the lame man had been healed. Peter invited them to repent and be converted.

Peter added that Jesus was the prophet announced by Moses, and those who refused to listen to him would be cut off from the people. The prophets had spoken, and these Jews were the children of the prophets, to whom the promises made to Abraham were given. Jesus, when he was raised from the dead, was first sent to the men of Israel to bless them as they turned away from their sin.

Peter and John Arrested (Acts 4:1-22)

But, while they were speaking, the priests and the captain of the Temple and the Sadducees came and grabbed them because they preached about the resurrection of Jesus, which they did not believe. They put them in prison. Nonetheless, many believed their word, and five thousand were saved.

The next morning, the rulers, the elders, and the scribes assembled at Jerusalem with Annas and demanded by what power or in what name they have healed the lame man. Peter, full of the Holy Spirit, announced it was in the name of Jesus, whom they had crucified, and whom God had raised from the dead. The council recognized them as former companions of Christ: the man who had been healed was there. What could they say or do in the face of the multitude who had

witnessed the miracle? So, they demanded the apostles never to speak about Jesus again. But God had commanded them to preach Christ, so they said, “we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” Ultimately, the council threatened them further, and finally, let them go because they didn’t know how to punish them without starting a riot.

The Report to the Believers (Acts4:23-37)

Peter and John returned to the other disciples and told them what the council had said. Confronted with this opposition, they began to pray that God would hear their threats and give them the boldness to preach and to have the power to heal and perform miracles and wonders in the name of Jesus. All the believers were of one heart and mind.

They began sharing their possessions, and the apostles preached powerful sermons about the resurrection of Jesus. One of the disciples named Barnabas sold a field he owned and brought the money to the apostles for distribution to those in need.

If the Christian life is simple a matter of doing our best, there is no need for God to send the Holy Spirit to help us. After all, our best is our best. How do we improve on that? God knows that we need his help and that’s why He sent a Helper, the Holy Spirit. The quality of life Jesus expects from his followers falls short apart from His intervention. That’s why he sent the Holy Spirit.