FIVE-DAY THEOLOGY COURSE

ACTS

The Spirit of God in Mission

TAUGHT BY

Lec SK. KIERU

Unit 1 notes

Chapters 1, 2

Day 1: Understanding Acts and Preparing for Pentecost · Day 2: The Spirit-Empowered Church in Jerusalem and Beyond · Day 3: The Gentile Mission and Paul's Missionary Expansion · Day 4: Paul's Missionary Journeys, Jerusalem and Rome

Day 5: Final examination (2026-10-09)

Based on Acts: The Spirit of God in Mission by Denzil R. Miller. Africa's Hope, 2017.

CHAPTER 1 · UNIT 1 · DAY 1

Introduction to Acts

Definitions of terms, the purpose of the study, facts about Acts, issues of interpretation, and the focus of Acts

Taught by Lec SK. KIERU

Source: Acts: The Spirit of God in Mission - Denzil R. Miller (Based on Chapter 1)

Chapter purpose. This chapter introduces the book of Acts: who wrote it, why we study it, how it must be interpreted, and the missions focus that runs through the whole book.

This is the first lesson of the course. It lays the foundation for everything that follows, especially the meaning of Acts 1:8.

Bible reading: Acts 1-28 (the whole book, in one sitting)

The author strongly recommends that at this point in your study you read through the entire book of Acts in one sitting. This takes about two-and-one-half to three hours and gives you a broad overview of the book.

Learning Objectives

• Explain why "The Acts of the Holy Spirit" is a more fitting title for the book than "The Acts of the Apostles".

• Distinguish between mission and missions as the author uses these words.

• Give reasons why it is important to study and teach the book of Acts.

• Explain how Acts 1:8 serves as the interpretative key to the book of Acts.

• Identify the missions focus of Acts.

Before This Lesson, Read Your Bible

Acts 1-28 (the whole book, in one sitting)

Read the entire book of Acts in one sitting, about two-and-one-half to three hours. As you read, note recurring themes: the work of the Holy Spirit in giving power and direction to believers, the proclamation of the gospel, the triumph over

persecution, and the kingdom of God.

The Big Idea

In the book of Acts the Holy Spirit is revealed as the Spirit of missions.

A Better Name for the Book

• The title "The Acts of the Apostles" is not the best name for the book.

• A better name would be "The Acts of the Holy Spirit", since He is the central character and champion of the book.

• The human main characters change as the story progresses: Peter, Stephen, Philip, Paul.

• The divine Hero, the Holy Spirit, remains constant. Throughout Acts He takes center stage, filling, giving power, enabling, and directing the work.

• Because the Holy Spirit is revealed as the Spirit of missions, the author subtitles this book "The Spirit of God in Mission".

Mission and Missions

Mission

• Mission means God's mission or purpose, sometimes called the missio Dei, from a Latin term.

• God's mission is to bless all the peoples of the earth through the seed of Abraham, that is, through Jesus Christ (Genesis 12:3; 22:18; compare Galatians 3:16).

• Stated another way, God's mission is to redeem and call unto himself a people from "every tribe and language and people and nation" on the earth (Revelation 5:9; 7:9).

• Jesus gave the Great Commission to direct the church in fulfilling that mission (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47-48; John 20:21-22; Acts 1:8).

Missions

• Missions means all the church does to fulfill the mission or purpose of God.

• This includes such things as giving, going, and praying for missionaries.

The Orientation of This Study

• Some Christians read Acts only as history and do not expect the Spirit to work the same way today.

• Others ask, why not today? Why can the twenty-first century church not receive the same Spirit in the same way, and so experience the same power, glory, and guidance as the early church? The author believes it can, and should.

• This study is a vocational commentary: it is purposely targeted toward those actively involved in gospel ministry.

• Again and again we ask, "How should their ministries impact and influence our ministries today?"

• The goal is more than knowledge about the early church. It is to have the same spiritual experiences those first believers had, and to put their practices into our own lives and ministries.

Why Study Acts?

• First, a proper understanding of Acts greatly helps our understanding of the rest of the New Testament. Acts serves as an essential bridge between the Gospels and the Epistles.

• Second, Acts helps us see what the early church looked like, and gives us a model of what the church should look like today.

• Third, Acts gives us a strategy, or plan, for missionary outreach.

Questions Acts Answers About the First Believers

• What were the central or core values and priorities of the first believers?

• How did they minister, and what moved them to do as they did?

• What were the secrets of their great evangelistic and missionary successes?

• What were the essential experiences and common practices of the first church?

• What challenges did they face, and how did they meet those challenges?

Acts as Missionary Strategy

C. Peter Wagner calls the book of Acts "God's training manual for modern Christians". He says that Acts "is intended to be a pattern of how the kingdom of God would be spread worldwide through the centuries until Jesus returns.... The Gospel of Luke tells what Jesus did, and Acts tells us what He expects His followers to do both then and now".

Acts not only tells how the early church preached the gospel and evangelized the then-known world, it gives us an enduring strategy of how we can effectively do missions today.

Background: Authorship, Date and Purpose

Authorship

• Most New Testament scholars identify Luke as the author of Acts, the same Luke who wrote the Gospel bearing his name.

• External evidence includes the Muratorian Canon (A.D. 170) and the writings of Irenaeus (A.D. 180).

• Internal evidence: both Luke and Acts are addressed to the same person, Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1).

• The famous "we" passages show Luke was a fellow traveler and missionary associate of Paul (Acts 16:10-12; 20:5-16; 27:1-28:16).

• Paul called Luke his "dear friend" and identifies him as a medical doctor (Colossians 4:14), and one of his "fellow workers" (Philemon 24).

• Luke is the only Gentile writer in the New Testament and, for that matter, the entire Bible.

Date and Purpose of Writing

• Acts was written around A.D. 65, about 37 years after the Spirit was first poured out on the Day of Pentecost.

• Luke was therefore writing to a second generation of Christians who were not present at Pentecost.

• He possibly wrote from Rome, where the book of Acts ends and where he spent considerable time with Paul.

• His readers were probably Gentiles and Greek-speaking Jews living far from

Jerusalem, undergoing persecution, and had lost their missionary vision and zeal, with less emphasis on the empowering work of the Spirit.

• Luke certainly wrote to teach history, but his primary intent was to call the church back to its pentecostal and missionary roots.

• He further wrote to teach that the empowering presence of the Spirit comes from a powerful spiritual experience he calls "the baptism in the Holy Spirit" (Luke 3:16; Acts 1:5; 11:16), which he presents as separate from salvation, accompanied by speaking in tongues, and given to empower believers for effective witness.

Interpreting Acts: Three Insights and Two Tools

To interpret Acts properly, one must understand that it belongs to the literary genre of historical narrative. Each of the four New Testament genres, Gospels, Epistles, apocalyptic writing and historical narrative, requires its own interpretative approach.

Three Important Insights

• The literary unity of Luke-Acts. Acts is the second part of a two-part work. Acts 1:1 calls the Gospel of Luke Luke's "former book".

• The theological character of Acts. Luke wrote not only as a historian but as a Spirit-inspired theologian, so Acts, properly interpreted, is a legitimate source for normative doctrine.

• The theological independence of Luke. We must not impose Paul's teaching on Luke without first letting Luke speak for himself. Only then can we harmonize the two and get the New Testament's full teaching on the Holy Spirit.

Two Important Tools

• Biblical theology. The biblical theologian approaches Scripture diachronically, that is, across time, seeking how God has progressively revealed himself, and allows each biblical author to speak for himself.

• Narrative theology. An orderly approach to interpreting the historical portions of Scripture, using the literary principles and rules an author employs in composing historical narratives.

The Interpretative Key

Many Bible commentators have cited Acts 1:8 as the key verse of the book. We call it the interpretative key to Acts, because this verse helps to "unlock" our understanding of the entire book. It does this by introducing two key concepts.

1. The Empowerment-Witness Motif

• The first and most important concept is in the first half of the verse: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses..."

• A motif is a pattern of words, concepts, or events repeated throughout a work.

• This pattern is repeated again and again as we progress through Acts.

• This pattern reveals Luke's primary intent in writing the book: to call the church of his day, and ultimately the church of every day, back to its pentecostal and missionary roots.

2. A Table of Contents for the Book

• The second part of Acts 1:8 serves as an outline, a sort of table of contents, for the book: His followers would be His witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth".

• It also reveals the book's missionary orientation. Luke wrote Acts to record the missionary advance of the church to the ends of the earth.

The Holy Spirit Pattern

Figure 1.2. The empowerment-witness motif: the pattern Luke repeats throughout Acts.

• Holy Spirit: The Spirit comes on believers

• Power: "You will receive power"

• Witness: "You will be my witnesses"

• Mission: The gospel advances to the nations

Acts 1:8 as the Outline of the Book

Using the second part of Acts 1:8, the book of Acts can be outlined in three movements.

Passage · The Witness of the Church · Period

• Passage: Acts 1:1-8:1. The Witness of the Church: In Jerusalem. Period: The Jewish mission

• Passage: Acts 8:1-12:25. The Witness of the Church: In Judea and Samaria. Period: The transitional period

• Passage: Acts 13:1-28:31. The Witness of the Church: To the ends of the earth. Period: The Gentile mission

Eight Guidelines for Interpreting Acts

• All Scripture, including the historical portions, is inspired by God and is useful for doctrine (2 Timothy 3:16).

• Luke's writings belong to the literary genre of historical narrative.

• Luke wrote as a Spirit-inspired historian, a Spirit-inspired theologian, and a Spirit-inspired missiologist or student of missions.

• The disciplines of biblical theology and narrative theology must be employed in interpreting Acts.

• Luke had his own Spirit-inspired agenda and purposes in writing Luke-Acts.

• Luke, like any biblical writer, must first be understood on his own terms, and only then should his teachings be related to those of other biblical writers.

• In writing his histories, Luke, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, was selective and subjective in his choice of material.

• Luke's primary intent for writing Acts is revealed in Acts 1:8.

The Missions Focus of Acts

• Luke wrote as a Spirit-inspired missiologist, a student of missions. Missionary themes dominate the book.

• Luke has much to say about the Gentile nations, mentioned forty-four times in Acts, and the church's responsibility to reach them (Acts 1:8; 13:46; 26:20; 28:28).

• He structures the entire book of Acts around Jesus' strategic missionary

pronouncement in Acts 1:8.

• In chapter 19 he summarizes Paul's missionary strategy, a strategy the apostle used throughout the Roman Empire.

• Understanding the missions focus of Acts is essential to understanding the message of Acts.

Conclusion

Acts can therefore be properly viewed as a missions manual. In it you can find methods and strategies to guide you in fulfilling the Great Commission of Christ. It is more than the simple story of the missionary advance of the first-century church; it is a divinely-inspired guidebook of how that advance was accomplished in the first century and how it should be accomplished today.

Important Terms

Mission. God's own purpose: to call a people to himself out of every nation.

Missions. Everything the church does to carry out God's mission.

Missio Dei. Latin for the mission of God.

Hermeneutical issues. The problems we run into when working out what a Bible passage means.

Literary. To do with books and writings.

Genre. A kind or type.

Literary genre. A type of writing, such as history, poetry or letters. Each type has its own rules of interpretation.

Theological. To do with the study of God and God's dealings with people.

Historical narrative. A true story told as history. Acts belongs to this type of writing.

Biblical theology. Reading the Bible across time, letting each writer speak for himself.

Narrative theology. An orderly way of interpreting the story parts of the Bible.

Normative doctrine. A teaching that applies to everyone, in every time.

Subsequence. The teaching that Spirit baptism comes after, and is separate from, being born again.

Initial evidence. The teaching that everyone baptized in the Spirit will speak in tongues.

Motif. A pattern that keeps repeating through a book.

Interpretative key. The verse that unlocks the meaning of the whole book. For Acts, this is Acts 1:8.

Key People

• The Holy Spirit: The central character and champion of the book, revealed in Acts as the Spirit of missions.

• Luke: The author of both the Gospel of Luke and Acts. A medical doctor, Paul's dear friend and travel companion, and the only Gentile writer in the Bible.

• Theophilus: The man to whom Luke addressed both volumes. The name means "lover of God". Probably a Greek believer of wealth and influence, and Luke's literary patron.

• Peter, Stephen, Philip, Paul: The human main characters, who change as the story of Acts progresses.

Key Places

• Jerusalem: Where the witness of the church begins: the Jewish mission (Acts 1:1-8:1).

• Judea and Samaria: The second stage of witness: the transitional period (Acts 8:1-12:25).

• The ends of the earth: The ultimate scope of God's mission: the Gentile mission (Acts 13:1-28:31).

• Rome: The capital city of the Roman Empire, where the book of Acts ends.

Key Event

The writing of Acts, around A.D. 65, to call the church back to its pentecostal and missionary roots.

Luke wrote to a second generation of believers who were under persecution and had lost their missionary vision and zeal. By telling them how the church began, and how it triumphed in the power of the Spirit, he hoped to encourage them to do the same.

Key Verse

"But 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."

Acts 1:8

Remember This

• The Holy Spirit is the divine Hero of Acts. He is the Spirit of missions.

• Mission is God's purpose. Missions is what the church does to fulfil it.

• Acts 1:8 is the interpretative key to Acts.

Life Application

The author states the aim of this study plainly: the goal is more than simply to gain knowledge about the early church. It is to have the same spiritual experiences those first believers had, and to put into practice in our own lives and ministries the same practices they put into theirs.

• Ask the question the author asks of every passage: how should their ministry influence my ministry today?

• Do not read Acts only as history. Expect the Spirit to work in the same way today.

• Treat Acts as a missions manual, and look for methods and strategies for fulfilling the Great Commission.

Textbook Review and Application

• 1. Why would "The Acts of the Holy Spirit" be a more appropriate title for the book of Acts than "The Acts of the Apostles"?

• 2. Give three reasons why it is important to study and teach the book of Acts.

• 3. How can the book of Acts serve as a book of missionary strategy for the church today?

• 4. How does Acts 1:8 serve as the interpretative key to the book of Acts? How can you use this concept in your study of the book of Acts?

Quick Review

1. Who wrote the book of Acts?

Answer: Luke, the same author as the Gospel of Luke. He is the only Gentile writer in the Bible.

2. To whom is Acts addressed?

Answer: Theophilus, whose name means lover of God.

3. What is the difference between mission and missions?

Answer: Mission is God's own purpose, the missio Dei. Missions is all the church does to fulfil that purpose.

4. What literary genre does Acts belong to?

Answer: Historical narrative.

5. Which verse is the interpretative key to Acts?

Answer: Acts 1:8.

Chapter Summary

The Holy Spirit is the central character of Acts, and Acts is the story of His work in the mission of God.

• Luke wrote Acts around A.D. 65 to call the church back to its pentecostal and missionary roots.

• Acts belongs to the genre of historical narrative and must be interpreted using biblical theology and narrative theology.

• Acts 1:8 gives both the empowerment-witness motif and the outline of the whole book.

Acts is a missions manual. Study it to find the methods and strategies God uses to advance His mission through a Spirit-empowered church.

ONE-SENTENCE MEMORY

Acts is the Spirit-inspired story of the Spirit-empowered mission of the church, and Acts 1:8 is the key that unlocks it.

CHAPTER 2 · UNIT 1 · DAY 1

Preparation for Pentecost

The background of Pentecost, Jesus' departure, the Upper Room experience, and the selection of Judas' replacement

Taught by Lec SK. KIERU

Source: Acts: The Spirit of God in Mission - Denzil R. Miller (Based on Chapter 2)

Chapter purpose. This chapter studies Acts 1, which serves as a programmatic introduction to the whole book. It sets the tone, states Luke's purpose in Acts 1:8, and shows how the disciples prepared for the outpouring of the Spirit.

Chapter 1 introduced Acts 1:8 as the interpretative key. Chapter 2 now works through Acts 1 itself and shows how that key verse writes the programme for the entire book, and how the disciples obeyed the command to wait.

Bible reading: Acts 1:1-26

Read the whole of Acts chapter 1 before the lesson. Parts of this chapter cannot be fully understood without a clear and current recollection of the biblical text.

Learning Objectives

• Explain the five functions the first eleven verses of Acts perform in Luke's narrative.

• Explain Jesus' final command to His church and how it fits with His command to go.

• Describe the meaning of being "baptized in" the Holy Spirit.

• Name the seven key outpourings of the Spirit in Acts.

• Show from Luke-Acts how prayer is associated with receiving the Holy Spirit.

Before This Lesson, Read Your Bible

Acts 1:1-26

Keep your Bible open to Acts 1 throughout this lesson.

The Big Idea

The mission of God can only be successfully accomplished in the power of the Spirit.

Acts 1:1-11: A Programmatic Introduction

The first eleven verses of Acts serve as a programmatic introduction to the entire work. They set the tone and "write the program" for all that will follow.

Five Functions of Acts 1:1-11

• They summarize and finalize the work of Jesus as presented in the Gospel of Luke (vv. 1-2).

• They serve as a narrative bridge between Luke's two volumes (compare Luke 24:44-53).

• They reveal Luke's authorial intent and introduce the key theme of the work (1:8).

• They provide a "table of contents" for the book (1:8).

• They introduce five overarching themes that will reappear throughout the book (vv. 1-11).

The Story: Acts 1:1-3

Luke begins his book by reminding his readers of his former work, the Gospel of Luke. He summarizes Jesus' ministry as a ministry of "doing" and "teaching." After His resurrection, Jesus remained with His disciples for forty days teaching them about the kingdom of God. Then as His concluding act of ministry, Jesus gave final instructions through the Holy Spirit to His apostles.

Commentary on Acts 1:1-3

1:1 Theophilus

• Luke addresses his book to Theophilus, the same man he calls "most excellent Theophilus" in Luke 1:3. In Acts the title "most excellent" is used of nobility and political leaders (Acts 24:3; 26:25).

• Theophilus, which means "lover of God," was probably a Greek believer, a man of considerable wealth and influence, and Luke's literary patron.

• Although Luke and Acts are addressed to a single person, they were written to a larger audience. More broadly, Acts has a message for all "lovers of God."

1:1 In my former book

• Luke's "former book" is his Gospel, which described what Jesus began to do and teach before His ascension.

• The implication is that this second volume is about what Jesus continued to do and teach after His ascension.

• In Luke, Jesus carried out His ministry through the direction and power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:18-19; compare Acts 10:38). In Acts He continued His ministry through His church, which was also directed and empowered by the Spirit.

• The phrase "do and teach" summarizes Jesus' entire ministry. It was a ministry of powerful words and mighty works.

1:2 Instructions through the Holy Spirit

• Even after His death and resurrection, Jesus still carried out His ministry under the impulse of the Spirit.

• The Holy Spirit's active role in empowering and inspiring ministry is a key theme of both the Gospel of Luke and Acts.

• As the Superintendent of the Harvest, the Holy Spirit, having anointed and guided Jesus' ministry, will now anoint and guide the global mission of the church.

1:3 He showed himself... that he was alive

• At the very beginning of Acts, Luke refers to the death and resurrection of Jesus. These two pivotal events represent the core of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-6) and the paramount message of the church.

• Luke immediately informs his readers that the church's witness is to the gospel, and that the central message of the gospel is the death and resurrection of Christ. This is the message we must forcefully and faithfully proclaim to the nations.

1:3 Spoke about the kingdom of God

• The kingdom of God is the overarching context for the book of Acts.

• Luke shows this by using a narrative strategy known as inclusio: framing his story inside key parallel statements about the kingdom of God (1:3; 28:23, 31).

• Once he does this, it is no longer necessary to mention the kingdom each time it applies. The kingdom of God is assumed to be the context of everything within the frame.

• Luke uses the phrase kingdom of God thirty-two times in his Gospel. For Luke, to proclaim the kingdom is equivalent to preaching the gospel (Acts 8:12; 28:23, 31).

The Story: The Spirit Is Promised (Acts 1:4-8)

During His last meeting with His disciples, Jesus gave them final instructions. They were to wait in Jerusalem for the promised outpouring of the Spirit. In a few days they would be baptized in the Holy Spirit. As a result, they would receive supernatural power, enabling them to take the gospel to Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

When the disciples asked Jesus about Israel's future participation in the kingdom of God, He instead pointed them to the task at hand: Spirit-empowered witness to the nations.

Commentary on Acts 1:4-8

1:4 "Stay!" and "Go!"

• Jesus issues a final command before returning to the Father: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised." This parallels Luke 24:49: "Stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

• During the past forty days Jesus had repeatedly told His disciples to "Go!" With each restatement of the Great Commission is a command to go (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:21-22; Acts 1:8).

• But now, in His final words, He commands them, "Stay!" The lesson is this: before they could effectively obey the first command, they would have to explicitly obey the second.

• Jesus left His church with a humanly impossible task, the evangelization of all nations before He comes again. It was a job beyond their capability and ours. They would therefore need supernatural help.

• We too, if we are going to effectively reach the lost with the gospel, must carefully obey both commands.

1:4 The gift my Father promised

• The phrase translated "the gift my Father promised" (Greek ten epangelian tou patros) is literally "the promise of the Father."

• Jesus is likely referring to the promise of the outpouring of the Spirit in Joel 2:28-29, since that was the passage Peter quoted at Pentecost (Acts 2:17-18).

• He could also have been referring to His earlier promise that the "Father in heaven [will] give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13).

• Joel generalized the promise: it is for "all people." Jesus specified: although the promise is potentially for all people, it is specifically for those children of the Father who earnestly ask for it (Luke 11:9-13).

1:5 Baptized in the Holy Spirit

• This phrase could be better translated "baptized in (Greek en) the Holy Spirit."

• Just as John baptized in water, Jesus would baptize in the Holy Spirit. This statement references John the Baptist in Luke 3:16.

• In this metaphor Jesus is the baptizer and the Holy Spirit is the element into which one is baptized.

• Paul uses the same metaphor for a different baptism, baptism into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). In Paul's metaphor the Spirit is the baptizer and the body of Christ is the element.

1:6 Restore the kingdom to Israel

• The disciples were correct in connecting Jesus' teaching concerning the Holy Spirit with the kingdom of God; however, their timing and focus were wrong.

• Jesus' immediate concern was that they would be baptized in the Holy Spirit so they might receive power to participate in advancing God's kingdom on the earth.

1:8 You will receive power, and you will be my witnesses

• Acts 1:8 serves as the hermeneutical key to the book of Acts, and can be divided into two parts.

• The first half reveals Luke's empowerment-witness motif: "you will receive power," and as a result, "you will be my witnesses." This is the key to Luke's primary intent in writing Acts, and is repeated many times throughout the book.

• The second half ("in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth") functions as a programmatic outline for Acts. It writes a program or "table of contents" for the entire book.

• The second part also reveals Luke's secondary purpose: to trace the church's geographical progress from Jerusalem to Rome, and to show how the church moved from being a localized Jewish sect into a universal body of believers, encompassing both Jews and Gentiles.

• To the ends of the earth. The ultimate scope of God's mission is "the ends of the earth" (Greek eschatou tes ges). Every person from every nation and language and from every age in history is the object of His loving concern and grace. Every person must therefore hear the good news of Christ. It is for this great purpose that the Spirit empowers Christ's disciples.

Table 2.1: The Seven Key Outpourings

The empowerment-witness pattern of Acts 1:8 is most dramatically demonstrated in seven key outpourings. Each of these outpourings resulted in powerful missional witness. Note that the author places the Antiochian "outpouring" in quotation marks.

· Outpouring · Scripture · Period in Acts

• #: 1. Outpouring: Pentecost, the first Jerusalem outpouring. Scripture: Acts 2:1-4. Period in Acts: The Jewish mission

• #: 2. Outpouring: The second Jerusalem outpouring. Scripture: Acts 4:31. Period in Acts: The Jewish mission

• #: 3. Outpouring: The Samaritan outpouring. Scripture: Acts 8:14-17. Period in Acts: The transitional period

• #: 4. Outpouring: The Damascene outpouring. Scripture: Acts 9:15-18. Period in Acts: The transitional period

• #: 5. Outpouring: The Caesarean outpouring. Scripture: Acts 10:44-48. Period in

Acts: The transitional period

• #: 6. Outpouring: The Antiochian "outpouring". Scripture: Acts 13:1-3. Period in Acts: The Gentile mission

• #: 7. Outpouring: The Ephesian outpouring. Scripture: Acts 19:1-7. Period in Acts: The Gentile mission

Life Application

The command of Jesus to wait for the promise of the Father was not only for those first disciples in Jerusalem. It is also for all believers of every age until Jesus comes again (compare Luke 11:9-13).

We, like those early believers, must seek the face of God until the Holy Spirit comes upon us. Only then will we be adequately equipped to be His witnesses at home and "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The Story: Jesus Taken Up Into Heaven (Acts 1:9-11)

Having promised His disciples power, Jesus ascended into heaven. As He disappeared from their sight, two men (angels) appeared before them. The angels challenged them, "Why are you standing here staring into the sky? This same Jesus will come again in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

Commentary on Acts 1:9-11

1:9 He was taken up

• Jesus' ascension receives only brief mention in the Gospels (Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51). Here Luke adds more detail.

• Jesus was "taken up before their very eyes," that is, He ascended visibly and bodily into heaven.

• In Acts this story sets the stage for the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost (2:33). It is one of the "many convincing proofs" that Jesus was alive (1:3).

1:11 Why do you stand looking?

• These words of the angels come as a challenge to the staring disciples.

• While there is an appropriate time to stand and gaze on the Lord's glory (2

Corinthians 3:18), such activity can never serve as a substitute for obedience to His clear commands.

• The disciples had been commanded to return to Jerusalem and wait to receive power from on high (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5), and they needed to obey quickly.

• Throughout Acts, angels intervened in the mission of God. They often urged the disciples to "go" and bear witness to Christ (5:19-20; 8:26).

1:11 This same Jesus will come back

• This statement introduces the eschatological context of the book of Acts.

• Since "this same Jesus... will come back," there is an urgency about the disciples' mission.

• The entire book of Acts, as well as the entire New Testament, has an eschatological, or last-days, context: "He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything" (Acts 3:21).

• Luke spoke often on eschatology and the second coming of Christ (Luke 12:35-40; 13:34-35; 21:25-36; 22:16; Acts 1:10-11; 2:17; 3:19-21).

Further Insight: Five Key Themes Introduced in Acts 1

The first eleven verses function in Acts much as a legal or academic abstract. They outline the major elements of what is to follow. Five key themes are introduced which occur again and again throughout Acts.

• The kingdom of God. Luke mentions it twice in these verses: in verse 3 Jesus "spoke about the kingdom of God"; in verse 6 the disciples inquired about the restoration of "the kingdom to Israel."

• The global mission of the church. Jesus told His disciples that "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (v. 8). Acts is principally the story of the church fulfilling its God-ordained mission of taking the gospel to the nations.

• The necessity of Spirit empowering. In verses 4-5 Jesus commanded them to wait for the gift the Father promised, and in verse 8 promised them power. The mission of God can only be successfully accomplished in the power of the Spirit.

• The Holy Spirit guiding the work of missions. Verse 2 says Jesus gave orders to

the disciples through the Holy Spirit. Throughout Acts one reads of the Spirit inspiring, guiding, and directing the work of missions. Luke presents Him as the Superintendent of the Harvest.

• The urgency of the missionary task. In verse 11 the angels chided the disciples: "Men of Galilee,... why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus... will come back." In Acts the work of missions is carried out in anticipation of Christ's soon return.

The Story: In the Upper Room (Acts 1:12-26)

In obedience to Jesus' command, the disciples returned to Jerusalem. There they entered an upper room where they resided, prayed, and conducted business.

In their group were the eleven apostles: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. Also with them were Mary the mother of Jesus, Jesus' brothers, and a group of women. The total number of believers was about 120. "They all joined together constantly in prayer" (1:14).

One day Peter stood and proposed to the group that Judas Iscariot, who had betrayed Jesus and then committed suicide, be replaced. His replacement must be a man who had been with the disciples during Jesus' entire ministry. The group then nominated two men, Joseph called Barsabbas and Matthias. After prayer, they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias, who was added to the eleven apostles.

Commentary on Acts 1:12-26

1:13 Upstairs to the room where they were staying

• About 120 disciples gathered with the apostles in the upper room (v. 15).

• Their time was divided between this venue and the temple courts. In the upper room they gathered for prayer and business. They also "stayed continually at the temple, praising God" (Luke 24:53).

1:14 Constantly in prayer

Luke consistently associates the reception of the Holy Spirit with earnest prayer.

• The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus "as He was praying" (Luke 3:21).

• Before the Day of Pentecost the disciples were "continually at the temple praising God" (Luke 24:53) and "constantly in prayer" (Acts 1:14).

• Saul spent three days in prayer before Ananias laid hands on him to receive the Spirit (9:9, 11).

• Cornelius "prayed to God regularly" (10:2), and Peter also prayed in preparation for the outpouring at Caesarea (v. 9).

• At Antioch the Spirit moved as the church worshiped, prayed, and fasted (13:1-2).

• The Holy Spirit came upon the Samaritans, Saul, and the Ephesian disciples when they were being prayed for (8:17; 9:17-18; 19:6).

• Anyone who desires to be filled with the Holy Spirit should thus commit himself or herself to earnest and expectant prayer to God.

1:14 Along with the women

• Women were among those who were filled with the Spirit at Pentecost.

• Throughout his two-volume work, Luke often focuses on the significance of women in fulfilling the mission of God (Luke 8:1-3; 23:49, 55; 24:1-12, 22; Acts 5:14; 8:12; 16:13-15; 17:4).

• He makes it clear that women can be filled with the Spirit and effectively used by God in gospel ministry (Acts 1:14; 2:17-18; 18:18-19, 26; 21:9).

1:22 One of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection

• In the upper room Peter makes it clear that "it is necessary" to choose a replacement for Judas.

• One reason was to return the number of disciples to the original twelve.

• But the key reason for the choice seems to be witness to the gospel, for Peter said that the one chosen "must become a witness... of his resurrection."

Important Terms

Baptized in the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the baptizer and the Holy Spirit is what the believer is immersed in. It brings power for witness.

The promise of the Father. The gift Jesus told the disciples to wait for, that is, the

outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Inclusio. A writing technique where an author frames a story between two matching statements, so the idea in those statements covers everything in between.

Episode. One specific story inside a bigger series of stories.

Superintendent of the Harvest. Luke's picture of the Holy Spirit as the one who directs and oversees the work of missions.

Eschatological. To do with the last days and the return of Christ.

Key People

• Jesus: Gives final instructions through the Holy Spirit, promises power, then ascends bodily into heaven.

• The eleven apostles: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.

• Mary the mother of Jesus, and the women: Present in the upper room. Women were among those filled with the Spirit at Pentecost.

• Peter: Proposes that a replacement be chosen for Judas, whose key qualification is witness to the resurrection.

• Matthias: Chosen by lot to replace Judas Iscariot, and added to the eleven apostles.

• Joseph called Barsabbas: The other man nominated to replace Judas.

Key Places

• Jerusalem: Where the disciples were commanded to stay and wait for the gift the Father promised.

• The Upper Room: Where about 120 believers resided, prayed, and conducted business.

• The temple courts: The disciples "stayed continually at the temple, praising God" (Luke 24:53).

Key Event

Jesus commands the disciples, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised," and then ascends into heaven.

Jesus had repeatedly said "Go!" Now He says "Stay!" Before they could effectively obey the first command, they had to explicitly obey the second.

Key Verse

"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about."

Acts 1:4

Remember This

• Jesus said "Go", but first He said "Stay". Obey the second command in order to obey the first.

• The mission of God can only be successfully accomplished in the power of the Spirit.

• Luke consistently associates the reception of the Holy Spirit with earnest prayer.

Textbook Review and Application

• 1. To whom is the book of Acts addressed? Was it meant only for him? How might it be relevant to you?

• 2. What was Jesus' final command to His church before returning to heaven? How can this command be reconciled with His repeated command to "go"? How does this command apply to the church today?

• 3. Describe the meaning of "baptized" in the Holy Spirit.

• 4. Cite several texts in Luke-Acts that associate prayer with receiving the Holy Spirit. How do these texts apply to the church today?

Quick Review

1. How many believers gathered in the upper room?

Answer: About 120.

2. Who was chosen to replace Judas Iscariot, and how?

Answer: Matthias, chosen by lot after prayer.

3. What was the key qualification for Judas' replacement?

Answer: He had to become a witness of the resurrection of Jesus.

4. In the metaphor of Spirit baptism, who is the baptizer and what is the element?

Answer: Jesus is the baptizer and the Holy Spirit is the element into which one is baptized.

5. How many key outpourings of the Spirit does the author identify in Acts?

Answer: Seven.

Chapter Summary

Before the church could go, it had to wait. Spirit empowering is the necessary preparation for mission.

• Acts 1:1-11 is a programmatic introduction that writes the plan for the whole book and introduces five key themes.

• Jesus commanded the disciples to stay in Jerusalem until they were "clothed with power from on high".

• Luke identifies seven key outpourings of the Spirit in Acts, each resulting in powerful missional witness.

Commit yourself to earnest, expectant prayer for the Holy Spirit, because the reception of the Spirit is consistently associated with prayer in Luke-Acts.

ONE-SENTENCE MEMORY

Acts 1 gives the programme for the whole book: wait for the Spirit, receive power, and be witnesses from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.