

ACTS

Chapters 1-12





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EXPLORE THE BIBLE: Acts, Chapters 1–12

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➤ ABOUT THIS STUDY

GOD IS ON THE MOVE, INVITING AND EMPOWERING YOU TO JOIN HIS GREAT MISSION.

The Bible isn't just a story of what happened thousands of years ago; it's an invitation to join what God has been doing since the beginning of history. As a Christian and as a part of the church, you play a key role in telling others the good news of Jesus. The same God you read about in the Bible is with you right now and is ready to work through you for His amazing purpose.

The Book of Acts provides a dramatic narrative of the continuing work and witness of the risen Lord Jesus through His followers. It's the foundational account of various people, places, and events involved in the birth and growth of the early church. More important, it magnifies the powerful work of the Holy Spirit in propelling the spread of the gospel message to the ends of the earth.

Explore the Bible: Acts, Chapters 1–12 inspires readers with the fact that over and over again, God works through ordinary people—empowered by the Holy Spirit—to accomplish His eternal mission. Believers in the 21st century are now a part of this amazing story.

The *Explore the Bible* series will help you know and apply the encouraging and empowering truth of God's Word. Each session is organized in the following way.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT: This page explains the original context of each passage and begins relating the primary themes to your life today.

EXPLORE THE TEXT: These pages walk you through Scripture, providing helpful commentary and encouraging thoughtful interaction with God through His Word.

OBEY THE TEXT: This page helps you apply the truths you've explored. It's not enough to know what the Bible says. God's Word has the power to change your life.

LEADER GUIDE: This final section provides optional discussion starters and suggested questions to help anyone lead a group in reviewing each section of the personal study.



For helps on how to use *Explore the Bible*, tips on how to better lead groups, or additional ideas for leading, visit:
www.ministrygrid.com/web/ExploreTheBible.

➤ GROUP COMMITMENT

As you begin this study, it's important that everyone agrees to key group values. Clearly establishing the purpose of your time together will foster healthy expectations and help ease any uncertainties. The goal is to ensure that everyone has a positive experience leading to spiritual growth and true community. Initial each value as you discuss the following with your group.

☐ PRIORITY

Life is busy, but we value this time with one another and with God's Word. We choose to make being together a priority.

☐ PARTICIPATION

We're a group. Everyone is encouraged to participate. No one dominates.

☐ RESPECT

Everyone is given the right to his or her own opinions. All questions are encouraged and respected.

☐ TRUST

Each person humbly seeks truth through time in prayer and in the Bible. We trust God as the loving authority in our lives.

☐ CONFIDENTIALITY

Anything said in our meetings is never repeated outside the group without the permission of everyone involved. This commitment is vital in creating an environment of trust and openness.

☐ SUPPORT

Everyone can count on anyone in this group. Permission is given to call on one another at any time, especially in times of crisis. The group provides care for every member.

☐ ACCOUNTABILITY

We agree to let the members of our group hold us accountable to commitments we make in the loving ways we decide on. Questions are always welcome. Unsolicited advice, however, isn't permitted.

I agree to all the commitments.

Date

➤ GENERAL EDITOR



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You can follow Vance on Twitter at *@vancepitman*.



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JESUS GIVES THE MISSION

Jesus assigned His followers the task of telling everyone about Him and His message.



➤ ABOUT THE BOOK OF ACTS

As promised by Jesus, the Holy Spirit filled believers with His presence and power. For this reason many Bible students refer to this beloved Bible book as The Acts of the Holy Spirit. Through the power of the Spirit, the gospel message was proclaimed everywhere, and lives were transformed. That same reality continues for believers today.

AUTHOR

The writer of Acts didn't identify himself by name. However, clues within the book and its clear connection to the Gospel of Luke have led most evangelical Bible scholars to conclude that Luke, a physician and missionary associate of Paul (see Col. 4:14), wrote both the Third Gospel and Acts. He addressed both works to Theophilus (see Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1), and in Acts 1:1-2 he referred to the Gospel as his "first narrative ... about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day He was taken up." Luke thus wrote Acts as a sequel to the Third Gospel. He tied the two works together by reporting at the end of the Gospel and again at the beginning of Acts the Lord's promise about the Holy Spirit (see Luke 24:49; Acts 1:1-8), as well as Jesus' ascension into heaven (see Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-11).

DATE

Bible students hold differing views about the date Luke wrote Acts. One view (the view I hold) is that Acts was written in the early 60s. This view takes note that Luke made no mention in Acts of the Jerusalem temple's destruction in A.D. 70 or of the persecution of Christians instigated by Nero in A.D. 64. It seems probable that Luke would have mentioned these events if he had written after they occurred. Others, however, hold to a date of writing sometime around the temple's destruction in A.D. 70 or even as late as the mid-80s.

PURPOSE

Luke stated up front his purpose in writing Acts. He wanted to present an accurate narrative of the events surrounding Jesus' life on earth and the continuing influence of His ministry and message. Embedded within that purpose was an effort to defend the faith against assertions on the one hand that Christianity was a political movement against Rome and on the other hand that Christians were only a sect of Judaism.

"WE TALK OF THE SECOND
COMING; HALF THE
WORLD HAS NEVER
HEARD OF THE FIRST."

—Oswald J. Smith

Think About It

Observe the promises Jesus made to the apostles in this passage. How are the promises connected to one another?

Identify the actions the apostles were to take. How are these actions related to the promises?

➤ ACTS 1:1-11

1 I wrote the first narrative, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach **2** until the day He was taken up, after He had given orders through the Holy Spirit to the apostles He had chosen. **3** After He had suffered, He also presented Himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God. **4** While He was together with them, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father's promise. "This," He said, "is what you heard from Me; **5** for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." **6** So when they had come together, they asked Him, "Lord, are You restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?" **7** He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by His own authority. **8** But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." **9** After He had said this, He was taken up as they were watching, and a cloud took Him out of their sight. **10** While He was going, they were gazing into heaven, and suddenly two men in white clothes stood by them. **11** They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen Him going into heaven."

➤ UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

USE THE FOLLOWING PAGES TO PREPARE FOR YOUR GROUP TIME.

The opening chapter of Acts pulses with expectation. It promises a dynamic sequel to the gospel story “about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (1:1). Luke assured his readers that the resurrected Lord Jesus, having ascended to the Father, was nevertheless continuing His redemptive mission on earth. He would do so through the Holy Spirit’s living in, guiding, and empowering His followers “in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (v. 8).

Luke reported the risen Lord’s final instructions to His apostles: to remain in Jerusalem until they received the Holy Spirit (see vv. 4-5). Their mission would require supernatural enablement; it could not be accomplished on the basis of human energy and effort. The apostles wondered if Jesus’ instruction signaled the imminent restoration of Israel as a political kingdom, but Jesus clarified the mission: they were to be His witnesses throughout the world (see vv. 6-8). Jesus then ascended into heaven, and two angels assured the watching apostles that He would one day return in the same way He had left them (see vv. 9-11).

In the remainder of Acts 1, Luke reported the process by which the community of disciples, now numbering about 120 people, restored the number of apostles to 12 after Judas the betrayer’s death. The group flourished in an atmosphere of unity, so Peter led them to recommend worthy potential replacements, to pray about the decision, and then to select the new member of the twelve by casting lots. Trusting God’s guidance, the group selected Matthias to join the apostles (see vv. 12-26).



EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE REMEMBERED PROMISE (Acts 1:1-5)

¹I wrote the first narrative, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach ²until the day He was taken up, after He had given orders through the Holy Spirit to the apostles He had chosen. ³After He had suffered, He also presented Himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴While He was together with them, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father's promise. "This," He said, "is what you heard from Me; ⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

Luke reminded Theophilus (see p. 7) that the first narrative he wrote (the Gospel of Luke) had focused on the life, actions, and teachings of Jesus during His time on earth. Some Bible students understand the phrase "most honorable Theophilus" in Luke 1:3 to suggest that this individual was an important Roman official (compare the descriptive phrases used in Acts 23:26; 26:25).

Luke reported that Jesus had given orders through the Holy Spirit to the apostles. The term *apostles* literally refers to those who have been appointed and sent out on a mission. The Commander giving the orders was Jesus. The Holy Spirit was the presence of God who would guide the apostles and empower them to carry out the mission.

Luke emphasized two key truths to reinforce his readers' faith in Jesus. First, after Jesus suffered and died on the cross, He also presented Himself alive. Jesus' resurrection was real and true, authenticated by many convincing proofs. The Greek word translated *proofs* refers to a certainty that can be confirmed by evidence. The resurrection of Jesus was confirmed when He appeared to multiple individuals and groups in the 40 days after His tomb was found to be empty (see 1 Cor. 15:4-8).

The second truth Luke emphasized was the centrality of the kingdom of God. God gave birth to the church for the purpose of expanding His kingdom. Faithful Jews longed for God to restore Israel to its former national glory. Jesus taught, however, that He inaugurated God's righteous reign through His ministry and mission.

Jesus commanded the apostles not to leave Jerusalem until further notice. What was so significant about their staying in Jerusalem? This city was the epicenter of Jewish worship and temple sacrifices. Centuries earlier the prophet Joel had predicted the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem and a subsequent spiritual awakening (see Joel 2:28-32). Furthermore, Jerusalem was the location of the death and resurrection of Jesus. For these reasons He instructed His apostles to remain in the city until they could boldly announce the fulfillment of the Father's promise.

What makes it difficult to wait for the Lord to prepare us to fulfill His purposes? What are the rewards of waiting?

THE RESURRECTION PROCLAIMED ***(Acts 1:6-8)***

⁶So when they had come together, they asked Him, "Lord, are You restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?" ⁷He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by His own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

KEY DOCTRINE

Evangelism and Missions

The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations.

BIBLE SKILL

Compare passages with related concepts.

Read Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-49; and John 20:21. Compare those passages to what Luke recorded in Acts 1:6-8. Take note of similar themes, teachings, and directives. How do the passages complement one another?

When the risen Lord spoke to His apostles about the kingdom of God, they were understandably curious (and perhaps confused) about what this meant. Jesus would have to clarify for the apostles that the kingdom of God centered in Him, not in a national entity. The kingdom of God is the reign of His grace and power in the lives of those who believe in Jesus. He declared that it was both futile and distracting from the real mission for the apostles to dwell on times or periods that were beyond their control. The Lord commissioned us to live faithfully each day, passionately proclaiming the gospel and making disciples, not to speculate about God's end-time calendar.

The mission of testifying to the resurrection was a task so enormous that the apostles needed supernatural ability. The power Jesus promised to His apostles was inseparable from their assigned mission. Witnesses are individuals who are compelled to tell others something they know to be true. Because the apostles knew Jesus had conquered sin and death through His death and resurrection, they were compelled to tell this good news. The content of the apostles' testimony focused on Jesus' death and resurrection. The cross pointed to Jesus' victory over sin. The resurrection pointed to His victory over death and the grave, as well as His validation as God's Son. Like the apostles and the early church, believers today are commissioned to bear witness to a world-changing historical event.

What hinders believers from fulfilling their assignment to testify about Jesus' presence in their lives? What role does the Holy Spirit play in helping believers share the gospel?

THE RETURN PORTRAYED (*Acts 1:9-11*)

⁹After He had said this, He was taken up as they were watching, and a cloud took Him out of their sight. ¹⁰While He was going, they were gazing into heaven, and suddenly two men in white clothes stood by them. ¹¹They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen Him going into heaven."

Jesus' ascension demonstrated the Father's pleasure in welcoming the Son back into the glory of heaven (see John 17:4-5). It bridged the gap between the atoning work of Christ on the cross and His heavenly ministry as High Priest (see Heb. 8:1). Furthermore, the ascension opened the way for Jesus' power and presence to continue in His followers through the Holy Spirit. It was for their benefit that He would return to heaven and the Spirit would come to them (see John 16:7). Finally, the ascension underscored the fact that Jesus had given His apostles (and the church) a mission as His ambassadors.

As Jesus ascended into heaven, the apostles were gazing into heaven so intently that they didn't notice the appearance of two men in white clothes. The context strongly suggests these two men were angels whom God sent to assure the apostles about Jesus' future return. The two angels' question included a gentle rebuke. Instead of remaining in that place and looking up into heaven, the apostles needed to obey Jesus' command to stay in Jerusalem and prepare to get involved in the business of His mission. As motivation, the apostles were to keep in mind that one day their Master would come in the same way they had seen Him ascend into heaven. That is, He will return personally, bodily, visibly, and victoriously.

How can believers get caught gazing when they need to be obeying the Lord? What role does witnessing play in preparing for Jesus' return?



► OBEY THE TEXT

Believers follow Christ and point others to Him through the power of the Holy Spirit. In obedience and love, believers are to share the gospel with others. Believers are to live in light of Jesus' lordship and in anticipation of His return.

What is your group doing to point others to Jesus? What role do you play in helping the group point others to Jesus? Discuss ways your group can be more intentional in spreading the gospel to the ends of the earth.

What factors cause you to hesitate in fulfilling the mission of being Jesus' witness? What steps can you take to overcome your hesitation and obey the Lord's command to be a witness?

Record the names or initials of people with whom you could share the gospel. Ask God to help you find a way to talk with each person listed. Begin to act on what He reveals to you.



MEMORIZE

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8

USE THE SPACE PROVIDED TO MAKE OBSERVATIONS AND RECORD PRAYER REQUESTS DURING THE GROUP EXPERIENCE FOR THIS SESSION.

MY THOUGHTS

Record insights and questions from the group experience.

MY RESPONSE

Note specific ways you'll put into practice the truth explored this week.

MY PRAYERS

List specific prayer needs and answers to remember this week.



➤ GETTING STARTED

OPENING OPTIONS: Choose one of the following to open the group discussion.

WEEKLY QUOTATION DISCUSSION STARTER: “We talk of the Second Coming; half the world has never heard of the first.”—Oswald J. Smith

- What’s your initial response to this week’s quotation?
- How often do you think about Jesus’ return?
- How often do you consider the existence of people who’ve never heard the gospel?
- Does Jesus’ return seem to be a topic of debate among Christians or a daily reality? Explain.
- Today we’ll see Jesus’ earthly presence coming to an end and the promise of His return.

CREATIVE ACTIVITY: To prepare, identify a time when you were surprised. If possible, secure a picture or another object that reminds you of or represents that memory. When everyone has arrived, open your time together by briefly sharing this surprising experience. Then use the following to open the discussion.

- When have you been completely surprised? Why were you surprised?
- Today we’ll read about something Jesus said and did that was completely unexpected.

➤ UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

PROVIDE BACKGROUND: Briefly introduce members to the Book of Acts by pointing out the major themes and any information or ideas that will help them understand Acts 1 (see pp. 7 and 9). Then, to help people personally connect today’s context with the original context, use the following questions and statements.

- Luke authored two books. The Gospel of Luke focused on the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The Book of Acts focused on the spread of the gospel and establishment of the church after Jesus’ ascension into heaven. Why would both books have been important for the original audience? Why are they still important for readers today?
- As we begin our study of the Book of Acts, pay attention to the different ways God worked to spread the gospel of Jesus.

➤ EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ THE BIBLE: Ask a volunteer to read Acts 1:1-11.

DISCUSS: Use the following questions to discuss group members' initial reactions to the text.

- How do you understand the word *began* in the phrase “all that Jesus began to do and teach” in verse 1?
- Why are the first two verses foundational to an understanding of the rest of the Book of Acts?
- Why is it important that verse 3 establishes Jesus' resurrection as proven historical fact?
- What key points in verse 3 provide a summation of the gospel introduced in verses 1-2?
- What was promised in verses 4-5? Why were the disciples told to wait rather than immediately spread the good news of Jesus and the kingdom of God?
- In verses 6-8 why is it significant that Jesus said the power of the Holy Spirit was necessary for the disciples' mission, but knowledge of God's timing wasn't possible?
- Why would being witnesses throughout the earth be of greater importance than seeking a kingdom in Israel?
- Why did the Book of Acts open with Jesus' ascension and a promise that He would return?
- What does this Scripture passage reveal about God's character? About natural human tendencies? About our mission as Christians?

NOTE: Provide ample time for group members to share responses and questions about the text. Don't feel pressured to prioritize the printed agenda over group members' personal experiences. If time allows, discuss responses to the questions in the personal reading.

➤ OBEY THE TEXT

RESPOND: Foster an environment of openness and action. Help individuals apply biblical truth to specific areas of personal thought, attitude, and/or behavior.

- How do you feel knowing that even the disciples still didn't fully understand what Jesus was doing? Why are you encouraged or discouraged that Jesus said we'll never know God's timing?
- In what ways can we encourage one another to go in obedience to Jesus instead of delaying or doing nothing?
- How are you currently seeking to obey Jesus' final words to be His witness?

PRAY: Close by thanking God for Jesus. Pray for hearts that are eager to share the good news of Jesus and the hope we have in His return.