

Ministry of Grace Church

The Acts of The Apostles Chapter 1 – A Transition

Preface:

Of all the books in the New Testament, Acts stands out as unique. Like the four gospels, it is basically a historical book. (Slide 2A) However, it is the only one that covers the foundation and early growth of the church. And, it is the only book that lays out the background and setting for most of the writings of Paul the Apostle. Without the book of Acts, many of the writings of the New Testament would be lacking in background and context.

The other thing that makes this book unique is the fact that it is a transitional book. (Slide 2B) It portrays the transition from God's relationship with the Jews to His relationship with the church. In another sense it is a historical transition from the earthly ministry of Jesus to the ministry of the Apostles, especially Peter and Paul. In the book of Acts, in a very real sense, the reader goes from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, to the end of the earth. But, why is it called "Acts"? The earliest evidence for the naming of this book comes from a prologue to the Gospel of Luke around the year AD 150. In reality this title is a misnomer. Instead of "The Acts of the Apostles" it probably should have been called, "Certain Acts of Certain Apostles" since it focuses primarily on the actions of the Apostles Peter and Paul.

The authorship of Acts by Luke has never really been questioned. He was a doctor by training who accompanied Paul during much of His missionary travel. Luke wrote both his gospel account and this book for a man named Theophilus, (Slide 3A) whose name means "Lover of God" (Luke 1:3 & Acts 1:1). Nobody knows whether Theophilus is the person's real name or if it's a pseudonym. There is some speculation that this man may have been a wealthy politician who supported Luke financially while he wrote these two books. Whereas these two books were apparently written to confirm and instruct Theophilus in his new found faith, they have also served to do just that for millions of Christians since the first century.

The importance of this book cannot be overstated. Along with the four gospel accounts, it serves as the foundation upon which the remainder of the New Testament is built. But, in spite of its importance to the church, or perhaps because of it, it has spawned many false beliefs among those who view it too casually, not recognizing its transitional nature. So, let's see what Doctor Luke has prescribed for the body of Christ.

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

Acts 1:1-5

¹In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ²until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; ⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

Notes:

Luke starts off this book with an acknowledgement that he had written a previous book (the Gospel According to Luke). In that book he ended with Jesus' ascension into heaven and in this one he starts off with that ascension.

However, before Jesus ascended in bodily form to the Father, Luke tells us that Jesus “**presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs ...**” The word translated “**proofs**” is *tekmērion*, which refers to concrete evidence presented in a court of law, as opposed to mere witness testimony. Jesus wanted to make sure that His followers knew without a doubt that He is alive. In fact, Jesus did not simply present Himself one time and then leave, He appeared to his disciples and continued His teaching regarding the coming Kingdom for 40 days before ascending to the Father.

What Kingdom was Jesus teaching His disciples about during these 40 days of instruction? For sure, He continued His teaching about the Kingdom of Heaven in which He will rule from His throne in Jerusalem. But, alongside His teaching about the Millennial Kingdom, Jesus was also teaching about the earthly kingdom that we live in today in which Jesus is ruling from His heavenly throne.

Before He left, Jesus gave the disciples two instructions which, on the surface, may seem contradictory. He told them to *wait in Jerusalem* and He told them to *go into the world*. (Slide 3B) This apparent contradiction is resolved when we realize that the disciples were to obey these instructions sequentially. The first instruction was to wait in Jerusalem until they were “clothed with power from on high” (the Holy Spirit), and the second instruction was to go and testify to the world once they had received the Spirit.

What did Jesus mean by the expression, “baptized with the Holy Spirit”? He compared this baptism to the baptism of John the Baptist. John's was a baptism using water, but this was a baptism using the Holy Spirit of God. So, what was John's purpose in his baptism? We know from his preaching that the water baptism of John served as a testimony that those who were baptized had repented of their sins and that they were now followers of John. It also was a testimony that they were preparing themselves for the Kingdom of God. Similarly, the baptism of the Spirit that Jesus talked about served as a testimony that those who were baptized had repented of their sins and were now followers of the risen Jesus Christ. And, it also was a testimony that they were preparing themselves for the spiritual Kingdom of God.

The Greek word translated “baptized” means “to place into.” In the case of water baptism, it means to place someone into the water. In the case of baptism by the Holy Spirit, it means that we are placed into the body of Christ. Here's how Paul described it in his first letter to the Corinthians:

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body ... (1 Corinthians 12:13a) (Slide 4A)

When we got saved, the Holy Spirit placed us into the body of Christ.

The Ascension

Acts 1:6-11

⁶So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” ⁹And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them

in white robes, ¹¹and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Notes:

Verse 6 starts off with “So” (the Greek is *men oun*, meaning “therefore, indeed.”) This indicates a strong cause and effect relationship to what was said before, “**you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.**” There are numerous references to this outpouring of God’s Spirit in the Old Testament, and most of them link this outpouring with the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, it is only natural that the disciples would expect the Kingdom to soon follow. In fact, in Ezekiel’s prophecy of the war of Gog and Magog in **Ezekiel 39:25-29**, he indicates that this outpouring of the Spirit and the restoration of the fortunes of Jacob are tied together. That’s why Jesus’ disciples asked if He was about to restore the kingdom of Israel. Obviously, the disciples were very familiar with these Old Testament prophecies.

However, Jesus’ response did not answer their question. He said, “**It is not for you to know the times or seasons ...**” (Slide 4B) The word “times” is *chronos*, which views time quantitatively. That is, it refers to the timing of a specific event or the length of a time period. The word “seasons,” on the other hand, is *kairos*, which views time qualitatively, referring to the character of a certain period of time. So, in other words, Jesus told the disciples not to dwell on when or how the kingdom will come. It will happen when God the Father has determined it to happen, and not a moment before.

Then, in order to help the disciples keep their mind off the coming of the Kingdom (which Jesus had been preaching about for the past three years), He explained a little more about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This is one of those places where transitional words are very important. He said:

... **It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you ...**
(Acts 1:7-8)

The word translated “but” is *alla*, which contrasts what was just said with what is said next. In other words, Jesus said, instead of focusing on the coming kingdom, focus on the task at hand and the amazing things that are about to happen. He said that they were about to receive power (Greek *dunamis*, from which we get the English word “dynamite”) when the Holy Spirit comes upon them. This is one of those places where we have to remember that Acts is a transitional book. God is transitioning from dealing exclusively with Jews to dealing with all people, transitioning from the age of Law to the age of Grace.

Most Christians are familiar with the idea that when a person gets saved, he or she is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. (Slide 5A) In fact, in Ephesians we are told:

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:13-14) [NIV]

When we got saved, God gave us His Spirit as a guarantee of our salvation. The Holy Spirit lives within us and will never be taken away. In fact, he can’t be taken away because the Holy Spirit is our guarantee of salvation. However, in the Old Testament people were not indwelt by the Spirit of God. Instead, the Spirit came upon them, but the Holy Spirit was also free to leave them. For instance, in 1 Samuel, when Saul was searching for his father’s lost donkeys, he encountered Samuel who had been commissioned by God to anoint him as king. As he anointed Saul, Samuel said:

After that you will go to Gibeah of God, where there is a Philistine outpost. As you approach the town, you will meet a procession of prophets coming down from the high place with lyres, tambourines, flutes and harps being played before them, and they will be prophesying. The Spirit of the LORD *will come upon you in power*, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person. (1 Samuel 10:5-6)

This same expression that Samuel used regarding the Spirit coming upon Saul is what Jesus used in describing how the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost. Remember, “transition period.” As we will see in the next chapter, when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, the spirit “came upon” them and then “filled them.” Acts is the only book in the New Testament where the Holy Spirit is said to “come upon” those who believe.

As Jesus finished instructing the disciples about their upcoming mission, He was suddenly taken upward out of their sight and the two angels standing by told them that Jesus would come back in the same manner in which He left. That is to say, He will return in bodily form someday.

The First Church

Acts 1:12-14

¹²Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. ¹³And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. ¹⁴All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

Notes:

Here we are told that Jesus ascended into heaven from the Mount of Olives. It's interesting to note how Zechariah described the return of the Lord:

On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. (Zechariah 14:4)

Not only did Jesus ascend from the Mount of Olives, He will return there when He comes back to set-up His kingdom.

We are told that the Mount of Olives is a Sabbath day's journey from Jerusalem. A Sabbath day's journey was defined by the Sanhedrin to be about 3,000 feet, a little more than ½ mile. This passage does not say that they came back into Jerusalem on a Sabbath day, it is simply a description of how far they travelled.

They gathered in an upper room. There is no indication that this was the same upper room in which they shared the Last Supper with Jesus. It was typical for the upper floors to contain larger rooms, since the walls of the smaller rooms below would provide the support necessary for the larger spaces. Those who gathered in the upper room after the ascension included the 11 apostles, the women, probably Mary Magdalene, Mary (the mother of James and Joseph), and Salome, along with Jesus' family, which included Jesus' mother and His brothers, James, Joseph, Simon, & Judas (See Matthew 13:55). In all, it appears that there were 19 individuals in the first “church.” It's interesting that this is the first mention of Jesus'

brothers being disciples. Apparently, the resurrection convinced them! One of His brothers, James, even went on to be the leader of the church in Jerusalem and was the author of the book of James.

Verse 14 tells us that they were “with one accord.” This particular Greek word means that they were “of the same mind.” In other words, there was no dissention and they were all similarly focused on prayer. Interestingly, the Greek text has the definite article for prayer. So, it actually says they were praying “the prayer.” This may very well have been a specific prayer concerning Jesus’ promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit, mentioned back in verse eight.

Matthias Chosen to Replace Judas

Acts 1:15-26

¹⁵In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, ¹⁶“Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.” ¹⁸(Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. ¹⁹And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) ²⁰“For it is written in the Book of Psalms, “‘May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it’; and “‘Let another take his office.’ ²¹So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²²beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.” ²³And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen ²⁵to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” ²⁶And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Notes:

Peter, being a natural leader, stood up at a gathering of about 120 disciples and gave his first of seven speeches/sermons mentioned in Acts. He obviously had a very high regard for the Scriptures and was well aware of those which had predicted the Messiah and His betrayal. This is probably due to Jesus’ teachings following His resurrection. In Luke’s gospel account we read,

Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” *Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,*
(Luke 24:44-45)

Although Peter does not mention Judas by name, he knew what David had written in the Psalms:

May their camp be a desolation; let no one dwell in their tents. (Psalms 69:25)

May his days be few; may another take his office! (Psalms 109:8)

He quotes these verses directly when he says:

For it is written in the Book of Psalms, “May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it;” and “Let another take his office.”

Peter then suggests that one of the disciples, one who had been following Jesus from the beginning, should be named as a replacement for Judas. Two names were then brought forward by the group, Joseph (also called Barsabbas and/or Justus) and Matthias. Since these two were both approved by the entire group, they decided to let God choose between them by casting lots and the lot fell on Matthias, (Slide 6A) who became the 12th Apostle.

Why was it important to find a replacement for Judas, and yet there is no evidence that they found a replacement for the Apostle James (the brother of John) when he was executed by Herod (see Acts 12:1-2)? The answer to this question may be found in Jesus' teaching about the 12 disciples being judges during the Millennium:

Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Matthew 19:28)

Although he was then considered an apostle, Matthias is not mentioned again anywhere in the New Testament.

So What?

Jesus instructed the apostles and the rest of His disciples to go into the world and be witnesses for Him. However, He told them that they needed to be properly prepared before doing it. He told them to wait until they had been empowered by the Holy Spirit. As we learned last week, all Christians have been commanded to preach the gospel and to make disciples. We can preach the gospel without much training. In fact, there have always been new converts who were filled with such joy and zeal that they immediately began telling others about it. Making disciples is a little different. It is only reasonable that if we are going to teach someone else, we need to have a solid foundation of the doctrinal truths taught by Scripture.

As we mentioned earlier, unless we understand the transitional nature of the book of Acts, we can get into some false teaching, particularly if we don't have a firm grasp of what the Bible teaches in other places. One example of this, which we will get into in more detail next week, is the gift of tongues that was poured out when the Spirit first came upon the disciples in the upper room on the day of Pentecost. If we believe, as some churches do, that having the gift of tongues is something that every Christian should have, then we are ignoring other verses in the New Testament such as:

For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. *All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as **he** wills.*
(1 Corinthians 12:8-11)

It is the Holy Spirit who determines which gift(s) we receive. It is not up to us. So, again, let's pay close attention to the transitional nature of Acts as we learn what we can from the early church.

The thing that stands out the most to me in this first chapter, is the fact that the entire church appears to have been compelled to pray together. I'm sure they prayed individually, but Luke makes a special point to say that they were all of one accord and that they prayed together. And, it appears that they were specifically praying for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

The Christian church today seems to have lost its zeal for this kind of prayer, perhaps as a reaction to those Christians who put too much emphasis on the sign gifts of the Spirit. Even though the book of Acts is a transitional book, it makes sense that if the early church put so much emphasis on seeking the power of the Holy Spirit, then we should too. After all, Paul taught:

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, *be filled with the Spirit*. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:15-21) [NIV]

As we have said before, every Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But, Paul commands us all to be “filled with the Spirit.” (Slide 6B) Yes, the verb “to be filled” is in the imperative mood, indicating a command. So, there must be some additional filling by the Spirit that is not just a natural result of salvation. Have you prayed for this “filling” of the Spirit?

Now What?

As your pastor, I will continue to encourage each of you to set aside a specific time each and every day that you go to the Lord in prayer. Developing this habit along with the habit of reading from the Scriptures every day are the two most important things a Christian can do. All the other aspects of our walk with God are dependent on these two habits.

As we continue to work on our prayer life, let us now put special emphasis on praying that God will fill us with His Spirit.

Let's pray.

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