

Acts 1

The title "Acts of the Apostles" is a bit misleading. The book contains only a few of the "acts" of some of the apostles, primarily Peter and Paul. It is more a story of the expansion of the church from Jerusalem to Rome. Whereas Jesus is the chief character in the Gospels, the Holy Spirit, working through the apostles, is the dominant character in the book of Acts.¹ The book could more appropriately be entitled the "Acts of the Holy Spirit."

Who wrote the book of Acts? Luke.

What do we know about Luke? He was a physician (Colossians 4:14), a Gentile (based on his Greek name) and a devoted companion of Paul (from the text of Acts, Colossians 4:14, Philemon 24).

Luke wrote the introductory statements in vv. 1-5 to connect the Book of Acts with his former book which was what? The Gospel of Luke. Acts is considered to be the sequel -- like Luke Volume II -- in which Luke records the historical transition from Judaism to Christianity -- a total remake of the way God interacted with His people. In the former book, Luke had recorded what Jesus had begun to do and to teach during His earthly ministry. In this second book, he wrote what Jesus continued doing to build His church through Spirit-indwelt Christians.²

Who was Acts written to (v. 1)? "Theophilus" -- which means lover of God. We don't know exactly who he was, but Theophilus was a fairly common Greek proper name. **Where have we heard of Theophilus before?** Luke 1:3. The Gospel of Luke was also written to Theophilus.

How many days did Jesus spend with His disciples after His resurrection (v. 3)? 40 days. **What did He do during those 40 days?** He spoke about the Kingdom of God. He showed himself to the Apostles which gave convincing proof He was alive. In 1 Corinthians 15:6, Paul described one of the many infallible proofs of His bodily resurrection -- more than 500 people saw the resurrected Jesus, and most of them were still alive some 25 years later in the days of Paul's ministry.

What instructions did Jesus leave the disciples with (v. 4)? Stay in Jerusalem and wait for the promised Holy Spirit. Jesus knew that they really could do nothing effective for the Kingdom of God until the Holy Spirit came.

How long after Jesus ascended would they have to wait for the Holy Spirit to arrive? 10 days

The Apostles were still clueless and focused on their expectation surrounding the coming of the kingdom. **What kind of kingdom were they envisioning (v. 6)?** The political restoration of Israel. The removal of Roman oppression and Jesus (the Messiah) established as king. A return to the glory days of the Jewish nation when they lived as the Chosen People and God walked with them.

What is the signature verse of Acts -- the one that defines the book? Acts 1:8: *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.* God's Spirit would empower the disciples as they executed their purpose of witnessing. Note they were not called to be theologians, or Bible scholars, or philosophers or pastors. They were now to be witnesses.

What is the job of a witness? To tell what one has seen, heard and experienced. For the disciples everything was to be secondary to the proclamation of their personal testimony. Their job was to call attention to what they knew of Him and to deliver His message to mankind. Page after page is occupied by their testimony, and the key to this feature is found in the words of Peter: *"For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard"* (Acts 4:20). The concept of "witness" is so prominent in Acts (the word in its various forms appears some thirty-nine times) that everything else in the book should probably be seen as subsumed under it.³ Our personal testimony -- what we have seen, heard and experienced is perhaps our most valuable and powerful witnessing tool.

How might this power manifest itself in our lives? The result of receiving this power would be that we, just like the apostles, will become witnesses of Jesus in spreading the Gospel all over our world. Jesus is not referring to a natural power but rather a supernatural power. It looks different than our traditional concept of power. For example, when I speak, God may choose to use my words to impact another person's heart and I may know nothing about it. God's power is unleashed when we are faithful and obedient servants. This power may also manifest itself

in our lives in the form of the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) as well as through the imparting of gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4).

What is the significance of being a witness to Samaria? Samaritans had a mixed religion, partly true, and partly false; they were Jewish and heathen hybrids – a people despised by the Jews. The Samaritans came about when the Assyrians intermarried with the Israelite women following Assyria's conquest of Israel in 722 B.C. The way the Jews and the Samaritans felt about one another is similar to how most Israelis and Palestinians feel about one another today. Samaria was unfriendly territory. **Who are your Samaritans?**

Who were the two men dressed in white (v. 10)? Angels **What did the angels announce (v. 11)?** Christ was now in heaven and He would return in the same way you saw him go – in the clouds. **How do you think that made them feel?** What filled these disciples with great joy was the fact that He did not die and they had the well founded hope that they would see Jesus again soon (Luke 24:52). Without this hope His departure would have made them very sad. The prospect of the Lord's return should have the same joyful effect on us.

In this emotionally chaotic, uncertain environment, who stepped up to lead (v. 15)? Peter. He had been restored by Jesus after denying Him three times (John 21:15-19). This is the first indication of Peter's leadership role in the early church.

Peter believed it was necessary to choose someone to take Judas' place. To be qualified for this ministry, as the other eleven disciples, the twelfth had to have met what conditions as specified by Peter (vv. 21-22)?

- Someone who has been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us
- Someone who was a witness with us of his resurrection

They narrowed the selection to two men. How did they determine which of the two would succeed Judas (v. 26)? They prayed first and then cast lots to determine God's will.

This instance of casting lots to determine God's will is the last one the New Testament writers recorded. **Why did the methodology of casting lots go away?** Casting lots was necessary before the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but when the Holy Spirit came, He provided the guidance inwardly that God had formerly provided externally. The Holy Spirit works both through Scripture as well as through impressing His will on believers in response to prayer.

They chose Matthias. Should they have waited for arrival of the Holy Spirit? Some think they were too hasty. There is no hint in Scripture that the decision made on this occasion was a mistake. God did not intervene or rebuke anyone. Another indication the choice of Matthias by lot was sanctioned by the Lord is because the apostles are called "the twelve" from that point on (Acts 6:2).

Was Paul God's intended replacement for Judas. Paul was, of course, an apostle with authority equal to that of the Twelve. However, Paul had not been with Jesus during His earthly ministry. And he was not a witness of the resurrection. Furthermore the distinctly Jewish nature of the future ministry of the Twelve (Matthew 19:28) supports Paul's exclusion from this group. His ministry was primarily to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:9). Paul never claimed to be one of the Twelve, though he did contend that his official apostleship had come to him as a direct commission from the Lord. However, it came from the risen Lord, and he considered himself abnormally born as an apostle (1 Corinthians 15:7-8). Finally, there is no hint in Scripture that the decision made on this occasion was a mistake.⁴ God did not intervene or rebuke anyone.

¹ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Acts, 2017 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>) p. 1

² Ibid. p. 12

³ Ibid. p. 16

⁴ Ibid. p. 30