

The Acts of the Apostles

Introduction

- Acts 1:1-11
- I remember hearing the story of a young man being saved out of the drug culture of the 1960's, and turning to the Bible with the same hunger that he had for drugs before he met Jesus. He read the New Testament, devoured it, especially the stories of Jesus in the Gospels, and the stories of Peter and Paul in the book of Acts. He also started going to church, to the one that was closest to his house. It happened to be a Methodist church, and this young disciple of Jesus right off the streets and off of drugs was puzzled by something and after a few weeks could not contain it any longer. He went up to the pastor after the morning worship service, introduced himself and told him about his salvation. Then he said to the pastor, "When does the stuff happen?" The pastor didn't understand and said so: "What stuff are you talking about?" The young man said, "You know, the stuff! The stuff that I have been reading about in the Bible." The pastor shook his head and admitted that they didn't do that stuff at his church.
- Now as we embark on a journey through the book of Acts, I will have to admit to you that some of the 'stuff' we will read about has not happened at Antioch. You will be glad to know that no one has dropped dead in a meeting where they have been confronted by the elders about lying. You might be sad to know that no one has been raised from the dead in even one of our services. You might be glad to know that not one of us has been bitten by a poisonous serpent and then shaken it off while building a fire for our Jesus Loves You parties. You might be sad to know that there have been no incidences of exorcism in our 26-year history as a church. However, let me say this. Most of the time those confronted with church discipline have left the church. They didn't drop dead, and for that I am glad. But they walked away from what perhaps may have been the last time God would put a roadblock in their way to say, "Turn, and I will help you grow up." So, there was a death. Second, though no one has been raised from the dead at Antioch, many have come to Christ. They were dead and now they live. Third, though no one has survived a deadly snakebite in this church, there have been many people given to bitterness whom God has delivered from that deadly stronghold. Fourth, we have never cast a demon out of anybody, at least I don't think we have, but the Lord has helped hundreds of His people to grow up, to be transformed by the renewing of our minds and set free to walk in newness of life in Jesus!
- I want to do three things today as we begin this study in this wonderful book. First, I want to give you a brief introduction to the book, its author, its style, and its 'melodic line.' Second, I want to give you a brief overview of the major themes of the book, big principles that we will see repeated all through the story. Third, I want to talk about the beginning of chapter one and draw out some of the meat from what we heard Kevin read today. So, Introduction, Overview, and Beginning.
- **Introduction**
- **The time.** Acts spans a period of about 33 years, from the time that most agree Jesus ascended into heaven, the spring of AD 30, to the end of the two year period during which Paul was under house arrest in Rome, around AD 63. 33 years. And if Jesus lived for 33 years, which the record indicates, then combine the 33 years of the life of Christ that Luke covered in his first book, the Gospel of Luke, with the 33 years of the life of the church that Luke covered in his second book, Acts, and you see that the beloved Dr. Luke wrote about the most important 66 years in the history of the world! From the birth of Jesus to the death of Paul, or within a few years of it. The cross stands in the middle of that, and indeed, the cross divides all of human history. When we stand on the judgment day, we will be either standing under the cross, redeemed by the One who was crushed there for our sins, or we will be standing at the Great Throne of God's judgment, crushed by the weight of the law, condemned by our sin to eternal damnation. That leads to the next part of our introduction,

- **The purpose.** It is NOT primarily a historical record. Luke is a historian, but he leaves out a lot, and it is not a detailed account even of the Acts of the Apostles. (Which apostles' lives does the book actually chronicle? Right, Peter's and Paul's. Mostly Paul!) So, what is the purpose? It dovetails with the purpose of Luke's first book, the Gospel of Luke. Luke explains it well if we put some of his key verses together. Luke 1:3-4, "to write an orderly account...that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught." What is most important that we have certainty in? Luke closes the book with this in chapter 24, "Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.'" (verses 45-47) That's the purpose of the Gospel, that Jesus is the promised Messiah, and Luke wrote about "all that Jesus began to do and teach." (Acts 1:1). So, what is the purpose of Luke's second book, Acts? It is also about Jesus, but mainly about the message of the Gospel being proclaimed to the whole world. Jesus explains it in Acts 1:8. Then see how Luke brings it all full circle in the last verse, Acts 28:30-31. I would submit to you that the **melodic line of the book of Acts is the expansion of the Gospel.** The victorious march of the Gospel from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the earth, as Jesus said in Luke 24:47, and again in Acts 1:8.
- **The style.** Luke is a story teller. I love that about the guy. And he loves a good speech or sermon. I love THAT about the guy. There are no fewer than 26 speeches and sermons in the book of Acts. It is a book of eyewitness accounts, which Luke collected over many years, accounts which are carried along by speeches and sermons. The book is an album filled with pictures which Luke flips through and tells a story about each one, as we look over his shoulder. Just think of some of the pictures in Luke's photo album! The picture of Jesus' ascension and what happened and who said what to whom. A picture of the Day of Pentecost and the tongues of fire on the heads of each one of the believers. A picture of a lame beggar healed by a word from a preacher, and him walking and leaping and praising God, while serious holy men of Judaism look on with horror, mouths wide open. And on and on. I can't wait! That's the introduction.
- **The Overview**
- There are at least five great themes that we will explore in this book, and I believe we will be delighted in learning more together about each one.
- **The Holy Spirit.** We call Him the "shy Sovereign" sometimes because He is sent by God to point us to Jesus. But the Holy Spirit is a person, not an inanimate force, and we need to know Him better! We will learn about Him as we look briefly today at verse 8, and as we examine the events of the day of Pentecost in weeks ahead. And over and over in this book, we will see the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the lives of God's people.
- **Missions.** Perhaps the greatest work of the Holy Spirit after Pentecost is recorded in Acts 13 when the Spirit spoke to the five leaders of the church at Antioch, while they were worshipping the Lord, and told them to send out two. May I suggest that genuine worship always leads to witness, and the reason we witness is that God may be glorified, worshiped, by more people! The Spirit said to Antioch's elders, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Thus began the greatest missionary work the world has even seen. And it continues with us, at THIS Antioch.
- **The church.** It is born at Jerusalem, on the Day of Pentecost, this great work of God that Jesus promised would not fail, and that even the gates of hell would not be able to stand up against its assault! We will see the building blocks that make a church healthy: biblical authority, sound doctrine, fellowship, prayer, mission and more. We will also see the struggles that the first church and that every church goes through, and be encouraged by how the Spirit of God takes them through those trials.
- **The opposition.** One of the trials that the churches in the book of Acts will face is opposition to the Gospel. From the scoffers on the Day of Pentecost who accused the new church members, all

120 of them, of being drunk...to Peter and John being beaten for preaching the Gospel...to Stephen, the first martyr of the church...to every imaginable form of opposition being thrown at the apostle Paul. Everywhere opposition was raised, the apostles preached the Gospel, and the church flourished. Simon Kistemaker writes, "Satan's efforts to block the spread of the Gospel are not only futile; indeed, they aid the growth of the church."

- **The defense of the Gospel.** Jesus promised the disciples that they would be flogged and dragged before tribunals and even put to death by those who thought they would be doing God a favor. Then Jesus told them not to be afraid, because He would give them the Spirit who would give them what to say when the time came. (Matthew 10:17-20) We will see this prophetic word played out over and over in the book of Acts, and we will see how men like Peter, John and Paul were emboldened by God to be defenders of the Gospel.
- **Beginning**
- Two points about this passage today, and then we will unpack it more thoroughly next Sunday. First, Jesus was on the earth for 40 days after His resurrection and before His ascension. (verse 3). What was He doing? "Speaking about the kingdom of God." He was expanding on His Road to Emmaus sermon, I believe, from Luke 24. Remember? "Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." (Luke 24:27) Then he opened the eyes of the two disciples so they would recognize Him as the risen Christ, and they said after He had disappeared from sight, "Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us on the road, while He opened to us the Scriptures?" (verse 32) Yes, I believe there was a LOT of heart burning going on in the 40 days after the resurrection. Can you imagine? The disciples had the opportunity of a lifetime, to ask Jesus anything they wanted to ask. And He poured into them for nearly 6 weeks. I imagine there was very little sleep, and eating was a necessary nuisance, because they could not get enough of being with the Lord.
- Second, Jesus told them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for the promise of the Father. (**See John 14:15-17**) The Spirit would not come until Jesus returned to heaven, and now Jesus reminds them of His teaching from Maundy Thursday. Then we come to Acts 1:8, which I believe is a key verse in all the Bible. There is a parallel between this baptism that is about to take place and the baptism of Jesus at the very beginning of His ministry. He was baptized by John in the Jordan and the Spirit came down upon Jesus like a dove and strengthened Jesus for His time of testing in the wilderness and for all of His ministry on the earth. Now the disciples are about to establish the church and to oppose the kingdoms of this world, so Jesus says, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." God sends the Spirit so the disciples will have power. For what? "And you will be My witnesses." The essential for witness is power that can only come from God. And the essential fruit or evidence of a life empowered by the Spirit is witness! What is a witness? Simply this: someone who has seen something and experienced something for himself. You cannot be a witness to something you have not seen yourself. AND, this person has a testimony. He speaks. She speaks. From the lips of a witness you get their eyewitness report. "I was there and this is what happened." Peter and John and James and all the disciples HAD seen and heard and tasted and experienced in every way the person of Jesus Christ. But they were not ready to face the opposition to the Gospel, nor were they ready to give a defense for the Gospel and be witnesses UNTIL they were clothed with the power of the Holy Spirit. Neither are we.
- Baptism in the Spirit. If you are born again, then you have already been baptized in the Holy Spirit. The only generation for which there needed to be a 'second blessing,' I believe, was the first generation of disciples of Jesus. They were believers, but until Jesus ascended and the Holy Spirit descended, they were not baptized, or, clothed in the Spirit. That happened one time, on the day of Pentecost. The writings of the Apostles after that clearly point to a one-time event. For example, in 1 Cor. 12:13 Paul says, "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit." You were baptized in the Holy

Spirit upon conversion. But there is an ongoing need for us as believers to be FILLED with the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 5:18, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit." Why would he command it if being filled was a one and done deal? Literally the Greek could read, "**continue to be being filled with the Spirit.**" How? First, by confession of sin. Sin is the greatest roadblock to power in the Spirit. Second, by asking in faith. "Oh God, fill me with your Spirit!" So, let's not make the mistake of dividing Christians into two classes: Spirit-baptized and Ordinary Christians. That leads to pride on the one hand and jealousy or resentment or great confusion on the other. No, an ordinary Christian is Spirit-baptized by definition. You do not receive the seal of the Holy Spirit, the promise of eternal life, unless you are born-again. That's ordinary Christianity. Which is Spirit-baptized.

- Prayer