

Bible Study June 2, 2021

ACTS 1 AMPLIFIED VERSION

In the book of Acts, Luke continues the story he began in his Gospel, covering the 30 years after Jesus was taken up into heaven. During that short time the church was established, and the Good News of salvation was spread throughout the world, even to the capital of the Roman Empire. Those preaching the Good News, though ordinary people with human frailties and limitations, were empowered by the Holy Spirit to take it all over the world. In Acts we learn about the nature of the church and how we, like these early believers, can turn our world upside down.

PETER'S MINISTRY (1:1–12:25)

The book of Acts begins where the Gospels leave off, reporting the actions of the apostles and the work of the Holy Spirit. Beginning in Jerusalem, the church is established and grows rapidly; then it faces intense persecution, which drives the believers out into the surrounding areas. Through this dispersion, Samaritans and Gentiles hear the Good News and believe.

Establishment of the church

Acts 1:1-11 is the bridge between the events recorded in the Gospels and the events marking the beginning of the church. Jesus spent 40 days teaching his disciples, and they were dramatically changed. Before his resurrection, they had argued with each other and had deserted their Lord. One of them, Peter, had even lied about knowing Jesus. Here, in a series of meetings with the living, resurrected Jesus, the disciples had many questions answered. They became convinced of his resurrection, learned about the Kingdom of God, and discovered their power source—the Holy Spirit. By reading the Bible, we can sit with the resurrected Jesus in his school of discipleship. By believing in him, we can receive his power through the Holy Spirit to be new people. By joining with other Christians, we can take part in doing his work on earth.

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

1In my first book I told you, Theophilus, about everything Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions through the Holy Spirit. 3During the forty days after he suffered and died, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God.

Luke says that the disciples were eyewitnesses to all that had happened to Jesus Christ—his life before his crucifixion and the 40 days after his resurrection as he taught them more about the Kingdom of God. Today people still doubt Jesus' resurrection. But Jesus appeared to the disciples on many occasions after his resurrection, proving that he was alive. Consider the change Jesus' resurrection made in the disciples' lives. At his death, they had scattered, become disillusioned, and feared for their lives. After seeing the resurrected Jesus, they became fearless and risked everything to spread the Good News about him around the world. They faced imprisonment, beatings, rejection, and martyrdom, yet they never compromised their mission. These men would not have risked—and, in some cases, given—their lives for something they knew was a fraud. They knew Jesus was alive, and the early church was spurred by their enthusiasm to tell others. We need to know this so we can have confidence in their testimony. Twenty centuries later, we can still be confident because our faith is based on fact.

Jesus explained that his coming inaugurated the Kingdom of God. When he returned to heaven, God's Kingdom would remain in the hearts of all believers through the presence of the Holy Spirit. But the Kingdom of God will not be fully realized until Jesus Christ returns to judge all people and remove all evil from the world. Until that time, believers are to work to spread God's Kingdom across the world. The book of Acts records how this work was begun. What the early church started, we must continue.

4Once when he was eating with them, he commanded them, “Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. 5John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

The Trinity is a concept describing the unique relationship of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. If Jesus had stayed on earth, his physical presence would have limited the spread of the Good News, because physically he could be in only one place at a time. But after he was taken up into heaven, he would be spiritually present everywhere through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was sent so that God would be with and within his followers after Jesus returned to heaven. The Spirit would comfort them, guide them to know his truth, remind them of Jesus' words, give them the right words to say, and fill them with power (see John 14–16).

At Pentecost (2:1-4), the Holy Spirit was made available to all who believe in Jesus. We receive the Holy Spirit, or are baptized with him, when we receive Jesus Christ. The baptism of the Holy Spirit must be understood in light of his total work in Christians.

- 1) Receiving the Holy Spirit marks the beginning of the Christian experience. We cannot be Christians (belong to Jesus Christ) without his Spirit (Romans 8:9); we cannot be united to Jesus without his Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:17); we cannot be adopted as his children without his Spirit (Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:6-7); we cannot be in the body of Christ except by baptism in the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13).
- 2) The Holy Spirit provides the unique power of our new lives. He begins a lifelong process of change to make us more like Jesus (Galatians 3:3; Philippians 1:6). When we receive Jesus by faith, we begin an immediate personal relationship with God. Throughout our lives, the Holy Spirit works in us to help us become like Christ.
- 3) Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as an advocate, counselor, or comforter. The Holy Spirit guides us, teaches us, and helps us to understand the message God has given us in the Bible (John 14:26). He knows us and connects us to Jesus.
- 4) The Holy Spirit unites the Christian community in Christ (Ephesians 2:19-22). He can be experienced by all, and he works through all (1 Corinthians 12:6-11; Ephesians 4:4).

The Ascension of Jesus

6So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, “Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?”

During the years of Jesus' ministry on earth, the disciples continually wondered about his Kingdom. When would it come? What would be their role? In the traditional view, the Messiah would be an earthly conqueror who would free Israel from Rome. But the Kingdom Jesus spoke about was, first of all, a spiritual Kingdom established in the hearts and lives of believers (Luke 17:21). God's presence and power dwell in believers in the person of the Holy Spirit.

7He replied, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. 8But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Like other Jews, the disciples chafed under their Roman rulers. They wanted Jesus to free Israel from Roman power and then become their king. Jesus replied that God the Father sets the timetable for all events—worldwide, national, and personal. If you want changes that God hasn't yet made, don't become impatient. Instead, trust his timetable.

The power believers receive from the Holy Spirit includes courage, boldness, confidence, insight, ability, and authority. The disciples would need all these gifts to fulfill their mission. If you believe in Jesus Christ, you have the power of the Holy Spirit in your life. Ask God to fill you with these same gifts in order to fulfill his mission for you.

Jesus had instructed his disciples to witness to people of all nations about him (Matthew 28:19-20). But they were told to wait first for the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49). God has important work for us to do for him, but we must do it by the power of the Holy Spirit. We need God's timing and power to be truly effective. We often take matters into our own hands and run ahead of God. But waiting is sometimes part of God's plan. Instead of running ahead of God and his plans, we should wait and listen for his leading.

This verse describes a series of ever-widening circles. The Good News was to spread geographically, from Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria and finally to the ends of the earth. It would begin with the devout Jews in Jerusalem and Samaria, spread to the people of mixed race in Samaria, and, finally, be offered to Gentiles all over the world. God's message has not reached its final destination if someone in your family, your workplace, your school, or your community hasn't heard the Good News about Jesus Christ. Communities all over the world are becoming increasingly diverse. Peoples of every nation, tongue, and race are living in our neighborhoods. Make sure that you are contributing in some way to the ever-widening circle of God's loving message.

9After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. 10As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. 11“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!”

After 40 days with his disciples (1:3), Jesus returned to heaven. It was important for the disciples to see Jesus taken up into heaven; they knew without a doubt that he was God and that his home was in heaven. The two white-robed men were angels who proclaimed to the disciples that one day Jesus would return in the same way he had gone—bodily and visibly. History is not haphazard or cyclical; it is moving toward a specific point—the return of Jesus to judge and rule over the earth. We should be ready for his sudden return (1 Thessalonians 5:2), not by standing around “staring into heaven,” but by using the gifts God has given us to spread the Good News so that others will be able to share in his great blessings.

Matthias Replaces Judas

12Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, a distance of half a mile. 13When they arrived, they went to the upstairs room of the house where they were staying.

Here are the names of those who were present: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James (son of Alphaeus), Simon (the zealot), and Judas (son of James).

After Jesus was taken up into heaven, the disciples immediately returned to Jerusalem and had a prayer meeting. Jesus had said they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit in a few days, so they waited and prayed. When you face a difficult task, an important decision, or a baffling dilemma, don't rush into the work and just hope it comes out the way it should. Instead, make your first step prayer for the Holy Spirit's power and guidance.

A *zealot* could be anyone who was zealous for the Jewish law. The Zealots may have been a radical political party working for the overthrow of Roman rule in Israel through violence.

14They all met together and were constantly united in prayer, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus.

At this time, Jesus' brothers were with the disciples. During Jesus' lifetime, they had not believed he was the Messiah (John 7:5), but his resurrection must have convinced them. Jesus' special appearance to James, one of his brothers, may have been an especially significant event in their conversion (see 1 Corinthians 15:7).

15During this time, when about 120 believers were together in one place, Peter stood up and addressed them. 16“Brothers,” he said, “the Scriptures had to be fulfilled concerning Judas, who guided those who arrested Jesus. This was predicted long ago by the Holy Spirit, speaking through King David. 17Judas was one of us and shared in the ministry with us.”

This was the first church business meeting. The main order of business was to appoint a new disciple, or *apostle*, as the 11 were now called. While the apostles waited, they were doing what they could—praying, seeking God's guidance, and getting organized. Waiting for God to work does not mean sitting around doing nothing. We must do what we can, while we can, as long as we don't run ahead of God.

How could someone who had been with Jesus daily betray him? Judas Iscariot had received the same calling and teaching as everyone else. But he had chosen to reject Jesus. Judas had hardened his heart and joined in a plot with Jesus' enemies to put him to death. Judas remained unrepentant to the end, and he finally committed suicide. Although Jesus predicted this would happen, the choice was Judas's. Those privileged to be *close* to the truth are not necessarily *committed* to the truth. We may see all sorts of evil in Christian circles, such as sexual sin, financial mismanagement, or betrayal, but God's plans cannot be thwarted. When the choices people make seem unfathomable and confusing, look for what God is doing to bring hope in the situation.

18(Judas had bought a field with the money he received for his treachery. Falling headfirst there, his body split open, spilling out all his intestines.

Matthew says that Judas hanged himself (Matthew 27:5); Acts says that he fell. The traditional explanation is that when Judas hanged himself, the rope or branch broke, causing Judas to fall and his body to burst open.

19The news of his death spread to all the people of Jerusalem, and they gave the place the Aramaic name Akeldama, which means “Field of Blood.”

20Peter continued, “This was written in the book of Psalms, where it says, ‘Let his home become desolate, with no one living in it.’ It also says, ‘Let someone else take his position.’

21“So now we must choose a replacement for Judas from among the men who were with us the entire time we were traveling with the Lord Jesus—22from the time he was baptized by John until the day he was taken from us. Whoever is chosen will join us as a witness of Jesus’ resurrection.”

The apostles had to choose a replacement for Judas. They outlined specific criteria for making the choice. After finalists were chosen, the apostles prayed, asking God to guide the selection process. This gives us a good example of how to proceed when we are making important decisions. We should set up criteria consistent with the Bible, examine the options, and pray for wisdom and guidance to reach a wise decision.

Many people consistently followed Jesus throughout his ministry on earth. The 12 disciples were his inner circle, but others shared the disciples’ deep love for and commitment to Jesus.

23So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. 24Then they all prayed, “O Lord, you know every heart. Show us which of these men you have chosen 25as an apostle to replace Judas in this ministry, for he has deserted us and gone where he belongs.” 26Then they cast lots, and Matthias was selected to become an apostle with the other eleven.

The disciples became apostles. *Disciple* means “follower” or “learner,” and *apostle* means “messenger” or “missionary.” These men now had the special assignment of spreading the Good News of Jesus’ death and resurrection.