

# INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF ACTS

## PURPOSE OF ACTS

The purpose of the book of Acts is to give believers an accurate history of the early church. Luke was an eye witness of some of these events and was a careful collector of facts from individuals that saw them happen. His work was attacked by many unbelievers at first, but archeological discoveries proved them to be wrong. The value of an accurate history of the founding of the early churches is the foundation that is set for the formation of future churches.

The book of Acts also provides a bridge between the four Gospels and the Epistles. The Gospels reveal who Jesus Christ is and what He did. The Epistles explain the spiritual meaning of who Jesus Christ is and what He did. The book of Acts shows how the apostles applied the life and work of Jesus Christ to the spiritual needs of people and turned the world upside down.

Acts reveals how the Gospel of Jesus Christ began in Jerusalem and was spread to Rome. Peter was the primary preacher to the Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 1-7). Philip, Peter, Paul and Barnabas took the Gospel to the Samaritans, to an Ethiopian returning to Africa, to some Gentiles in Caesarea and to Jews and Gentiles in Antioch, Syria (Acts 8-12). Paul was the primary apostle to take the Gospel to the Jews and Gentiles that lived in the Roman Empire (Acts 13-28).

Acts gives special attention to establishing the churches of Jesus Christ among the Jews and Gentiles, which we learn from Paul in his letters to the churches, that they will be united at the Rapture and become the Bride of Christ. However, the Kingdom of God, the hope of the Jews, is mentioned throughout the book (Acts 1:3, 6; 8P12; 14L22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). The Kingdom was rejected by the Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 3), Jews in Asia (Acts 13), and finally the Jews in Rome (Acts 28:17-28). It is with this rejection in Rome that Luke abruptly concludes the book. However, Gentile believers and Jewish believers will be in Christ's Kingdom on the earth when He rules all nations from Jerusalem (Zech 14:8-11; Rev 3:21).

## DATE OF ACTS

The book of Acts was written by Luke around A. D. 62. Some reasons for this are no mention of Paul's trial before Caesar, the fall of Jerusalem (A. D. 70) or Nero's persecution of Christians. These all happened after A.D. 64.

## MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The work of Jesus Christ did not end with the close of His years on earth. The purpose of Luke, in writing the Book of Acts, is to relate how His work was carried on by the Holy Spirit through His chosen Apostles. This is an account of the transition from law to grace; from temple worship to church service; from Christ's earthly leadership to His heavenly supervision of the work through the Holy Spirit. It is important to recognize the function of the Holy Spirit of God in the local church and in individual believers. "But you shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8; cf. Lk 24:47-49).

## CHART OF CHURCH DEVELOPMENT IN ACTS

A. Jewish-Centered Church	Acts 1-12	A.D. 33-48
B. Gentile-Centered Church	Acts 13-28	A.D. 48-62

## **THE ASCENSION OF JESUS CHRIST AND THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

**PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.**

### **I. The Promise of the Spirit — 1:1-26**

#### **A. Establishment of the Spirit's Coming — 1:1-5**

Luke gathered and presented the facts of Christ's ministry in his Gospel and these are summarized in Acts 1:1-3, which logically lead the reader to the coming of the Spirit in verses 4-5.

There are several proofs that Luke is the author of the book of Acts as well as his Gospel. The author says he had previously written to Theophilus — vv. 1, 2; cf. Luke 1:3. Theophilus had a Greek name meaning, "lover of God," but was probably a Roman official because of his title, "most excellent" — Luke 1:3; cf. Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25.

The "we" passages in Acts (16:10-17; 20:5 — 21:18; 27:1 — 28:16) indicate that the author traveled with Paul. It can be seen that Luke did travel with Paul by such passages as Philemon 24 and 2 Timothy 4:11

Also, the use of medical terms indicates that a physician may have written the book of Acts. Luke was a physician (Col 4:14), and technical terms for feet and ankles were used in Scripture only in Acts (3:7).

**1:1-3** — Acts is a continuation of the Gospels, in a certain sense, a "fifth Gospel." Luke says his Gospel involved the beginning of Christ's activities and teachings — cf. Luke 1:3. He records in Acts that which Christ is now doing and teaching through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. These verses give the proof of Christ's resurrection. Jesus Christ's bodily resurrection from the tomb is essential to God's entire redemptive program (1 Cor 15:12-19). Christ had to defeat death and the grave to save us and He did.

**1:4-5** — The promise of the Spirit is restated by Luke. It is recorded first in Luke 24:49. The promise of the Father is the baptism "with" or "in" the Holy Spirit which began on Pentecost. It is in contrast to John's baptism by water. The baptism of the Spirit places believers in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13); and He dwells in the believers, making their bodies His temple (1 Cor 6:19-20).

#### **B. The Endowment at the Spirit's Coming — 1:6-11**

The promise of the Spirit's coming was given again by Christ at His ascension with the further promise of power.

##### **1. The question — 1:6, 7**

**1:6** — The disciples asked a question concerning the time of the Kingdom of God. The earthly, Messianic Kingdom is associated with the promise of the Spirit (cf. Joel 2:28).

**1:7** — Christ rebuked His disciples about the time when the Kingdom would be restored, but not the fact that it would be restored to Israel. He did not deny a literal Kingdom on earth; He simply said it has been delayed. The time of the Kingdom was His Father's business. After Jesus ascended to Heaven, Peter preached about the blessings of Christ's Kingdom when it comes to earth (Acts 2 and 3).

##### **2. The power — 1:8**

**1:8** — Power was promised to Christ's disciples in His Great Commission. The various recordings of the Commission of Christ are as follows: Matt 28:19, 20; Mk 16:15, 16; Lk 24:46-49; Jn 20:19-22; Acts 1:8.

The various places where Christ commissioned His disciples are as follows (there are about 40 days between John 20 and Acts 1:8):

**Mark 16 and John 20** — occurred in the Upper Room. Mark emphasized the purpose of preaching the Gospel to every person; John, the example of the Father's commission to Christ's commission.

**Matthew 28** — occurred in Galilee and emphasized the command to disciple all nations and the pattern for doing it.

**Luke 24** — occurred in Jerusalem before Olivet and emphasized the message of the Gospel.

**Acts 1:8** — occurred on Olivet and emphasized the power of the Spirit to witness for Christ. This occurred just before Christ's ascension. This is the key verse of Acts.

**The promise** — you shall receive"

**The potency** — power

**The Person** — the Holy Spirit

**The purpose** — you shall witnesses of me (Christ)

**The plan** — (witnesses) in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth

The reference to the Holy Spirit in the Great Commission is the source of the disciples' power. Notice: the command is given to us even as His promise is for us (cf. Matthew 28:20 – teaching their converts what Christ taught them).

### **3. The ascension — 1:9-11**

**1:9** — Christ's ascension from the Mount of Olives was witnessed by His disciples. He visibly ascended into heaven. He did not suddenly disappear.

**1:10-11** — Two angels told the disciples that Christ's return to earth will be the same as His ascension. In fact, it will be to the Mount of Olives and it will split in two parts when His feet touch it (cf. Zech 14:4).

### **C. The Expectation of the Spirit's Coming — 1:12-26**

The believers were to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Spirit.

#### **1. They gathered for prayer — 1:12-14**

**1:12-14** — The Mount of Olives was a Sabbath day's journey from Jerusalem. When the disciples had returned to Jerusalem, they went to the upper room. The definite article suggests that it was a well-known room. The list of eleven apostles given in verse **13** is in agreement with those found in the three Synoptic Gospels. Luke's purpose in giving priority to Peter in the list is to display him as the divinely chosen leader of the infant church. There were 120 believers that gathered in the upper room (v. 15).

#### **2. They chose a replacement for Judas — 1:15-26**

**1:18-19** — Judas' death is not in contradiction with Matthew 27:5. The view of A.T. Robertson and H. Ironside: Judas tied a rope around his neck and then to a tree on the edge of a cliff and then jumped. The body was severed from the head and torn on the rocks below. An alternate view: Judas hanged himself, but priests bought the field and threw him over the cliff into it. Matthew distinctly records the acts of Judas and the priests (Matt 27:3-10). Acts records all the deeds as

performed by Judas, some being only indirectly performed by Judas. Judas only bought the field in that he paid for it. He fell only in that he was thrown over by the priests.

**1:23-26** — Matthias was chosen by lot. However, some say the disciples were wrong to choose another disciple. They say that the position was reserved for Paul. They say that Matthias is never mentioned again (but neither are the majority of the eleven). They think that the disciples should have waited for the Holy Spirit in His new ministry to lead them. Nevertheless, Luke's account seems to approve the action of the disciples. It was based on the fulfillment of prophecy (1:16, 20). The two men were qualified (1:21-23). They prayed for leading (1:24-25). They used the Old Testament method of lots which God allowed: (1) Joshua 18:8 says lots were used for dividing land; (2) Jonah 1:7 says lots were used to determine who was guilty for the storm; and (3) Proverbs 16:33 shows that the Lord allowed lots to show His will. . As a companion of Paul, Luke surely would have presented this as a wrong choice if Paul was to have had the place that was given to Matthias.

## **II. The Baptism in the Holy Spirit — 2:1-47**

### **A. The Effect of the Spirit's Coming — 2:1-13**

#### **1. His Coming — 2:1-4**

**2:2-3** — Two symbols of the Spirit's presence are given: there was a sound like a mighty rushing wind (cf. Jn 3:8) and there were the divided tongues like fire.

**2:4** — "They were all filled." The baptism of the Spirit (1:5) and the filling of the Spirit happened at the same time, but they are different as shown below:

#### **BAPTISM OF THE SPIRIT**

1. Performance of the Spirit to indwell us – 1 Cor 12:13
2. Permanent: one baptism – Acts 1:5
3. Inward evidence: implants the divine nature – 2 Pet 1:4
4. Given to all believers – Rom 6:3; 1 Cor 6:19-20

#### **FILLING OF THE SPIRIT**

1. Power of the Spirit to change us— Eph 5:18-21
- 2.. Temporary: many fillings – Acts 2:4; 4:31
3. Outward evidence: enables us to witness –Acts 1:8
4. Given only to obedient believers— Act 4:31

Note: the Spirit baptizes all believers into the body of Christ when they are saved and dwells in them; those in the upper room were saved, but the Spirit had not baptized them into the body of Christ and dwelt in them until Pentecost.

#### **2. The Effect — 2:5-13**

**2:5-6** — The unsaved of other countries heard the disciples speak in their own language. This was God's message to show them that the apostles were God's messengers.

**2:7-12** — The unsaved were amazed at that which they heard and saw. "Galileans" is a term that implies unlearned.

**2:13** — Some of the unsaved mocked. It has been said that 9 a.m. was the hour of sacrifices and no one would eat or drink before that hour.

### **B. The Explanation of Christ's Ministry and of the Spirit's Coming — 2:14-40**

#### **1. Joel's prophecy spoke of the Spirit's effect on submissive believers— 2:14-21 (Joel 2:8-32).**

**2:14-15** — The mocking of disrespectful Jews was answered by Peter.

**2:16-21** — Some see Peter's reference to Joel's prophecy as an example of the Spirit's work when He fills a believer. It is not a fulfillment or a partial fulfillment. Others believe Peter used the first part of Joel's prophecy as a partial fulfillment. The events in verses 19-20 will be fulfilled at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Peter simply continued to quote Joel's prophecy to get to verse 21, where he gives his invitation to call on the Lord and be saved. Paul also used this verse in Rom 10:13.

**2. Jesus was proven to be the Messiah — 2:22-24**

**2:22** — Jesus' works proved He was the Messiah.

**2:23-24** — Jesus' resurrection was further proof that He was their Messiah. It was in God's plan for Christ to die; it was no accident. God knew evil men would desire do this to His Son, and He allowed to accomplish His purpose. These foreign Jews crucified Him by agreeing with their leaders who actually did it.

**3. David's prophecy concerning Christ's resurrection — 2:25-31**

**2:25-28** — It is found in Ps. 16:8-11.

**2:29-31** — David foretold this prophecy about Christ's resurrection by the Spirit. David could not be writing about himself, because he died and his body saw corruption and was still in the grave.

**4. Apostles' testimony concerning these events — 2:32-36.**

**2:32** — "We are all witnesses" — All the apostles were eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection.

**2:33** — "Which you now see and hear" — After Jesus had ascended to heaven and was exalted to the right hand of the Father, the Holy Spirit was sent to earth by the Father in Jesus' name (John 14:26). When the Spirit came and filled the apostles, they acted with unusual boldness and spoke in the languages of other nations. These effects of the Holy Spirit were evident to all who saw and heard the apostles.

**2:34-36** — David said, "The LORD said to my Lord, sit...on my right hand until I make your foes your footstool" (Ps 110:1). The right hand of the LORD is a position of authority and power (cf Ps 2:7-9; Mt 28:18). Peter used this verse to show that Jesus Christ is both God's Son and Messiah ("Lord and Christ"). Then he reminded them a second time that they had crucified Him.

**5. Peter's Invitation — 2:37-40**

**2:37** — These Jews were alarmed and convicted of their horrible crime and asked what they could do.

**2:3** — Peter said, Repent... and be baptized...*for* the remission of sins. The Greek word, *eis*, that is translated "for" here, is translated "because" in Mt 12:41, which would make better sense here. We are baptized because of the remissions of sins, not for the remission of sins. Peter did not mention the need for baptism for salvation in Acts 3:19; 5:31; 10:43. Others see baptism as an outward sign of their repentance and renunciation of Judaism, which was necessary for salvation. Still others see the words "and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ" as a parenthesis, so it would read, "Repent for the remission of sins, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ". Baptism is not a means of salvation; it is a testimony of salvation (Mt 18:19; Acts 10:43-48).

**2:38-39** — The promise of the Spirit was given to those who would repent.

**2:40** — Peter kept urging the people to be saved.

**C. The Evidence of the Spirit's Coming — 2:41-47****1. The people saved — 2:41**

**2:41** — Three thousand were saved when Peter preached his first message. These were baptized and added to the membership of the church, which were the 120 that had been baptized by the Spirit..

**2. The Church functioning — 2:42-47**

**2:42** — They followed the apostle's doctrine (teaching) and enjoyed their fellowship. They kept the ordinances (baptism — v. 41; Lord's supper — v. 42) and prayed.

**2:43** — The apostles had power to perform miracles and signs (note that no one else is said to have possessed these powers).

**2:44-45** — They shared their possessions. (1) It was voluntary — no coercion. (2) It was temporary — not practiced for long. (3) It was necessary — Jewish Christians were ostracized from their society with no means for earning a living.

**2:46** — "One accord" — Unity was evident in that early church.

**2:47** — "Praising God" — This is one of the acceptable sacrifices of a believer (Heb 13:15).

"Having favor with all the people" — This often happens when a church begins, but when the claims of Christ are fully understood by a community and are rejected, persecution begins.

"Added to the church daily" — People were being saved every day. The evangelistic work of the church is a daily task.