

THE BOOK OF ACTS

The work of Jesus didn't cease when He ascended into heaven. The book of Acts records what Jesus continued to teach and do through His disciples.

Acts traces the expansion of Christianity in the days of the early Church. The story begins in the Jewish capitol of Jerusalem, and ends in the Gentile capitol of Rome. Acts explains how *the Jewish Messiah* became *Lord of the Gentiles*.

Guys, it's absolutely essential that we study the book of Acts - for there has never been a more successful period of Church history. In a single generation the Church was able to spread Christianity throughout the whole known world.

And understand, their success was without all the 21st century helps we rely on. They had no technology and transportation - no money and marketing plans - no buildings and buses. Yet through the Word of God - through prayer - through the power of

MANY INFALLIBLE PROOFS

Acts 1:2-3 tell us that following His resurrection, Jesus lingered on earth for 40 days before ascending to heaven. This is why no one in the first century seriously questioned the legitimacy of the resurrection - there were too many eyewitnesses. Luke calls these sightings of the risen Christ... "many infallible proofs".

Jesus knew the faith of all future generations would hinge on the testimony of these eyewitnesses. Thus He made the evidence so undeniable and irrefutable, so clear and conclusive - that no one could discredit the news...

JESUS' HOMECOMING

After Jesus spoke to His disciples of the Holy Spirit's power, we're told in verse 9 that, "while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight." Jesus' body began to rise from the earth, and He ascended into heaven.

This was a vital event. This was Jesus' homecoming. It proved that His Father had accepted His suffering and sacrifice - and considered His mission a success!

And as Jesus ascended to heaven, two angels deliver a message, "This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." At the rapture, Jesus will again come in the clouds to snatch away those who trust in Him. *He'll return for us the same way He left us.*

the Holy Spirit - and through faith - they turned the world upside down.

In the mid-1960s, when the Billy Graham Crusade came to the segregated city of Montgomery, Alabama, Dr. Graham insisted that the choir consist of both blacks and whites. A bigoted editorial in the local newspaper complained that Graham's decision had set the church back 100 years. Billy Graham responded, "If that's the case, I've failed in my mission. I intended to set it back 2000 years."

The Church today needs to recapture the fire and spark of the Church in Acts.

The book of Acts ends with chapter 28, but the acts of Jesus continue today, as the living Lord carries on His work through followers filled with His Spirit.

A SUB FOR JUDAS

After Jesus' ascension 120 disciples assembled in the upper room. And it's Peter who assumes leadership and suggests they find a replacement for Judas. In verse 20 Peter quotes Psalm 109:8, "Let another take his office."

The disciples select two men: Barsabas and Matthias - then cast lots - or rolled dice - and the lot fell to Matthias. He was recognized as the 12th apostle.

Peter was correct, a replacement was needed - but whether it was their duty to decide is another matter. I personally believe they were impulsive and jumped the gun. God had His own choice. I believe He intended Paul to be the 12th apostle.

Here's a good example of the *dangers of getting ahead of God*.

It's interesting, this is the last time you see believers in Jesus casting lots, or throwing out fleeces... or resorting to gimmicks for guidance. After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost they receive their guidance from the Spirit Himself.

Bible Scan - Acts 1-5

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FEBRUARY

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2002

WHAT TURNS WIMPS INTO WITNESSES

Before He ascended to heaven Jesus told His disciples to “Go and make disciples of all nations...” – to reach the world with the Gospel of His grace!

But the disciples are not quite ready to be dispatched on their mission.

These men have experience in ministry – knowledge of the Bible – commitment to the cause – they’ve spent time with Jesus and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit - but there’s still one thing they lack... they’re missing the Holy Spirit’s power!

That’s why they’ve gathered in the upper room. Jesus told them to hang out in Jerusalem, and wait for the promise of the Father. Verse 8, “And you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Notice Jesus’ terminology in Verse 5: “John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit...” Understand there are various types of baptism in the New Testament. There’s water baptism. There’s baptism into the body of Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:13 speaks of this baptism, “By one Spirit we are all baptized into one body...” The Spirit initiates and es-

tablishes us in Christ.

But there is another baptism spoken of in the New Testament - an infusion of spiritual power. It goes by different names “*the filling*”, “*the baptism of the Spirit*”, “*the out-pouring*”, “*the promise of the Father*”, “*rivers of living water*”. It goes by various names, but it’s the same experience. It’s true spiritual empowerment.

Guys understand, there are three experiences we can have with the Holy Spirit.

Before we are saved He is “*with*” us, leading us to Christ. When we’re saved He comes to live “*in*” us. But after we’re saved we need the Spirit to come “*upon*” us.

It’s this “*upon*” experience that *turns wimps into witnesses*. It creates more than *spiritual goose bumps* - it brings to our lives *a spiritual boldness!*

Every Christian has the Spirit of God dwelling *in* them, but not every Christian has had the Holy Spirit come *upon* them and empower them. We need this divine empowerment. We need to open our hearts and ask to be filled with the Spirit.

OPENING CEREMONIES AT THE NEW TEMPLE

“*Pentecost*” is a Greek word which means “*fiftieth*”. It was to be celebrated 7 weeks and a day after the Sabbath during the Passover. It was originally called the “*Feast of Weeks or Harvest*”. It celebrated the end of the spring harvest.

And how appropriate, that on this day that God began a new harvest of souls.

Two bundles of wheat were offered to the Lord on Pentecost, and the Gospel of Jesus brought two bundles of wheat into God’s kingdom – Jews and Gentiles.

It’s also interesting that Pentecost was observed as the anniversary of the giving of the Law to Moses – the old covenant. And it was on that same day that God’s new covenant went public. He began to pour out His grace on the Church.

2:1 tells us, “Now when the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.” Notice the prelude to the miracles that will follow. Good stuff happens when God’s people come together in a workable, wonderful unity...

Suddenly, a wind blows through the upper room. Flames of fire dance over the disciples’ heads. In the Old Testament opening ceremonies for both the tabernacle and temple brought fire from heaven. God con-

sumed the sacrifices.

Now God is dedicating another temple - of a different type. Today, the Church is God’s dwelling place on earth. We are the Temple of the Holy Spirit...

In the Old Testament temple animals were slaughtered and their carcasses burned before God. The priests offered dead sacrifices. In contrast, Romans 12:1 tells us the New Testament temple offers to God, “*living sacrifices*”. You and I – our bodies, and minds, and feet, and hands – are all tools in the Master’s grip.

Here again, God is dedicating a new temple just as He did Moses’ tabernacle and Solomon’s temple, and heaven’s fire falls on the sacrifices. Prior to Pentecost the disciples possess the Spirit - now the Spirit takes possession of the disciples.

In both Old Testament instances the fire fell once – at the opening ceremonies – at the dedication - but it was never repeated. That’s true of the New Testament temple. The fire and wind at Pentecost was never repeated in the book of Acts.

OTHER TONGUES

However, another phenomenon that accompanied the filling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was repeated many times. Verse 4, "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance..."

The Holy Spirit did a miracle. He caused the disciples to speak in languages - other than their native tongue. It freed their hearts and enabled their lips to praise God in an uninhibited manner. Tongue-tied disciples spoke perfect praise.

That's why the international gallery marveled. People from around the world, in Jerusalem for the feast - are now hearing Galilean disciples speak their native tongue. People are speaking a foreign language they've never learned. And the euphoria it all created caused some people to conclude they all were just drunk.

Verse 11 clarifies what the disciples' were saying. They were declaring "the wonderful works of God." The gift of tongues is a supernatural means to praise and worship God. It's not a message from God, but a praise or prayer to God.

PENTECOST PETE

Remember Peter... the man who proved chicken before the rooster crowed. He now preaches with power. What a difference the baptism of the Holy Spirit makes! Peter is bold and fearless. He's in the face of the Pharisees. The people who crucified Jesus - the angry mob before whom he feared and fled - the same folks before whom he'd denied the Lord, He now confronts face to face!

Peter concludes in verses 38-39, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

Don't get confused by Peter's statement, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins..." We can go else where in Scripture and be convinced we don't have to be baptized to be saved.

Peter's comments reflect, not the doctrine, but the culture of the early church. Baptism was a given. When people got saved they went home wet. Believers saw repentance, faith, and baptism as a chain reaction. The question was never, "*do you have to be baptized?*" It was assumed if your faith was genuine you'd want to identify with Christ publicly through baptism. It was all viewed as a package.

Devotion Box - What's Not Biblical Can Be Lethal

Peter explains what happened in the upper room. He says in 2:16, "But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel..." Here's a vital point. Their experience was not just powerful or spiritual, but biblical. Guys, if it's not biblical don't bother. *What's not biblical can be lethal.* This is why I reject extra-biblical experiences like being slain in the Spirit, or holy laughter. When you allow human experiences, rather than Scripture, to set the standard for the Church you open yourself to dangerous deception. I'm all for experience, but be leery of an encounter that is not encountered in Scripture.

Devotion Box - God Blesses The Basics

Life in the infant Church was simple. The calendar wasn't cluttered with church bazaars, and planning luncheons, and board meetings. Acts 2:42 says they met to study the Word - to pray - to fellowship - to take communion and worship God.

The agenda was always spiritual.

Notice too, in verse 44 we're told the believers "had all things in common". They sold their material holdings and pooled their resources. Later, we discover this may not have been the best idea, but it demonstrates the love and unity and sense of responsibility the church had for one another. Hey, the sacrifice of Jesus was still fresh in their minds, how could they be selfish or stingy with each other?

Verse 47, "And the Lord added to the church daily..." No gimmicks or gadgets - no programs or pushes - just the Lord adding to the church. Guys, *when any church is a healthy church, God adds to that church!* He blesses the basics!

Devotion Box - Peter's Gift Of Faith

In Acts 3 Peter and John bump into a beggar who asks for a handout. The man has been lame from birth. Daily his friends bring him to the temple to beg. Peter's pockets are empty, but he has faith to believe God for the man's healing... Peter tells the lame man in verse 6, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."

Once, the Pope was counting the church's riches when Thomas Aquinas entered the room. The Pope pointed to the chests full of gold and jewels, and said, "Thomas, we can no longer say, 'Silver and gold I do not have.'" Aquinas answered, "Yes, and neither can we say, 'In the name of Jesus of Nazareth rise up and walk.'" It's a sad indictment against many churches today that we're more *prosperous* than *powerful*.

Peter told the man to "rise up and walk", and then we're told he took him by the right hand and lifted him. Imag-

ine, you taking that kind of initiative with a lame man. The man has never walked, but you reach down and grab his hand and start to pull him to his feet. What if his crippled legs collapse? Onlookers will accuse Peter of cruelty. Perhaps the man will sue. Hey, I'm not sure any of the concerns that would've flooded my mind were even contemplated by Peter. Verse 16 indicates God had given him the gift of faith. The next time you need a miracle, pray not only for your miracle, but for faith to believe.

Instead of bulking, the man's ankle bones received strength. Immediately, the beggar walks, and leaps for joy. There's no rehabilitation - no muscle therapy. Verse 16 says God gave him a "perfect soundness." This caused quite a stir among the Jews. Verse 10 says, "they were filled with wonder and amazement."

Bible Scan - Acts 1-5

Calvary Chapel

If you have questions on tonight's study email Pastor Sandy - sandyadams@calvarychapel.org
For back issues of Bible Scan study guides: www.calvarychapelstonemountain.com/biblescan.htm

Calvary Chapel Announcements - — **Baptism** between services, Sunday March 3rd. Contact Pastor James if you would like to be baptized. **Baby Dedication**, Sunday, March 10th. Contact the church office for details. **Good Friday Walk Through**, Thursday, March 28th—Friday, March 29th. **Next Bible Scan—Acts 6-12**

“And you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” - Acts 1:8

Bible Scan
Memory
Verse

Devotion Box - A Prayer For Boldness

You'd think Peter and John would be glad to dodge a bullet, and lay low for a while - but no! They return to the other disciples, and together the church prays for more boldness. Hey, the timid troops that forsook Jesus in the garden are now His fearless followers. What a difference the power of the Holy Spirit makes.

The prayer they pray in 4:23-30 is a model prayer for persecuted believers... In verse 24 they *get their eyes off the greatness of their problem, and recall the greatness of their God*. In verses 25-26 they remind themselves that *God isn't surprised by what's happened. He predicted it in advance*. In verses 27-28 they remember that *the powers that be are merely puppets to do the will of God*.

In verse 29-30 they *pray for boldness to speak the Word of God, and for God to work more miracles in Jesus' name*. And because His disciples are determined to shake things up, God does a little shaking of His own. The floor begins to rumble.

In essence, the disciples pray, “Lord, deal with their threats, and make us a greater threat! Pour some fuel on our fire.” Rather than lay low, they want to intensify their efforts. Rather than protection they desire a greater impact. Phillips Brooks once said, “Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger men and women. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks.” Let's pray for God to work miracles and us to be bold.

Devotion Box - Persecution And Power

In Acts 5 Gamaliel steps into the trial of the apostles with a little common sense. “*If this Jesus movement is of God no one can stop it - if it's not, it'll fizzle.*” Now 2000 years later Jesus is still going strong. When will men realize what Peter preached is true?

The Sanhedrin order the apostles flogged, then send them away - commanding them to never again speak of Jesus. You'd expect these apostles to be nursing their wounds and indulging in a little self-pity. But no, they're rejoicing, honored to have suffered a little for the One who suffered so much for them. Soon, they're back in the temple preaching about Jesus.

How do you stop such commitment? You don't! Persecuting the apostles was like trying to destroy a dandelion by blowing on its head. Each attempt to silence their witness, only strengthened their resolve and increased their boldness.

Winston Churchill said, “A fanatic is someone who can't change his mind and won't change the subject.” Are you a fanatic for Jesus. Let's all pray for the power of the Holy Spirit.

CALLED ON THE CARPET

You might say Acts 5 is a real drop dead passage - a killer of a Bible Study - a knock'em over chapter. Ananias and Sapphira were just dying to get into the Bible.

Two pastors were discussing God's blessing on their churches. One pastor talked about his church's explosive growth. He asked his colleague, “How many additions have you had?” The other pastor said, “We haven't had any additions, but we've had some blessed subtractions.” That's what we have here in Acts 5...

Ananias and Sapphira were the All-American couple. Ananias was a former quarterback and Sapphira an ex-cheerleader. They were leaders in the community - models of success. Now they both had embraced Christ and joined the church.

Understand, God never commanded anyone to sell their land and pool their resources. This was a church custom - but Ananias and Sapphira didn't want to be left out, or look bad. To this carnal couple image was everything! Here was their problem: Ananias and Sapphira wanted to look more spiritual than they really were - so they lied to the Holy Spirit. They too sold a possession, and said they were giving all the proceeds. Instead they kept back a portion.

Their problem was all too common. Every believer is tempted to want to appear more spiritual than they really are. We inflate our claims. We talk a degree of devotion we've never demonstrated. We vow to give all, then hold a little back.

When Peter calls this couple on the carpet - they never get up. Ananias is first, then Sapphira both drop dead for their hypocrisy.

What if God judged us to the same degree he judged Ananias and Sapphira? We'd be singing “I give all that I am for all that you are Lord” - and folks would drop like flies. God has obviously had more mercy on us.

Remember, we said *great power* and *great grace* characterized the early church - verse 11 adds, “*great fear*”.

It seems to me, God used a higher standard in the infant church in order to protect its purity. He did a little housekeeping to enhance its power and witness. We learn from Acts that purity and power go hand-in-hand.