

THE ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

Chapter 1 “And you shall be My witnesses”

*What happened to Jesus after His resurrection?

*How did Jesus plan for His message to be spread?

*Who replaced Judas as an apostle?

You're about to begin a study of Acts, a book in the Bible that tells what happened in the kingdom of God in the years following Jesus' death and resurrection. Hopefully you already know the story of Jesus' life from reading one of His four biographies in the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. But Jesus' life on earth was only the beginning! He continued to work through the people He chose as His witnesses. The book of Acts tells us how Jesus' apostles guided His church in the truth, and how they spread the gospel to the whole world.

Keep a Bible with you as you go through these lessons and read each paragraph in the Bible before you read the material here. The words you will read in the Bible have the same truth and power that they did 2,000 years ago, and they are spoken to you as much as the people back then.

Acts 1:1-2 Luke's introduction

The person who penned the book of Acts is Luke. He also wrote the book of Luke, which tells the story of the life of Jesus. He even wrote both his books to the same person: Theophilus. His first book ends when Jesus ascended into heaven, and this book will continue the story.

Acts 1:3-11 Jesus ascends to heaven

Luke tells us that Jesus was on earth for 40 days after His resurrection. In this time, He appeared to many people (1 Corinthians 15:3-8 tells us over five hundred people saw Him) — especially the apostles — and talked about the kingdom of God. He told His apostles to wait in Jerusalem.

Even after Jesus had explained to them about the kingdom of God for forty days, the disciples still did not seem to understand its true nature. They thought Jesus was going to lead the physical nation of Israel in a rebellion against the Roman Empire, and they asked Him if He was getting ready to do it. Jesus didn't answer their question directly, but used it as a way to tell them the real plan: they were going to be witnesses of His resurrection and spread the message all over the world. But how would such faulty people, who didn't even know that the kingdom was spiritual, not physical, be the leaders God needed for His church? Jesus gave the answer: the Holy Spirit was going to come to give them power and guide them into the truth (see John 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:13).

Then Jesus was lifted up into a cloud while they were still all looking on. What were the disciples thinking as they gazed into the skies after Him? They must have been confused, and even afraid. A moment before, they thought that Jesus would gather up forces to destroy Rome, and now He had left them! But two angels came and gave them some comforting words: Jesus was going to come again some day out of the clouds. Christians today share the same promise and expectation!

Note: “...even to the remotest part of the earth”

The word “apostle” means “one sent forth.” That’s exactly what Jesus did to the apostles; He sent them forth to preach His gospel. In verse 8, Jesus gives an outline of how the apostles were supposed to do it. Just like a ripple in a pond starts in one point and then ripples outward, the apostles were going to be Jesus’ witnesses, first in Jerusalem, then in the surrounding regions, and then in all the rest of the world. The rest of the book of Acts gives us details on how this happened.

Acts 1:12-26 A new apostle is chosen

In Jerusalem, the disciples were staying together in a second-story room where they devoted their time to praying. There were also women, as well as Jesus’ mother and brothers, and they were all so unified in their faith that it was like they were of “one mind.”

In one gathering, 120 people were present. Here, Peter stood up and said that the prophecies about Judas, the man who betrayed the Messiah, had been fulfilled. Judas had committed suicide by hanging himself in a field, which became known as “Field of Blood.” Peter said that just one other Scripture needed to be fulfilled about him: “Let another man take his office.” They needed to have someone take his position and be an apostle. Peter gave qualifications for the next apostle: he needed to be a witness of Jesus’ life, His resurrection, and His ascension. Two men, Joseph Barsabbas and Matthias, were nominated, but the disciples left it up to the Lord to decide which would be His apostle. So they cast lots (similar to “drawing straws”) and Matthias was picked.

Note: Big changes

We can note a huge difference between the attitudes of the disciples here and how we are used to them acting from the gospels. We saw them weak and cowardly when they fled when Jesus was arrested (see Mark 14:27); here we see them unified and of one mind. We saw them neglecting prayer out of a lack of faith (see Mark 9:28-29; 14:37-38); here we see them devoted to prayer. We saw before that the family of Jesus thought that He was crazy (see Mark 3:21; John 7:5); now His mother and brothers are steadfast believers!

What could have caused such changes? What could turn cowardly unbelievers into zealous disciples? There is only one way to account for it: these people saw the resurrected Jesus. Because of that, they were utterly convinced now of His messiahship, kingship, and divinity. Their transformation is powerful testimony to us of the resurrection.

Perhaps Peter showed the greatest change in attitude. We are used to him speaking from ignorance, arrogance, or from his own thoughts. Because of that, often he would actually contradict Jesus! (see Mark 8:31-33; 14:27-31). But here we see him humbly quoting Scripture as the authority for actions. Choosing a replacement for Judas was not his decision, but what “the Holy Spirit foretold.” The choice between Joseph and Matthias was made by the Lord, not by him. Peter had finally learned the lesson that Jesus had repeatedly taught, that some things are “not for you to know” (verse 7). Like Peter, we need to learn to trust the wisdom and authority of Jesus rather than our own opinions. If God’s word does not say it, we should not do it.

Match the person with their description:

1. Peter
2. Theophilus
3. Holy Spirit
4. Luke
5. Matthias
6. Judas

Penned the book of Acts

Chosen by the Lord to replace Judas

Hung himself at a field called
Hakeldama
Jesus promised that He would come to
give the apostles power & truth

Stood up and said that the Scriptures
must be fulfilled
The one to whom the book of Acts was
written.

True or False:

- 1. Jesus was on the earth for 40 days after His resurrection and appeared to many people.
- 2. The apostles were never supposed to preach to anyone outside of Jerusalem.
- 3. Jesus was going to lead Israel in victory over the Roman armies.
- 4. The next apostle had to be an eyewitness of Jesus and His resurrection.
- 5. It is okay to serve God according to our own opinions.

After you've filled out the answers, send this lesson back to the person who sent it to you with your name and address. They will correct your answers and discuss any questions or comments you have on the text.

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