

ACTS 1

JESUS COMMISSIONS HIS CHURCH

This morning we're starting a NEW study in the book of Acts. In this class over the last several years we have been all over the Bible but I have never done a study through Acts. So, this is very exciting for me personally.

As with any new study I like to introduce the book itself, which helps to provide context. The book of Acts is the second part of Luke's writing to a man named Theophilus. The first part of Luke's writing, of course, was the Gospel of Luke. So then, Acts is a continuation of Luke. Who is Theophilus? Little is known about him. He was an acquaintance of Luke's and was, more than likely, a Gentile Christian. Based on the way Luke addresses him – "most excellent Theophilus" (Luke 1:3) – he was apparently some kind of dignitary, a man of importance. Theophilus has come to faith in Christ and Luke is telling him the story of Jesus (Gospel of Luke) and about the beginning of the church (book of Acts).

Some people like to call the book of Acts, "The Acts of the Apostles." I prefer to call it, "The Acts of the Holy Spirit." After all, the Holy Spirit is THE POWER that ignites the church. While the apostles are prevalent in the book of Acts – like Peter, James and John and later Paul – we see a whole new cast of characters that are involved in the life of the early church that were not part of the original Twelve. We're going to learn about all of them as we go through this book. In the first 12 chapters the Apostle Peter is the person around whom many of the events will center. He's the leader of the apostles. From Chapter 13 on the main person becomes the Apostle Paul. This study will focus on the first 12 chapters.

OK, so let's get into the text this morning starting in Acts Chapter 1...

READ Acts 1:1-2

Luke is reminding Theophilus of the first part of his writing about the earthly ministry of Jesus – what Jesus did and what He taught. Luke

mentions the ascension of Jesus because that's where Luke had ended part 1 of his writing to Theophilus. If you go back to the Gospel of Luke, that is what it ends with. One interesting thing to note: in v 2 the disciples, those eleven men whom Jesus had originally chosen, are now referred to as "apostles." The word apostle comes from a Greek word meaning, "One who is sent off." This is a direct reference to the Great Commission that Jesus gave to His followers to go out and preach the Gospel.

READ Acts 1:3

From the time Jesus is resurrected from the tomb until He returns to heaven is 40 days. Luke mentions that during this roughly 6-week period of time Jesus taught about the kingdom of God. I want you to understand that He appeared during these 40 days not only to the remaining eleven disciples but to hundreds of other followers. By the way, you can read more details about what's going on during this time in John Chapter 21.

READ Acts 1:4-5

Jesus appears to the eleven apostles. What Luke tells Theophilus is the message that Jesus gives to His disciples just before He left. And what was that message? It came after The Great Commission and it is something that is very important. It is a reminder of what He had said in the Upper Room -- The Holy Spirit is going to come. The eleven are instructed to go to Jerusalem and wait for His coming there. "Not many days from now" means that this event is going to happen soon.

Putting together the events recorded at the end of Luke's Gospel with what's going on here at the beginning of the book of Acts we know that Jesus leads the apostles one last time up the Mount of Olives to the village of Bethany. It's a place they had been together with Jesus many times before. He had taught them there. It was one of their favorite places to meet. This is the setting for the next few verses.

READ Acts 1:6

Here on this very mountain overlooking Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives, Jesus had taught His twelve disciples a lot about the Kingdom of Heaven over the past several years. He emphasized it more recently in the last days of His ministry. Throughout Jesus's earthly ministry the disciples were convinced that Jesus would eventually set up His kingdom, defeat the Romans and rule from Jerusalem. This was their understanding from the Old Testament about what their Jewish Messiah, who they knew now to be Jesus, would do. OK, so now Jesus has completed His mission of redemption. He has died for the sins of mankind. He has been resurrected from the dead. So now, "Lord Jesus, are You going to restore the kingdom to Israel? Are You now going to set up Your Kingdom and rule?" It is a fair question. This is what's on their minds.

READ Acts 1:7

Jesus's answer is not exactly what they expected. Had Jesus been intending to set up His Kingdom, He would have said, "Yes. That is what I am about to do." But that's not what He says. At this point they're probably just a little confused about what Jesus's plans are. So, Jesus continues...

READ Acts 1:8

These are the very last words Jesus speaks to His followers while He is on earth. It goes right along with the Great Commission He had given to them earlier: "Go therefore and make disciples of ALL nations..." (Matthew 28:19).

The quarterly (written by Michael Martin, Summer 2024) makes this important point: "The idea of offering salvation to the Samaritans and Gentiles must have been challenging to these Jewish men. Jesus had prepared them for this larger ministry by deliberately including both groups in His ministry." If you read the Gospels, you see there were a lot of Gentiles that Jesus ministered to. As we go through the book of Acts we will see all of this unfold.

READ Acts 1:9

From the top of the Mount of Olives Jesus ascends back into heaven. It says, "He was lifted up." Mark in his gospel says, "So then the Lord Jesus, after He had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God" (Mark 16:19). Luke in his Gospel says, "And [Jesus] led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up His hands He blessed them. While He blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven" (Luke 24:50-51). It must have been quite a scene!

Jesus had told His disciples that He was going away. He informed them of His plans in the Upper Room on the last night before His crucifixion. He said, "Where I am going you cannot come" (John 13:33). Later He said, "Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you will follow afterward" (John 13:36). Then He said, "In My Father's house are many rooms ("mansions" KJV). If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:2-3). So, Jesus had told them He was going away, but He also told them that He would one day return for them. So then, Jesus's departure here is not a surprise to them at all. The manner in which He left, though, was probably a bit of a surprise.

READ Acts 1:10-11

Picture this: The apostles stand on top of the Mount of Olives and they gaze up into the afternoon sky. They watch Jesus disappear into the clouds. They strain to catch one last glimpse of Jesus. All of sudden two men in white robes are standing by them. Who are these "men"? They are more than likely angels, messengers from God.

The quarterly gives the reason for assuming they are angels: "Two men in white clothes is similar to other angelic manifestations, including the appearance to the women at the empty tomb." The assumption that they are angels, then, is a reasonable one. Whoever they are, presumably angels, their message is clear – "Jesus is coming back again!" The apostles remember Jesus's words that He spoke in John 16:16 when He said, "A

little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me; because I am going to the Father.”

Luke records what the apostles do next. “They worshiped [Jesus] and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God” (Luke 24:52-53). The eleven apostles head back down the Mount of Olives and into the city of Jerusalem.

READ Acts 1:12

“A Sabbath day’s journey away” is about 2000 yards, a little over a mile. So, it’s not very far at all.

READ Acts 1:13

The eleven apostles are named here. They are there in Jerusalem waiting as Jesus had instructed them. John Phillips in his commentary on Acts says this: “They did not know how long they would have to wait, but wait they would for as long as it took the Lord to fulfill His promise and send the Holy Spirit.” So, the apostles are waiting...

READ Acts 1:14-15

Gathered together in this one place are a total of 120 people. One of the people waiting is Jesus’s mother Mary. She was present at Pentecost! Peter, the spokesman for the apostles, addresses this large gathering...

READ Acts 1:16-17

Peter brings up Judas Iscariot, who was one of the original Twelve. “He was numbered among us,” Peter says. “Judas was a part of our ministry with Jesus. He was allotted his share in this ministry. He was with us for three and a half years. He heard Jesus’s claims and teachings just like we did. He witnessed Jesus’s countless miracles. But then, Judas betrayed Jesus. He was a guide to those who arrested Jesus.”

Right in the middle of Peter’s speech Luke inserts this parenthetical statement as clarification for what happened to Judas...

READ Acts 1:18-19

These gruesome verses offer a vivid description of Judas's death. We know from the Gospels that Judas felt remorse for what he had done and committed suicide by hanging himself (Matthew 27:5). Luke describes in gory detail things we did not know previously – apparently in his suicide attempt, the rope broke and Judas fell headlong into the ground below and was dashed into pieces (he must have been high up). The Jewish leaders took the 30 pieces of silver that Judas had thrown back into the temple and they purchased a field with it. That field became widely known as “the Field of Blood,” because it had been bought with blood money.

So, Judas, one of the original twelve disciples, killed himself. That left eleven remaining.

READ Acts 1:20

Peter quotes two passages from Psalms. He quotes from Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8. He uses these two Psalms as the basis for the action that he proposes next.

READ Acts 1:21-22

Peter is talking about replacing Judas. His replacement has to be someone who had intimate personal knowledge of the Lord from the beginning of His ministry to the end. Evidently there were a number of men who met these qualifications – specifically they had to have been “a witness to [Jesus's] resurrection. Those who followed Jesus were more than just the original Twelve. We know, for example in Luke Chapter 10, that Jesus appointed 72 of His followers. Out of all those men who were qualified to be an apostle, they put forward two men.

READ Acts 1:23

No basis is given as to how these two men were picked as the finalists for replacing Judas and getting the number of apostles back up to 12.

READ Acts 1:24-26.

Give the apostles credit. They prayed about this. The 12th apostle becomes Matthias.

There are several different opinions on the actions taken here by the eleven apostles. Some say they were wrong and should have waited until Pentecost when the Holy Spirit would come and give them wisdom about this matter. Some say that this action was unnecessary because God in His sovereign timetable would pick the Apostle Paul as Judas's replacement. Still others say that what the apostles did was the right thing.

My thought is that since there is no condemnation of their action later in scripture, the choice here of Mathias must have been in accordance with God's permissive will. There is nothing magical about the number 12. They probably could have picked several men. But in the end, they chose this one man Matthias.

What can we take away from Acts Chapter 1?

- Jesus IS coming back again someday. How do we know that? Because He promised His disciples that He would return and we, by faith, believe that HE WILL.
- Jesus's commission did not end with the apostles. Based on The Great Commission, it includes all Christians of all the ages. We have been tasked to take the Good News about Jesus and tell others wherever we go.
- Your decision-making in the important matters of life should always include prayer. Today we have the Holy Spirit living in us to help ensure that OUR choices are GOD'S choices.