

Preview of Acts

The Book of Acts is the second volume of a two-part history written by Luke. He refers to his former treatise (the Book of Luke) as an account of all that Jesus began to do and teach. Acts is a record of Jesus' continuing work in the church through the Holy Spirit. Perhaps the book could more properly be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit.

This book is our only link between the Gospels and the Epistles. It is the sequel to the Gospels and the introduction to the Epistles. The Epistles take for granted many facts known to us only from the Book of Acts. It is, however, not a complete history of the Apostolic Era. Many more things happened (the Epistles refer to some of them) that are not recorded. But we do have a sufficient record to give us a picture of the birth and development of the church. The facts recorded were divinely selected to give us the impression God intended us to have of this period.

Acts contains many lessons and examples for the church today. We must be careful, however, that we do not bypass the teachings of the Epistles in an effort to duplicate the experience of the early church. The Book of Acts, after all, represents a transitional period immediately following the close of the Old Testament.

The account of the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world (Acts 1:8) gives us an overall outline of Acts.

Chapters 1-7—Jerusalem

- A. The church established
- B. The Jewish period

Chapters 8-12—Judea and Samaria

- A. The church scattered
- B. The transition period

Chapters 13-28—the uttermost parts

- A. The church extended
- B. The Gentile period

Jesus' Ascension

Lesson Scope: [Acts I](#)

Lesson Focus

Acts 1 picks up where the Gospels leave off. Luke, the writer of this book, makes the spread of the Gospel his theme. He does not attempt to give a comprehensive view of all that was happening. Much of the book seems to be written from the standpoint of the writer as an eyewitness.

Jesus gave ample proof of His resurrection in the forty days before His ascension. He appeared numerous times to His disciples and on one occasion, to more than five hundred believers at once. Jesus continued teaching His disciples, although only a small portion of His encounters and teachings in those days is recorded. He left His disciples with a clear understanding of their responsibility to spread the Gospel and establish churches.

"When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men" (Ephesians 4:8). The greatest gift our Lord gave, of course, was Himself, in the person of the Holy Ghost. This involved bestowing individual gifts on various people—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, and so on (Ephesians 4:11). As to leading captivity captive, we know that the completion of Christ's earthly work "turned the tables" between Satan and Christ, assuring Satan's defeat. "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made

Jesus' ascension concluded His earthly ministry. Until His promised return, He continues to administrate the life and work of His body, the church, through the Holy Spirit.

Lesson Aim: To see the significance of Jesus' ascension.

Theme Verse: [Mark 16:19](#). So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.

Lesson Text:

The Living Saviour

Acts 1:1-8 ¹ The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, ² Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: ³ To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: ⁴ And, being assembled together with *them*, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, *saith he*, ye have heard of me. ⁵ For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. ⁶ When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? ⁷ And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. ⁸ But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

The Ascended Lord

Acts 1:9-11 ⁹ And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; ¹¹ Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

The Waiting Disciples

Acts 1:17-26 ¹⁷ For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. ¹⁸ Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. ¹⁹ And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; inso-much as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood. ²⁰ For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take. ²¹ Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²² Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must

one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. ²³ And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴ And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all *men*, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, ²⁵ That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. ²⁶ And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Questions for Study

The Living Saviour

1. How did Jesus redirect the thinking of the disciples between His resurrection and ascension?
2. How did Jesus confirm the thinking of the disciples?
3. What applications might we make to ourselves from Jesus' command that "they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father"?

The Ascended Lord

4. Why was it important that the disciples "beheld" and "looked" while the ascension took place?
5. What does "in like manner" tell us about Christ's Second Coming?
6. What are the implications of the question "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?"

The Waiting Disciples

7. What was foremost in the disciples' minds as they "continued ... in prayer and supplication"?
8. Why was an ordination appropriate at this time?
9. What qualifications did Matthias have that we look for in leaders we ordain?

Analyzing the Passage

Theophilus (Acts 1:1) means "beloved of God." The "former treatise" was the Book of Luke, also addressed to Theophilus (Luke 1:3), whose identity is unknown.

His passion (Acts 1:3) refers to Christ's suffering and death.

The "many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3) were absolute signs that Jesus was alive again. He walked, talked, and ate with His disciples. More than five hundred brethren saw Him (1 Corinthians 15:6).

The disciples asked Jesus, "Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Rather than rebuking them, Jesus refocused their thinking. He moved swiftly from a courteous "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons" to "Ye shall be witnesses unto me." The kingdom He was establishing in Acts 1 was global and spiritual rather than local and political.

The appearance of the two men in Acts 1:10 reminds us that God does not leave Himself without messengers. Jesus' physical presence was gone, but God was still speaking.

The Mount of Olives (Acts 1:12) is a significant spot. "His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives" (Zechariah 14:4). Here Jesus repeatedly visited Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in the village of Bethany. Here He began His triumphal procession into Jerusalem. Here on its lower slopes, He wrestled in Gethsemane. Here, near Bethany (Luke 24:50-51), His feet last touched earth.

Principles and Applications

The Living Saviour

1. Jesus' ascension was an integral part of His work of providing salvation (Acts 1:1-3). Luke's "former treatise" had told of what Jesus "began" to do, and it briefly mentioned the ascension. In Acts 1, Luke re-emphasized the ascension. It completed Christ's work on earth, making the rest of the Book of Acts possible. Jesus' ascension also makes possible our own ascension. Someday we "shall be caught up ... in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

2. Jesus' ascension opened the way for the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5). While Jesus lived and taught here, "the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39). On the night before He was crucified, Jesus told His disciples, "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you" (John 16:7). Within two months, He kept His promise on the day of Pentecost. Years after that event, the apostle Paul wrote, "When he ascended up on high, he ... gave gifts unto men" (Ephesians 4:8).

3. Jesus' ascension gave the apostles a better understanding of the work He had for them in the church (Acts 1:6-8). Jesus told Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world: ... now is my kingdom not from hence" (John 18:36). His ascension underscored this truth. If the King had physically departed into heaven for a time, how could He at the same time rule a physical kingdom

on earth? The ascension subtracted one dimension from the disciples' thinking, but it added many more. "Occupy till I come" (Luke 19:13) was full of possibilities that the disciples had yet to discover while they waited for His coming.

4. Jesus' ascension opened the way for believers to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit was not only a presence but also a power. He proved this with miracles and mighty acts until certain citizens described Christians as "these that have turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). But the Spirit delights just as much in indwelling all believers, quietly empowering them to live normal, godly lives. In many cases, these God-touched lives do as much or more to spread the Gospel than miracles do.

5. Jesus' ascension placed on men the burden of spreading the Gospel (Acts 1:8). "I have finished the work which thou gayest me to do," Jesus prayed in John 17:4. Shortly He would withdraw so that the full weight of responsibility would fall upon others, prompting them to rise to the challenge and become spiritually mature. As they in turn passed away, still others would take up the challenge.

Jesus did not expect His disciples to sweep the whole world at once. He told them to begin at home and go from there to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world. That "uttermost part" is where many of us live today. Thank God for faithful messengers who kept on spreading the Gospel until it reached us.

Jesus' Ascension

The Ascended Lord

6. Jesus' ascension took Him back to His Father in heaven (Acts 1:9). Jesus' first recorded words in the Gospels are "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49). During His ministry, He mentioned His Father a surprising number of times. (Check Father in a concordance.) Jesus took every opportunity to pray to Him. Finally He went home to His Father, home to a hero's welcome and a victor's throne.

7. Jesus' ascension provided the pattern for His return (Acts 1:11). How did He rise? He rose literally, physically, and in plain view. It is true that He returned shortly in the form of the Holy Spirit, but the words "in like manner" refer rather to a future coming when "Ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:62). Then we will understand perfectly what the Lord had in mind when He taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come."

The Waiting Disciples

8. Jesus' ascension brought unity to His followers (Acts 1:14). A common interest always brings a kind of unity, but belief in our Lord's ascension is a unity that transcends continents, cultures, and centuries. It brought the disciples together "with one accord in prayer and supplication." It still does—if not to the same location, at least to the same Lord. Belief in the ascension does not make an exclusive group so much as it makes an inclusive one.

9. Jesus' ascension caused the disciples to rely on the Scriptures (Acts 1:15-17, 20-26). Now that the infallible Man was physically gone, to what authority could the disciples turn? They could turn to the infallible Book, the Word of God, just as we can today. Peter quoted it as he addressed the other disciples.

10. Jesus' ascension made evident the need for continued leadership (Acts 1:20-26). One leader's tragic fall had shocked and sobered the group, but it could not be allowed to hinder the Lord's work. The obvious next step was to ordain another man. This ordination set a precedent for ordinations to come. We ordain, not only to fill vacancies but also to meet the needs of a growing work.

Important Teachings

1. Jesus' ascension was an integral part of His work of providing salvation (Acts 1:1-3).
2. Jesus' ascension opened the way for the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5).
3. Jesus' ascension gave the apostles a better understanding of the work He had for them in the church (Acts 1:6-8).
4. Jesus' ascension opened the way for believers to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).
5. Jesus' ascension placed on men the burden of spreading the Gospel (Acts 1:8).
6. Jesus' ascension took Him back to His Father in heaven (Acts 1:9).
7. Jesus' ascension provided the pattern for His return (Acts 1:11).
8. Jesus' ascension brought unity to His followers (Acts 1:14).
9. Jesus' ascension caused the disciples to rely on the Scriptures (Acts 1:15-17, 20-26).
10. Jesus' ascension made evident the need for continued leadership (Acts 1:20-26).

Answers to Questions

1. How did Jesus redirect the thinking of the disciples between His resurrection and ascension?

He directed their thinking away from a present, political kingdom to a kingdom that is not of this world.

2. How did Jesus confirm the thinking of the disciples?

Jesus proved Himself alive; He spoke "of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God"; and He gave them some directions for the future.

3. What applications might we make to ourselves from Jesus' command that "they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father"?

We should not rush out to serve the Lord before we have waited before the Lord and are confident of His blessing.

4. Why was it important that the disciples "beheld" and "looked" while the ascension took place?

Unlike the resurrection, which could be confirmed by Christ's presence after the fact, the ascension had to be seen while it happened, because after this event, Christ was gone. God wanted it clear that the disciples had "not followed cunningly devised fables ... but were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:16).

5. What does "in like manner" tell us about Christ's Second Coming? He will come physically and visibly in the clouds of heaven.

6. What are the implications of the question "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?"

The disciples' hope was not gone, and neither is ours. The Lord will return. In the meantime, He has work for us to do.

7. What was foremost in the disciples' minds as they "continued ... in prayer and supplication"?

They were waiting "for the promise of the Father," which would include power to spread the Gospel.

8. Why was an ordination appropriate at this time?

Judas's position was now empty, and it needed to be filled. While everyone had gathered to seek the Lord was a good time to fill that need.

9. What qualifications did Matthias have that we look for in leaders we ordain?

Matthias had been part of the group for some time. He was personally well acquainted with the Lord. He fit the qualification "know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 5:12).

Summarizing the Lesson

No wonder the angels asked the disciples, "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?" They had not lost Jesus. He had not said goodbye! He had simply slipped out of sight and would come again. In the meantime, He would work behind the scenes while His disciples—twelve of them—hundreds of them—millions of them—would work for Him. He has work for us too until He comes again. Let us not stand gazing.
Maranatha!

Research Guide

1. For this quarter's study of Acts, you may wish to use Rod and Staff's paperback Exploring the Book of Acts, by Lester Bauman.
2. Some parts of the chapter titled "The Christian Church" in Doctrines of the Bible would be relevant to this lesson.