

## A Study of the Acts of the Apostles

### Week One

#### Acts 1:1-26

#### Day One

1:1 In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach 2 until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. 3 After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

v. 1 – Luke is the author of this book and he referred to his previous work, which we know as the gospel of Luke. Luke wrote these books to one named Theophilus. Some believe this was an actual person, others believe he is symbolic of anyone who loves or seeks God (Theophilus means “lover of God). Regardless, Luke’s wrote with a focus on others. He didn’t write for ego or to develop a bestseller. He wrote to help others know Jesus. **What are you doing to help others know Jesus?** That should be an objective for every one of us.

v. 2 – Luke’s first book focused on Jesus’ life and ministry up to His ascension. Now he was going to report what happened after His ascension. Notice how focused Luke was as he defined the scope of both books. It is good to be specific when you serve the Lord. In fact, it doesn’t hurt to write down what you want to do by when. In that way, you can hold yourself accountable. **Do you have a list of objectives and things you would like to accomplish?**

Notice that Jesus didn’t just give instructions to His apostles. Luke reported that He gave instructions “through the Holy Spirit.” Jesus never acted on His own. He was directed by the Father and empowered by the Holy Spirit. How often I have launched out on my own initiative and strength, and that has only led to frustration and failure. *Lord, I ask you to lead and empower me to do Your will.*

v. 3 – Jesus invested a lot of time and effort into His disciples, especially the apostles. And His investment paid great dividends, for these men went on to turn the world upside down. **Who are you investing in? Who is in your circle of influence?** Jesus taught His apostles about the kingdom of God—God’s government. Jesus came preaching the kingdom of God and He left teaching about the kingdom of God. **If that is what Jesus taught, do you think that is what we should be teaching as well?** We should teach those in our circle of influence how to understand and respond to God’s government and directives in their lives.

This is where purpose comes in, for we must help each person find and fulfill the will of God for his or her life. I’m not talking about doing good or nice things, but *the* thing that we were created to do. That is the essence of the kingdom of God. **What is your**

**purpose? What price are you willing to pay to find it? Then are you willing to give your life to fulfill it? Don't be in a hurry to answer.**

## **Day Two**

4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." 6 So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 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."

v. 4 – Jesus told the apostles to wait. There are many who have that command down pat. They wait and wait for the right “timing” to do what God wants them to do. Yet Jesus only told them to wait until they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then they were to go, and go with zeal and radical commitment. Someone recently wrote me reminding me that Jesus, Moses and Joseph had to wait for the right timing. But my response is simple—you're not any of those three, who had unique, world-changing work to do.

If you are waiting, but preparing for God to use you while you are waiting, then fine. If you are using the waiting as a delay tactic to avoid failure or the uncertainty of serving God, then I say get up and get going. There's work to be done and you need to be doing more than you are today. **Do you agree or disagree?**

v. 5 – The apostles had no idea what Jesus was talking about. They didn't really understand what they were waiting for or how they would know when they had received it. And do you see that He was only talking about them waiting for a few days, not a few years. **What are you waiting for? Is it what you need to do God's will or are you waiting as a means of procrastinating?**

v. 6 – The apostles were anxious for the restoration of David's throne to Israel. They thought they understood God's kingdom to be a literal restoration of what they had centuries earlier. It is amazing that they had spent years listening to Jesus preach and teach about the Kingdom, but they still had preconceived notions of what that meant. It is so hard to empty our mind so that we can receive the new things that God has for us. That is why Paul's command in Romans is so critical:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12:1-2).

**Are you feeling brave?** Then ask the Lord today to show you any mindset you have that is contrary to His. Ask Him to show you where your mind needs to be renewed so that you can be transformed. Be careful, though, for if you ask this, He will do it and it will “blow your mind” for sure.

vs. 7&8 – Jesus told the disciples to mind their own business, which was to preach and witness with power. Instead of focusing on what they could do, they had a fascination with the future and how God was going to do certain things. The same is true today of those who are fascinated with future things, but ignore the daily things required of them to spread the gospel to the world. **Are you among this group?** I hope not, but if you are, I have one word of advice: leave the future to God and you concentrate on the present. **And if you believe that Jesus is coming back in this generation, are you acting like it? Are you saving for retirement? Are you buying clothes instead of using what you have? My point is that if you truly believe Jesus’ return is imminent, shouldn’t you be living a life of desperation, working to help as many get saved as possible?**

### Day Three

9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. 10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." 12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city.

v. 9 – That must have been quite a sight! The disciples received another proof of Jesus’ divinity and special standing with the Father. Little did they know that they had asked Him their last question. And we don’t know when that will happen for us either. I received a call yesterday that a friend and ministry worker went home to be with Jesus at the age of 56. I am 54, so something like that catches your attention. We tend to believe that things will continue the way that they are, and when you’re young, you tend to think that death is far away. It isn’t and things change. So armed with that knowledge, how will you live your life? What would you do if you knew you had two years to live? Where would you invest your time? That is how we should live at all times.

vs. 10&11 – I get the sense that the two angels were telling the disciples, “Go to work!” The disciples were gazing into the sky, perhaps expecting Jesus to return right then and there. But the angels refocused their thoughts and perspective and asked them why they were standing there with their mouths open.

It is an established fact that Jesus will return. That is the blessed hope of the Church and saints. But that cannot be our focus. We must work like He is coming back tomorrow, but the focus must be the work He has given us to do and not the circumstances that will surround His return. We have all we need to know about the Second Coming—He will

return the way He left. Period. Knowing that, why then stand and gaze into the heavens, trying to figure out what this or that passage means and how it relates to His return.

I watch some well-known ministries on television who have made a living out of the study of Jesus' return. I don't get it. It is useless and meaningless speculation as far as I'm concerned.

v. 12 – Here Luke gave us more information than when he ended his gospel:

When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God (Luke 24:50-53).

It seems to me that Luke ended his gospel quickly and now he picked up the story again as he began to write Acts. I like that Jesus left giving them a blessing. Jesus came blessing, lived to bless, and blessed as He departed. That is what you and I should do as well. **Who can you bless today?** There is power in your blessing. Think of it: If we can curse someone by our words, then we can also bless! So go around today and dispense blessings to those whom you meet. And you can do that in other ways besides saying, "Be blessed." Be generous, encourage someone or take time to listen and counsel. But walk in the legacy of Jesus today and be a blessing to as many people as possible.

#### Day Four

13 When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. 14 They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

v. 13 – There were then 11 apostles, Judas having been removed from their number. Where was this room to which they went? It was probably a large meeting room over a house where they were staying, which was common in that era. Other than that, it isn't important. But they were staying and meeting together.

Something important happens when we are together in teams and groups whose main focus is Jesus. Believers were never meant to prosper solely as individuals. We must be with others to work out an important part of our salvation, which includes trust, forgiveness and prayer. **Are you in a church? Do you have some kind of role that you play? Would your church miss you if you left?** If the answer is "no," then you have work to do to get involved. Notice too that the Holy Spirit listed these men by name. In some ways, this was the original church membership list. People tell me that membership isn't important. I beg to differ. I think it is important that you identify and

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be identified with a body of believers. They should know your name and you should know the names of the others in your group.

v. 14 – The prayer group or church consisted not only of the apostles, but also of Jesus’ family, including his brothers and mother. Luke was always careful to point out Jesus’ ministry to women. He also indicated that women were part of Jesus’ ministry team:

The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod’s household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means (Luke 8:1-3).

**If you are a woman, whose ministry team do you belong to? If you are a man, what have you done to include women on your team?** The Church is not as potent as it could be because we insist on excluding half our members and their gifts from ministry tasks. I like what William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, once said: “Some of my best men are women!”

### Day Five

15 In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) 16 and said, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus— 17 he was one of our number and shared in this ministry." 18(With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. 19 Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) 20 "For," said Peter, "it is written in the book of Psalms, "'May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,' and, "'May another take his place of leadership.'

v. 15 – So the first church had 120 in “membership,” assembled together and waiting. Peter began to assert the leadership that was his by assignment—he certainly didn’t earn it by denying Jesus. But who can earn leadership in the things of God. You never earn your position in Jesus; you just cooperate with it.

vs. 16&17 – Notice that Peter affirmed that the Word is from the Holy Spirit, in this case spoken through the mouth of David. And notice that Peter affirmed that Judas did indeed share in their ministry. Peter was probably referring to Psalm 41:9:

Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.

But don’t read into this verse that Judas was a helpless pawn. He chose to cooperate with the plan of Satan and was punished for his choice.

vs. 18&19 – These verses seems to be a contradiction, for Matthew reported:

So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself (Matthew 27:5).

Matthew spends no more time than he must discussing the traitor. Luke gave us a little more information. The discussion of this seeming contradiction is beyond the scope of our study, but let me say that my studies show that the reports aren't too far off from one another. But more importantly, let me say that we ought always to give the benefit of any doubt where the Bible is concerned to God and the Holy Spirit. We believe that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant word of God from the Holy Spirit.

One time Dwight Moody, the great evangelist, was on a train in the dining car, reading the Bible while he ate. Another passenger observed this and asked Moody point blank, "What do you do about all the contradictions in the Bible?" Moody replied, "I do just what I do when I eat this piece of fish. I chew the meat and spit out the bones." That is great advice. Don't ever choke on any "bones" as you chew God's word. There's enough meat to feed us for a lifetime, so spend your time on that.

v. 20 – Here Peter referenced Psalm 69:25 and 109:8. These words were directed to David's enemies at the time of their writing, but since David is a type or shadow of Christ, they were also a shadow of what was going to happen to Jesus. Can we ever understand the sense of betrayal that Jesus felt over what Judas did? Jesus loved him, yet Judas, probably disappointed that Jesus wasn't going to fulfill Judas' expectations of a literal kingdom, took money to guide Jesus' murderers to Jesus' place of prayer.

Yet the work of the Church went on after that failure just as it has after every human failure in history. The Church isn't about good men serving God, but a good God serving mankind through the death and life of Jesus. **Are you scandalized by some human failure? Has it affected your ability to serve the Church?** Then please do whatever you have to do to get healed and get back into the battle. We need you. Jesus needs you. But if you choose to remain sidelined, know that God loves you. Try not to hold God responsible for the many failures of men and women who started out serving Him with best of intentions.

### Day Six

21 Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection." 23 So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias.

v. 21 – Peter was concerned that the leadership team was inadequate to carry out the task of witnessing to the Lord's resurrection. I am not sure why Peter felt such urgency to replace Judas, although the apostles must have felt that if the Lord chose 12, then they

needed to have 12 on their team. But Peter did understand that they had to choose someone who had been with them the whole time because their role was to bear witness to Jesus' life and actions. When choosing someone to be on your team, whether business or ministry, spend some time checking to see if that person's values are consistent with those of the team or organization. When possible, give them some hypothetical questions and ask them how they would handle them. Better yet, see if there is some way you can work with them so you can see their work. Don't ever hire anyone simply on their skills; their values are more important, as Peter had learned with Judas.

v. 22 – Jesus didn't come back and show Himself to all of Jerusalem. He only showed Himself to His disciples. He then expected the disciples to tell others about the resurrection and Jesus would validate their message with signs and wonders. Nothing has changed today. We are to give testimony to the resurrection and God will endorse the message with miracles. Is it any wonder that we preach an anemic gospel because we have left out part of the formula? We are strong on preaching but short on miracles.

I don't think we can win the Muslim world without miracles. We will never win a debate with a Muslim, so we must present them with irrefutable evidence that Jesus is Lord. The only way to do that, from my point of view, is with the power of God.

v. 23 – The nominating committee proposed two men to replace Judas. We aren't sure how they came to this decision, but we do know how they chose the men. They were so intent on getting the Lord's choice that they devised a plan to take themselves out of the selection process and put God in charge of His church. Too often today, church leadership is chosen for all sorts of reasons—nepotism, attractiveness, business success, and availability to serve. I don't think any of those reasons are adequate means to choose the leaders of God's church, do you?

### **Day Seven**

24 Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen 25 to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs." 26 Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

vs. 24&25 – The apostles wanted God's choice and not their own. They knew that this wasn't a popularity contest, but rather serious business—God's business. So they did a simple thing: They prayed! And they prayed for God to show them which one He had chosen to replace Judas. We would be stronger as a church if we did this whenever we needed a leader. But what if God wanted a woman? Someone of a different ethnic group than the majority? Someone without seminary training?

The church doesn't belong to the leaders; it belongs to Jesus. He paid for it with His blood. The shepherds are simply caretakers. I've said recently that Jesus is coming back for His Church *now!* He wants it back from all those who have commandeered it to use for their own ends and purposes, just as He promised He would do in Jeremiah:

"Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!" declares the LORD. Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: "Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done," declares the LORD. "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD (Jeremiah 23:1-4).

**What should the guidelines be for effective leadership in the church?** I always use the verses in Peter as my guide:

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away (1 Peter 5:1-4).

**If you are a leader in God's church, do you follow Peter's directive? If you want to be a leader, how can you apply these principles to your leadership style?** Those three principles are: 1) A willing heart; 2) Freedom from greed; 3) Servants and not lords. Don't use those verses to judge anyone else; judge yourself! And be diligent to apply those leadership principles at all times.