

The Book Of Acts

Chapter 1

¹The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, ²until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit^a had given commandments^b to the apostles whom He had chosen, ³to whom He also presented Himself alive^c after His suffering by many infallible proofs,^d being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.^a

^a Jesus was all man (as well as being all God). He was reliant on the Holy Spirit just as we are reliant on the Holy Spirit in all that we do in this world. Indeed, that phrase – “through the Holy Spirit” – sets the tone for this whole book. The apostles relied on the Holy Spirit for everything they did. In this they copied Jesus. A good alternate name for the Book of Acts would be “The Acts of the Holy Spirit”.

^b I wish I were a moth during the time when Jesus walked in Palestine. I would park myself on a branch near the campfires the Lord and the apostles shared, and drink in their conversation. Yes, the Gospels are sufficient for us – if we needed more, the Holy Spirit would have inspired more – but I want more anyway!

More Study: Pick one of the four gospels. Search for and list all of the commandments Jesus issued to His disciples.

^c This was such a vital time for the disciples and for the Christian faith. The fact of Jesus’ resurrection and of his continuing presence with us is what makes Christianity work. Our relationship with Him makes us alive. Indeed, *life itself is defined by that relationship*. Jesus spent forty days after His resurrection establishing and firming up the bonds that had begun before the cross. He then ascended to heaven, leaving behind a group of men so solid in their trust and faith in Him that nothing could stand before them. The depth of that relationship with Christ is still real for us now, through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

Remember that Luke’s audience is Theophilus, a lieutenant for Emperor Nero, who is investigating the charges against Paul. He previously wrote the Gospel of Luke and now is driving home the point that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead and that the proof of that event is beyond argument.

^d **More Study:** Many books have been researched and written detailing how Christ’s resurrection is a historical fact. Find two of those titles, choose one and either order it through the local library or buy a copy for yourself.

⁴And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait^b for the Promise of the Father, “**which,**” *He said*, “**you have heard from Me;**”⁵ “**for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit^c not many days from now.**”^d ⁶Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”^e ⁷And He said

^a Jesus was always speaking about the Kingdom of God. Apparently, that subject was also His major focus during the forty days following His resurrection. We get a hint of His topics when we look at His conversation with the men on the road to Emmaus (*Luke 24:13-27*).

More Study: Look up all the references to the Kingdom of God in one of the Gospels.

^b Around 1907 there was a revival in Los Angeles on Azuza St. (called the Azuza Street Revival) that was defined by the coming of the Holy Spirit in tremendous power. It was similar to what happened in the Upper Room on the day of Pentecost. Several American Pentecostal denominations trace their roots to that revival. Early on, some of the Pentecostal churches in America developed a tradition that if a person wanted the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, he or she needed to “tarry” (or “wait”), seeking the Lord for a period of time before he/she could receive it. This is patterned after the the disciples ten-day wait in Jerusalem before Pentecost happened. While **this is not a Biblical doctrine** and should not be treated as such, there **is** something practical about it. The disciples “*continued in prayer...*” (*vs. 14*) seeking God for the ten days between Jesus' ascension and Pentecost. Through this waiting/seeking time their hearts were prepared and made right for the coming of the Holy Spirit. The heart of someone seeking the Baptism of the Holy Spirit needs to be right. Sometimes it is good for a person to “tarry” as he/she seeks the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

^c Three things: 1) In this passage Christ very clearly equates the events of Pentecost with the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. 2) The Baptism of the Holy Spirit was a second experience for them -- they had already experienced salvation. Now Jesus told them to wait for the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, which was coming next. 3) Jesus did not let them even take little steps toward building the church until they had received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. The point of all this? The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is a vital and important part of the Christian experience and should be sought by everyone who professes Christ.

^d For a more complete discussion of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit see Appendix A.

^e It is the indwelling Holy Spirit that allows us to see with spiritual eyes. The apostles were still thinking carnally at this point and were still missing the spiritual nature of the Kingdom of God.

to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons^a which the Father has put in His own authority. ⁸“But^b you shall receive power^c when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

It all came clear to them after Pentecost when they experienced the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. All Christians need the perspective that comes from the Holy Spirit. That is why it is so important for everyone to seek and receive the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

^a In 1988 we were attending church one Sunday morning and, as service turned out, we discovered that someone had placed small pamphlets under the windshield wipers of every car parked in front of the church. The pamphlet claimed that on the Jewish holiday of Rosh Hashanah (a few months away in September) Jesus would return again. On reading the pamphlet, my first thoughts were of Jesus’ words where He said that we could not know “*the day nor the hour*” of His return (*Matt 25:13*). When the apostle John was receiving the vision of the Apocalypse (the book of Revelation) he heard thunder speaking, but when he was about to write down what the thunder said he was told not to do so (*Rev 10:4*). Some things God has chosen not to reveal to us. Jesus said “*neither the day nor the hour*” shall we ever know. We know from Bible prophecy that we are probably living in the last days right now and that Jesus is returning sometime soon, but when someone tries to pin down the specific moment of that event, reject it. Don’t listen to that kind of thing! Our job is to be good stewards and servants so that when He comes He will find us doing the work of the kingdom (*Matt 24:44-51*).

^b Notice that Jesus dealt very briefly with the disciple’s question concerning the future and then refocused them. World and political events are of small importance when placed beside the things of the Kingdom of God. A few days later the power of the Holy Spirit would come upon them, the Kingdom of God would be established, and the entire world would be transformed in a way the disciples could not have imagined.

There is a personal dimension to this “refocus”. Even though we know that spiritual things eclipse the things of the world, we tend to focus instead on the demanding and urgent issues of our lives. The urgency of whatever our current crisis might be skews our vision of the greater things of the Kingdom of God. This is why we need the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and the power He brings to us. That is also why the infilling of His Spirit needs to be refreshed constantly. Keeping our focus on spiritual things is why Jesus said, “...*seek ye first the Kingdom of God...*” and Paul wrote, “*Set your mind on things above....*” (*Matt 16:33; Col 3:1,2*). Maintaining our walk in the spirit is the single most important thing we can do.

^c The disciples would have understood Jesus’ reference to power in the context of what they had seen working in Jesus while he walked with them in the flesh.

⁹Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

¹⁰And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, ¹¹who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner^a as you saw Him go into heaven.”

¹²Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey. ¹³And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room^b where they were staying: Peter,^c James,^d John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas^e; Bartholomew and Matthew; James *the son of Alphaeus* and Simon the Zealot; and Judas *the son of James*.

¹⁴These all continued with one accord in prayer and

^a Jesus is coming again! He said He would, these angels said He would, and John, at the end of the Revelation, said He would. We even have, in this passage, good imagery of what it will look like – He is coming in the clouds.

^b Traditionally it is thought that this "upper room" was in the house of the family of John Mark, the author of the Gospel of Mark.

^c The Apostle Paul testified in Gal 2:7 that **Peter’s** main ministry focus was to the “circumcised” – to the Jews. Peter was in Rome when Nero began persecuting Christians and was crucified upside down.

^d **James**, the brother of John, was the first of the apostles to be martyred. Acts 12:1,2 tells how King Herod began a persecution of the Christians by having James arrested and put to death.

^e The only sure thing that we know about Thomas’ life is that he established the church in India. He was martyred there – possibly when a local king, angry at the conversions he was making, had him speared. When the Europeans (Dutch or Portuguese?) first landed on the Indian subcontinent, they found an established, indigenous Christian Church that claimed Thomas as their planter.

More Study: Look up the rest of the apostles listed in verse 13 and write short, one or two sentence summaries of their lives.

supplication, with the women^a and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.^b

¹⁵And in those days Peter stood up^c in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said, ¹⁶“Men *and* brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; ¹⁷“for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry.”^d ¹⁸(Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. ¹⁹And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their

^a Much criticism has been leveled at biblical Christianity because the Bible so clearly teaches that in the home and in the church, men, rather than women, are to be the leaders. What the critics don't realize is that it was Christianity that brought freedom and equality to women. It was radical for Jesus to allow women to travel with (and even help provide for) Him and His entourage. It was radically counter-cultural for women to be included in the upper room gathering. Every culture and religion of the world oppresses women – except for Christianity and heavily Christian-influenced western culture. Only the Christian faith offers freedom, respect, and equality to women.

^b Mary was there because Jesus had placed her in John's care. His brothers were there because they had seen him die and, after seeing him alive again, they finally believed.

^c I have often wondered if Peter wasn't jumping the gun here. Decision-making in the New Testament is always based on the discernment and leading of the Holy Spirit. Yet, the Holy Spirit had not yet fallen on them – this was the interim time between the ascension of Jesus and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Still, the Holy Spirit was acting in them even as He is acting in every saved person. Notice, too, that their pre-Baptism of the Holy Spirit method was the Old Testament method of casting lots (see vs. 26). Everything changed after Pentecost.

^d It is a mystery to me how Judas Iscariot could have done what he did. When you consider that when Jesus sent the Twelve out on their training missions, Judas was healing the sick and casting out demons right beside them, it doesn't make any sense that he should betray Him. He experienced the love of Jesus and the same intimate relationship with Him as the Eleven. How could he throw that away? I truly don't understand it.

own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.)²⁰“For it is written in the book of Psalms:

‘Let his dwelling place be desolate,
And let no one live in it’;

and,

‘Let another take his office.’^a

²¹“Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us^b all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,²²“beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.”²³ And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.^c²⁴ And they prayed and said, “You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen²⁵“to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might

^a In spite of my doubts about the timing of finding Judas’ replacement (see note for verse 15), the Holy Spirit did speak. Peter pointed this out in verse 16. The New Testament way is to listen to the Holy Spirit, always weighing all things according to the Scriptures. This is what Peter was doing – letting the scriptures test his inclinations. Many people have fallen into deep error because they ignored the clear statement of the Scriptures, thinking they were being guided by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will not contradict what He has already said in the Word. So, maybe Peter had it right, after all.

^b They chose candidates from the pool of men who had been with them during the three years of Jesus’ ministry. Apparently, Justus and Matthias stuck with the Lord during the whole time – including the period in John Chapter 6 when many turned away. The church fathers used a similar criteria when they established the canon of the Scriptures, insisting that any New Testament book either be written by an apostle or someone closely associated with an apostle.

^c It is probably safe for us to assume that Justus and Matthias were part of "the 70" whom Jesus sent out on training missions, just like he did the Twelve (Luke 10:1).

go to his own place.”²⁶ And they cast their lots^a, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.^b

^a When we think about "casting lots" (or flipping coins), our minds hold to the concept of randomness and undirected chance. However, the Old Testament practice of casting lots to find God's will had nothing to do with chance. It was done in faith, believing that God was directing the outcome. Indeed, in God's universe there is no such thing as "chance". This has become apparent as the study of Chaos Theory shows that even in an apparently random and chaotic system we find structure, patterns and order.

More study: 1) Read a book on fractals. 2) From the Old Testament, list as many instances that you can find where the casting of lots was used for decision making.

^b So, in the end, what is my conclusion about the choosing of Matthias to replace Judas? I do think Peter jumped the gun. Perhaps it was his way of dealing with Judas' betrayal. Then, too, impulsively jumping in before things are ready was always Peter's mode of operation. Still, I also believe that God had His way in this matter and that Matthias was His choice. God is able to direct us, and the things that concern us, even when we run off in bullheaded fashion.