

I OVERVIEW OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES**BLUEPRINT:****Peter's Ministry (1:1-12:25)**

- **Establishment of the Church**
- Expansion of the Church

Paul's Ministry (13:1-28:31)

- First missionary journey
- Moving of the church council
- Second missionary journey
- Third missionary journey
- Paul on trial

MEGATHEMES:

Church beginnings Acts is the history of how Christianity was founded and organized and how it solved its issues. The community of believers began by faith in the risen Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, who enabled them to witness, to love, and to serve.

Holy Spirit The church did not start or grow by its own power and enthusiasm. The disciples were empowered by God's Holy Spirit. He was the promised comforter and Guide sent when Jesus went to heaven.

Church growth Acts presents the history of a dynamic, growing community of believers from Jerusalem to Syria, Africa, Asia, and Europe. In the first century it spread from believing Jews to non-Jews in 39 cities and 30 countries, islands or provinces.

Witnessing Peter, John, Philip, Paul, Barnabas, and thousands more witnessed to their new faith in Christ. By personal testimony, preaching, or defense before authorities, they told the story with boldness and courage to groups of all sizes.

Opposition Through imprisonment, beatings, plots, and riots, Christians were persecuted by both Jews and Gentiles. But the opposition became a catalyst for the spread of Christianity. This showed that Christianity was not the work of man, but it was the work of God.

II BACKGROUND

The Book of Acts is the principal source of information from which we learn about the First Century church during the first three decades after Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. During those years, Christianity, which began among the Jewish people, became predominantly Gentile. The gospel also expanded from its early roots in Palestine to the uttermost parts of the earth including the capital of the Roman Empire.

The first two chapters of Acts are tied closely together and revolve around the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Chapter one sets the stage for this important event by moving us from Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to the disciples' prayerfully waiting for the Promise in the upper room. Under God's inspiration, Luke recorded Jesus' instructions to the disciples concerning their soon to be launched worldwide mission. Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem for the gift of the Holy Spirit, who would **empower** them for service. He then describes Jesus' ascension into heaven as the disciples watched, and wondered what was going to happen next. Two angels suddenly appeared and turned the disciples' attention back to Jesus' command. It was important that they understood their two overarching missions:

- Evangelize the lost; and,
- Edify the saints.

The Holy Spirit would provide the supernatural gifts necessary for them to accomplish these missions. Returning to Jerusalem, the disciples went into the upper room where others joined them for an extended period of worship and prayer. The stage was set for the fulfilling of Jesus' promise recorded in **Acts 1:8**, and previously prophesized in **Joel 2:28** and **Jeremiah 31:34**.

III SCRIPTURE

JESUS' INSTRUCTIONS (1:1-8)

The first eleven verses are the bridge between the events recorded in the Gospels and the events marking the beginning of the Church. The resurrected Jesus spent 40 days teaching the disciples and during this time they were drastically changed. Before the resurrection, they had argued with each other and had deserted their Lord; with Peter lying 3 times about even knowing Jesus. Here, in a series of meetings with the resurrected Lord, many of their questions had been clearly answered. They became convinced of the resurrection, learned about the Kingdom of God, and discovered their power source, the Holy Spirit.

(1-3): The resurrected Jesus appeared to more than 500 people (*1 Corinthians 15:6*). Many in the first century church were eyewitnesses to the risen Christ. To see Jesus in His risen form, coupled with the soon indwelling of the Holy Spirit, energized the first century Christians. We do not have the eyewitness experience, but we do have the same indwelt Holy Spirit. The spiritual gift of faith is needed a bit more by us who live two millennia later in our relationship with the same resurrected Jesus (*Hebrews 13:8*).

Jesus explained that His Coming had inaugurated the Kingdom of God. When He returned to heaven, God's Kingdom would remain in the hearts of all believers through the presence of the Holy Spirit,

The transformation of the apostles and disciples is remarkable. Less than 7 weeks ago they cowered in fear as their Master was willingly accepting the sin burden of the world, they bickered with each other, and were not team players. Now they are energized as they realize they are in a unique position in history to form and grow the Bride, the Church of the risen Jesus Christ.

Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God, which was inaugurated, with His resurrection. Soon when He was to ascend into heaven, the Kingdom would remain in the hearts of all believers through the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Kingdom of God in its fullness will be realized until the Second Coming of Christ, the establishment of the Millennial theocracy, the judgment of all sin at the Great White Throne Judgment, and the elimination of all traces of evil (*Revelation 19-20*).

(4-5): What was the Father's Promise? It was the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. Jesus informed the disciples that it was an advantage to the Kingdom of God for Him to ascend to the right hand of the Father, for soon, the Holy Spirit would make God's power available to 120, and ultimately billions of believers. At Pentecost (*Acts 2:4*), the Holy Spirit was made available to all who believe in Jesus and were given His righteousness (*Romans 3:21; Romans 8:9*).

The Holy Spirit is the power of our new transformed lives, beginning the lifelong process of transformation and change as we become more like Jesus (*1 John 3:2; Philippians 1:6*). The Holy Spirit can be experienced by all and works through all (*1 Corinthians 12:11; Ephesians 4:4*).

(6-8): While Jesus was on earth, many expected that His Kingdom would be brought in by the conquest of the oppressor, Rome. But the Kingdom that Jesus spoke about was a spiritual kingdom in the hearts of believers (*Joel 2:28; Jeremiah 31:34*). With the power of the Holy Spirit, this kingdom was going to spread to the uttermost parts of the earth.

The "power" believers receive from the Holy Spirit includes courage, boldness, confidence, insight, ability, and authority. The disciples would need all of these gifts to fulfill their mission.

Today, Scripture is translated into more than 10,000 languages and dialects and has been heard by more than 6,000,000,000 people.

JESUS' ASCENSION AND BELIEVERS WORSHIP (1:9-14)

(9-11): It was important for the disciples to see Jesus ascend into heaven, eradicating any lingering doubt that He was God incarnate and that His home was in heaven. Jesus spent 40 days on earth after He was resurrected to give final instructions to the new Church. Two angels told the people who were awestruck and staring at the sky that the time has begun to go to work and share the Gospel.

(12-14): As Christ ascended into heaven, the apostles immediately walked about a half mile back to Jerusalem and began a prayer meeting. They must have been energized, as they just witnessed Jesus' return to heaven and were anticipating the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Amongst the disciples were Jesus' brothers and His mother. During Jesus' time on earth, his brothers did not believe that He was the Messiah. The resurrection and ascension surely gave them enough data to change their minds. Jesus' special appearance to James, one of his brothers, may have been an especially significant event in their conversion (see *1 Corinthians 15:7*)

JUDAS' REPLACEMENT (1:15-26)

(15): The first church business meeting took place, with Peter as the Moderator. The small group had grown from 11 to more than 120. What a transformation for Peter, who just awhile back was cowardly thrice denying that he even knew Jesus (*John 18:15-18; John 18:25-27*). But Christ forgave and restored him in *John 21*.

The stark contrast in Peter's recovery and Judas' suicide is there for us to learn by. When you are down and fail, pick yourself back up and move forward. Christians are instructed to live in the present with an eye on the future and to only use the past for correction.

(16): The betrayal of Judas was prophesized by David in *Psalms 41:9*. The desolation of Judas' home was prophesized in *Psalms 69:25 & Psalm 109:8*. *Matthew 27:5* indicates that Judas hanged himself. Afterwards, the rope broke, Judas fell, and his bowels spilled onto the earth.

(17-22): The apostles wanted to maintain a number of 12, so the selection process began for someone to take Judas' place. The qualifications for the candidates were to be guided by prayer. It was to be someone who was with Jesus from the time of John the Baptist's baptism until the ascension.

(23-26): Joseph Justus (a.k.a. Barrabas) and Matthias were nominated and prayer ensued with Matthias selected. The disciples became apostles. Disciple means follower or learner while apostle means messenger or missionary. These men now had a special assignment of spreading the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection.

The 120 Christian believers are based on the Jewish law that required a minimum of 120 Jewish men to form a community with its own council.

GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (2:1-3)

(1): The day of Pentecost is the second of three annual festivals that were celebrated by Israel. It occurred between the Feasts of Passover and Tabernacles, falling on the fiftieth day after Passover (*Exodus 34:22; Deuteronomy 16:9-11*). It was also referred to as the Feast of First Fruits in *Numbers 28:26*. It was a time of solemn assembly. On Pentecost 29 A.D., 120 disciples of Jesus Christ were together in the Upper Room of a house that they went to, soon after Jesus' ascension to heaven. They were prepared for something significant to happen, but had no idea what it was going to be.

(2-3): *Joel 2:28-32* and other Old Testament prophecies were about to be fulfilled. The Comforter that Jesus spoke about in *John 14:26* was about to take up permanent residence on Planet Earth in the hearts of 120 believers. This would soon spread to thousands, then millions, and now billions who are indwelt by Him today. All people who believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God receive the Holy Spirit at the time of conversion.

The Holy Spirit was present much earlier, as He was involved in the Creation of Man (*Genesis 1:26*), and as the Second Dispensation of conscience soon after Man's fall (*Genesis 4:6*). God's Promise throughout the Old Testament was that this same Holy Spirit would take up residence in each person who believes, but only after the propitiation for our sins that expiates God's wrath has become our righteousness.

WITNESS OF THE DISCIPLES (2:4-6)

(4): The first supernatural ability given to the disciples was the ability to speak in other tongues (i.e., gift of utterance) which reversed the language barriers set up in *Genesis 11:8-9* at the Tower of Babel. This was all part of God's plan to bring the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth.

They also spoke in an unknown heavenly tongue. Paul provides some guidance to the importance and implementation of unknown tongues in *I Corinthians 14:5-28*. Paul teaches that the usage of known tongues is much preferred, as they are more readily understood. Moreover, if utterance in unknown tongues occurs, an interpreter is required.

(5-6): Soon as they were filled with the Holy Spirit, the 120 believers immediately rushed out into the streets of Jerusalem and began the spread of God's Good News. Their activity, and speaking in supernatural tongues, immediately attracted a crowd who was bewildered. People in this crowd were to be the first of an **enormous soul harvest**. The apostles continued to minister in the power of the Holy Spirit wherever they went.

RESPONSES OF THE PEOPLE (2:7-13)

(7-8): The local populace knew that those in the upper room were Galileans, yet they spoke in so many different languages and this phenomenon was quite perplexing. It showed that Christianity is not limited to any race or group of people, as Christ offers salvation to all people without regard of nationality.

(9-11): The impact of hearing the Galilean believers speak in other languages was all the more powerful when the crowd considered how many lands were represented in their number. The list of nationalities begins with three countries east of the Roman Empire (e.g., modern Iran), Mesopotamia (e.g., modern Iraq), Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia Minor (e.g., modern Turkey), northern Africa (e.g., Egypt, Libya), Crete, Arabia, and others. God had prepared the way for all of these peoples to understand that He was thinking of them too when He died on the cross.

(12-13): However, not all responses were positive. Those who saw the truth behind the situation knew that God had empowered those in the upper room. Some people had a bit more difficulty with the truth and thought that the Galileans had imbibed too many Bud Lites.

Satan already had begun his counter-offensive to stop the spread of God's Church (*I Corinthians 1:18*), and with that, the End Times, in which the overarching battle between the Kingdom of God and the Satanic-driven world, began. Little did the First Century church know that this battle would continue into the 21st Century, as they expected Jesus to return shortly (*II Peter 3:9*).

RESPONSE OF PETER (2:14-36)

(14-15): Peter stepped forward and told the people why they should listen to the believers. There were three overarching reasons for them to listen up:

1. Jesus had entirely fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies (**Acts 2:14-21**); (The probability of this happening by chance was 1:10¹⁵⁷).
2. Jesus is the Messiah (**Acts 2:25-36**); and,
3. The risen Christ could change their lives (**Acts 2:37-40**).

(16-21): Peter offered the fulfillment of prophecy as the true explanation of the Christian's activity. His sermon invoked **Psalm 16:8-10**, **Psalm 110:1**, and **Joel 2:28-32**.

<p>Not everything in Joel 2:28-29 was happening that particular morning. The "last Days" include all of the days between Christ's first and second comings, or another way of saying from now on. The Day of the Lord denotes the whole Christian age. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was released throughout the entire world, and now everyone could receive the Spirit. This was a bit of a revolutionary idea to the first Century Jews who were still transfixed on Mosaic Law even though they were familiar with the prophetic writings of Joel, Isaiah and Jeremiah.</p>
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(22-24): Peter began with a public proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, at a point in time when it could be verified and validated by many eyewitnesses. Jesus' resurrection was the ultimate sign that what He said about Himself was true. Without the resurrection, we would have no reason to believe in Jesus and our faith would be in vain (**1 Corinthians 15:17**).

(25-32): Peter next referred to **Psalm 16:8-11**, which was written by David and quoted by Jesus. He showed that these words were not from David describing his own experiences, but were prophetic about the coming Messiah from David's lineage. Jesus is from the seed of Jesse (i.e., David's father) and is the Lion of Judah. David appears in Jesus' Kingly lineage described in **Matthew 1**.

The emphasis here is that Jesus' body was not left to decay but was resurrected and glorified.
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(33-36): Peter further claimed Scriptural proof for Christ's exaltation by citing **Psalm 110:1** as having been fulfilled. The outpoured Spirit was further evidence that Jesus was both Lord and Christ. Note that Christ means "**the anointed one**".

CONVICTION (2:37)

(37): After Peter's powerful, Spirit-filled message, the people were deeply moved (i.e., cut to the heart) and asked, "What shall we do?" The Holy Spirit was already at work, convicting the people of their sinfulness (**John 14:26**). The people asked the basic question that we must ask. It is not enough to be sorry for our sins. We must **let** God forgive them, and then **we must live** like

forgiven people.

We will only begin our "Grace Walk" as soon as we realize that we are truly forgiven and live under the constant grace that a loving God offers us.

The people realized that something was wrong with their lives and something was truly missing in their heart of hearts. That something was Jesus Christ, the Risen Savior and the Redeemer promised 4,000 years ago (*Genesis 3:15*). The Holy Spirit, which was promised in *Joel 2:28-29*, *Isaiah 44:3*, *Jeremiah 31:34*, and *Ezekiel 37:14*, and promised by Jesus before He was crucified (*John 14:26*) was available to them to begin the First Century.

The Holy Spirit ... don't leave Earth without Him!

CONVERSION (2:38-41)

(38): In response to the people's question of what they should do, Peter identified what it would take to enter the Kingdom of God, which now resided on Earth. They were to turn from sin (i.e., repent) and be baptized (i.e., show identification with Christ and with the community of believers). They would immediately receive forgiveness for their sins and be indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Did Peter imply that belief was not sufficient enough for salvation, but that one needed to be baptized also before forgiveness was imputed and the Holy Spirit indwelt the believer?

*Acts 3:19 and Acts 5:31 show us that repentance is the key to salvation, not an outward demonstration of baptism. Baptism was emphasized here because being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ was distinctly different than baptism by John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus Christ. To be baptized in Jesus Christ is to be totally and inseparably identified with Him (see *Romans 6:4*).*

(39): The Promise includes the gift of the Holy Spirit as well as forgiveness of sins. Not only did God extend this promise to those listening to Peter in 29 AD in Jerusalem but also to subsequent generations (i.e., about 80 generations since the Pentecost) and to people in distant places (i.e., uttermost parts of the Earth) as well. Today, the promise is available to more than 6,600,000,000 people. Unfortunately, not all of them have chosen to receive it.

(40-41): The new Church had its first evangelism. A total of 3,000 people in the crowd repented of their sins and were forgiven and given the gift of the Holy Spirit. **God was just warming up.** He had full control of His creation's eternity and He was readying His new Church to bring the Gospel to the rest of Jerusalem, then to Judea, and then to the uttermost parts of the earth. The 3,000 new Christians were joined with the other believers, taught by the apostles, and included in prayer meetings and fellowship.

Although Satan was going to provide a multitude of distractions, **he could never reverse what had just taken place.** He is, and will remain a defeated foe until he is thrown into the Lake of Fire (*Revelation 20:10*).

CHURCH MINISTRIES (2:42-47)

(42): The new believers joined the 120 in regular attendance at the apostles' teaching sessions (i.e., saint edification), at the Communion services, where they remembered Jesus' suffering to open up the Age of Grace, and at prayer meetings (i.e., fellowship). These services were patterned after the Last Supper (***Matthew 26:26-29***).

(43): All of the believers were filled with awe (***Proverbs 1:7***), or respectful reverence. They were awed at the energizing effect of the Holy Spirit working within their spirit, as well as by the many miracles that were performed by the apostles. This was a very exciting time for the young Christian Church.

(44-45): Recognizing the other believers as brothers and sisters in the family of God, the Christians in Jerusalem shared all that they had so that all could benefit from God's blessings. Some even sold everything that they had and provided it to those who needed it more. As part of God's spiritual family, each of us has the responsibility to help one another in every way possible (***Romans 12:18***). This is part of **loving your neighbor as you would love yourself**.

The rich man that asked what it would take to follow Jesus did not understand the Lord's reply when he was told to sell everything he had and then follow. The Lord wants us to trust Him for everything and to support His Kingdom. The riches of His Kingdom are far greater, and incorruptible, than the riches of earth.

(46-47): The Church was a true community of believers. Not only did they worship regularly in the Temple daily, but they met in small groups in homes for Communion, and ate of their meals together with great joy and thanksgiving.

A healthy Christian community attracts people to Christ. The Jerusalem church's zeal for worship and brotherly love was contagious. A healthy, loving Church can only go in one direction...growth. Unfortunately, not all of the churches today fit the First Century Church model.