

# Introduction

Acts 1 introduces the entire book. It takes up the thread of New Testament history where the gospel narratives drop it—at the ascension of Jesus. Chapter 1 covers the events between Christ’s ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and gives an account of Jesus’ ascension into heaven. In chapter 2 the book records the beginning of the acts or works of Christ through the apostles, beginning with Pentecost. Not only do these chapters furnish a historical introduction, but they also establish the connection between the gospel narratives and the subsequent history of the preaching and spread of the gospel.

Acts sets forth a three-fold theme.

First, it is the history of the work of the Holy Spirit. Luke’s first gospel narrative of the life of Jesus was definitely Christ-centered, as recounted by his history of the life of Christ. During his life Christ promised his people that the Spirit would be poured out on them. In Acts we see the fulfillment of that promise. These two, however, are not contradictory, since the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, who always speaks of Christ and who works the works of Christ.

Second, Acts sets forth the doctrine of the church, which in its simplicity is a model for the organization and operation of the church as guided by the Spirit.

Third, Acts is eminently evangelistic. That is, it records the history of the preaching and the spread of the gospel through the preaching of the word and the witnessing by believers to the salvation of Jesus Christ through the work of the Spirit.

In all of these ways, Acts serves as a paradigm for the New Testament church throughout its history, even to the present.

## The Writer

The author of Acts is the Holy Spirit. Acts is divinely inspired and belongs to the canon of scripture. Luke is the writer. We do not know a great deal about Luke, perhaps because his

identity and character must take a subordinate place to the content of his writing. The point is not who wrote, but what he wrote. We know that Luke was the writer of the gospel according to Luke: the account of the life, the teaching, and the deeds of Jesus.

Luke was neither one of the twelve disciples nor one of the apostles. However, he frequently accompanied the apostle Paul on parts of his missionary journeys, as is evident from the passages in Acts in which Luke uses the first person plural pronoun “we” to indicate his accompanying of Paul.

Whether he was an eyewitness of what he records, or whether he is the recorder of the history of the early church as it was told to him by others, in his writing we have an accurate history of the early church and the spread of the gospel throughout the then-known world.

We do know that Luke was an educated man, which helps lend credence to his writing. Colossians 4:14 identifies him as a doctor, an occupation that required education, as it does today. Also, his use of the Greek language exhibits the mark of a learned man. We do not know for certain if he was a Jew or a Gentile, although many scholars think he was a Jew, based on his obvious acquaintance with the Old Testament.

## **Methodology**

This is a study guide, not a commentary. It therefore does not take a statement or an explanation format, but a question format, which is intended to help God’s people understand the history recorded in Acts not from a merely formal viewpoint, but also the significance of the history as it records the work of the Holy Spirit in teaching us the doctrine of the church. I have therefore deliberately asked the often difficult “why” and “how” questions in order to foster an understanding of this scripture. As much as possible the questions are intentionally leading, interspersed with minimal remarks, with the goal of provoking study, discussion, and thought, thus to assist in the understanding of Acts, whether in Bible study societies or on a personal level. To the extent that the

questions are accurately answered in the light of scripture, the student of Acts will gain an understanding of the epistle.

### **Suggested Study Resources**

Gordon G. Keddie, *You Are My witnesses*, Evangelical Press USA.

Derek W. K. Thomas, *Acts: Reformed Expository Commentary*, P&R Publishing.

R. C. Sproul, *Acts: St. Andrew's Expository Commentary*, Crossway.

F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts*, Eerdmans.

John Calvin, *Commentary on the book of Acts*, Eerdmans.

Some of these books can be obtained used either online or from a used book store. A good Bible dictionary or encyclopedia will also be helpful.

# Acts 1

## Acts 1:1–5

Luke does not formally introduce Acts, but begins by immediately reminding Theophilus concerning his former treatise.

1. Who was Theophilus? What does his name mean? Do we know anything else about him?
2. What is “the former treatise”?
3. What was the content of the former treatise? What was its purpose (Luke 1:4)?
4. What is the implication of the word *began*?
5. Is the book’s title *The Acts of the Apostles* accurate? Can you suggest a better one?

6. What was the function of the apostles? What was a requirement to be an apostle (v. 2)?
  
7. What was the purpose of the forty days (vv. 2–3)?
  
8. What is meant by “infallible proofs”? Is it possible that there were more appearances of Christ than the ten recorded in scripture?
  
9. What is the significance of the fact that the period between the resurrection and the ascension was forty days in duration?
  
10. Where were the disciples assembled? Why were they not to leave Jerusalem (v. 4)?
  
11. What was “the promise of the Father” (v. 4)? When had they heard it from Jesus (John 14–17)?
  
12. What is the baptism with the Holy Ghost (v. 5)? What was the difference between John’s baptism and the baptism with the Holy Ghost?
  
13. Why does Jesus mention John’s baptism?

14. Is there reason here to reject water baptism in favor of Spirit baptism?
  
15. Is there an essential difference between John's baptism and Jesus' baptism (Acts 19:1–6)?

### **Acts 1:6–8**

These verses contain the conversation between Jesus and his disciples immediately prior to his ascension from the Mount of Olives.

1. What does the question of the disciples (v. 6) indicate concerning their understanding of Jesus and his kingdom?
  
2. In what sense did they conceive of the kingdom?
  
3. Would they ask the same question ten days later on Pentecost? Why or why not?
  
4. Jesus' reply (v. 7) is not a direct answer to their question. Why does he answer as he does?

5. Does Jesus mean that after the outpouring of the Spirit, the disciples will have power (correctly: authority) to know the times and the seasons?
  
6. What contrast does the word *but* indicate (v. 8)?
  
7. What kind of power would the disciples receive? From what source? With what result?
  
8. In what way were the disciples to be witnesses of Jesus (v. 8)?
  
9. Is the fourfold geographical order mentioned in verse 8 a prophecy, a suggestion, or a commandment?
  
10. What is the reason for this order?
  
11. Is this order normative for mission work today? Why or why not?
  
12. If so, what are the practical implications for us?

## **Acts 1:9–11**

These verses record the ascension of Christ.

1. What other scriptures refer to Christ's ascension?
2. What was the nature or meaning of the ascension?
3. What was the difference between this appearance of Jesus and his previous appearances?
4. What is the significance of clouds in scripture? What does it mean that a cloud received Jesus?
5. Verse 11 refers to the return of Christ at the end of time. What is the meaning of "in like manner"?
6. Why do angels appear at this time? What is the significance of their white apparel? Why is it necessary for them to appear at such times?
7. Why do the angels ask the question of verse 11?
8. What is the significance of Jesus' ascension for himself?



9. What is the significance of Jesus' ascension for the church?

### **Acts 1:12–14**

These verses give a list of the disciples (v. 13), the women who followed Jesus (v. 14), and where they went.

1. Where did the disciples go after Christ's ascension? Why?
2. What is a Sabbath's day journey?
3. Did those named in verses 13 and 14 and the 120 of verse 15 constitute the church?
4. What characterized this assembly (v. 14)? For what did they pray?
5. Why was there a period of ten days between the ascension and Pentecost? What is the significance of the number ten?

### **Acts 1:15–26**

These verses record Peter's speech regarding a replacement apostle for Judas Iscariot and the election of Matthias.

1. To what Old Testament passage does Peter refer in characterizing Judas (v. 16)?
2. How does Peter describe the death of Judas (v. 18)? How must we understand this?
3. How does Peter ground his argument (v. 20)? What is the meaning of bishoprick?
4. What does Peter say is a requirement to be an apostle (v. 21)?
5. What is another requirement (v. 22)?
6. Does Peter's conclusion follow from his argument?
7. In the context of this selection, what is the significance of the prayer of the apostles (vv. 24–25)?
8. To what truth(s) do the believers appeal in their prayer?
9. Was it necessary to select a replacement for Judas?

10. What is the meaning of casting lots?
  
11. Was the casting of lots appropriate in this situation?
  
12. Was this a valid selection?
  
13. In light of the fact that we never again read of Matthias, does this really matter?

# Acts 2

## Acts 2:1–4

These verses record the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost and its accompanying signs.

1. When did Pentecost take place? What does it mean that it “was fully come” (v. 1)?
2. What was the Old Testament feast that corresponded to Pentecost? How was this true?
3. Why were the believers “with one accord in one place” (v. 1)?
4. What is the meaning of the sound of the mighty rushing wind? What is the significance of wind?
5. What does this tell us about the Holy Spirit?
6. What is the meaning of the cloven tongues like fire? What is the meaning of fire in scripture?

7. What does this tell us about the Holy Spirit?
  
8. What is the meaning of the speaking in tongues by the believers? Did they speak in languages unfamiliar to them or did they speak in their native Aramaic and their hearers heard in their native languages?
  
9. What does the speaking in tongues tell us about the Holy Spirit?
  
10. Is it correct to say that Pentecost is the birthday of the church? Why or why not?
  
11. Why is the presence of the Spirit in the church today not accompanied by the same or similar signs?

### **Acts 2:5–13**

These verses record the reaction to the miracle of Pentecost.

1. There were many Jews living in Jerusalem. Why are they called devout men? Why does Luke mention that they came from every nation under heaven?

2. Why was there a multitude in Jerusalem at this time? Why did God choose this time to send the Holy Spirit?
3. What was the first reaction of the multitude (vv. 6, 12)? What was the reason?
4. What was the second reaction (vv. 7, 12)? How is the fact that the disciples were Galileans the reason for this reaction?
5. What was the third reaction of some in the multitude (v. 13)? Why would they say this?
6. Why are the various languages and nationalities mentioned in verses 9–11?

### **Acts 2:14–36**

These verses record Peter's Pentecost sermon.

1. Why is Peter the one who gives this sermon?
2. How does he refute the charge of drunkenness?

3. Why does Peter begin his sermon by using the prophecy of Joel 2:28–32 to explain the events of Pentecost?
4. What are the last days (v. 17)?
5. How must we understand “all flesh” (v. 17)? How was this prophecy fulfilled on Pentecost?
6. Why is prophesying emphasized (vv. 17–18)? What is prophecy?
7. What are visions and dreams? How are these the work of the Spirit? Why are they important?
8. Why are prophecy, dreams, and visions not evidences of the Spirit’s work today?
9. Who are God’s servants and handmaidens?
10. When do the events of verses 19–20 take place?
11. How are these events the work of the Spirit?

12. What is “the great and notable day of the Lord” (v. 20)?
13. What does calling on the name of the Lord mean (v. 21)?
14. Why does Peter call Christ “Jesus of Nazareth” and refer to him as a man (v. 22)?
15. What does God’s approval mean?
16. What are miracles? What are wonders? What are signs?
17. Who did these miracles, wonders, and signs? What is their purpose?
18. What is God’s determinate counsel? What is his foreknowledge?
19. Why is Peter so accusatory in verse 23? What does this tell us about preaching?



20. In verses 24–32 Peter speaks at length of the resurrection of Jesus. Why does he emphasize the resurrection rather than other events (the incarnation, death, or ascension) in the life of Christ?
21. What does it mean that Christ could not “be holden” by death. Why is this true?
22. Why does Peter quote Psalm 16:8–11 (vv. 25–28)?
23. How does Peter show that Psalm 16 ultimately refers not to David, but to Christ (v. 29)?
24. How did David know that he spoke of Christ (v. 30)?
25. What does it mean that God swore an oath to David (v. 30)? What was the oath?
26. What conclusion does Peter draw in verse 31?
27. What is Peter’s conclusion regarding the resurrection (v. 32)?
28. What conclusion does Peter draw in verse 33?

29. Why must Christ be exalted and receive the promise of the Spirit before he pours out the Spirit (v. 33)?
  
30. How does David prove that Psalm 110:1 refers to Christ?
  
31. What conclusion does Peter draw in verse 36?
  
32. What does it mean that Jesus is both Lord and Christ?

### **Acts 2:37–40**

These verses record the immediate response to Peter’s sermon.

1. What does being “pricked in their heart” mean? How did this happen?
  
2. Why did Peter’s audience ask what they must do, i.e., what action must they take (v. 37)?
  
3. What is repentance?
  
4. Why was baptism necessary?

5. Are repentance and baptism conditions to receiving the Holy Spirit? If not, why not?
6. How are verses 38 and 39 (“For”) related?
7. What truth is expressed by “the promise is unto you and to your children”?
8. What is “this untoward generation”?

### **Acts 2:41–47**

These verses record the life of the early church.

1. What was the relation between receiving the word and baptism?
2. Three thousand souls were immediately added to the church. Why is this number recorded?
3. Verse 42 records the unity of the church in its many aspects. To what does breaking of bread refer (vv. 42, 46)?

4. What does it mean that “fear came upon every soul”?
5. Why were many signs and wonders performed by the apostles?
6. Does the fact that those who believed were together and had all things in common imply a communist-style life and organization of the church (vv. 44–45)?
7. Why did the early believers have all things in common?
8. Why did the believers continue in the temple, since by the outpouring of the Spirit the temple worship had been fulfilled by Christ?
9. What do “gladness and singleness of heart” mean?
10. Who were those whom God added to the church? What is the relation between those who had favor with the people and those whom God added to the church?