

THE GREAT AWAKENING

The Book of Acts

Lesson 1

Introduction

The Book of Acts was written by a man named Luke, a traveling companion of the Apostle Paul. Acts is actually the second part of his two-part work, Luke-Acts. **Read Luke 1:1-4 and compare it to Acts 1:1-3.**

Facts about the Book of Acts

- The book opens with Jesus' ascension 40 days after His resurrection and closes with the Apostle Paul under house arrest in Rome.
- This covers approximately 30+/- years: From the ascension of Jesus (circa AD 30) to Paul's arrest in Rome (circa AD 61).
- It highlights primarily the lives and ministry of two of the Apostles: Peter (Ch. 1-12) and Paul (Chs.13-28). The others are hardly mentioned.
- It records the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome, the capital of the empire.
- Though it is called the Acts of the Apostles, maybe the title "The Acts of the Holy Spirit" would be a more appropriate title. The words "Spirit" or "Holy Spirit" occur no less than 55 times in this book, which is far more than any other book of the New Testament.

The Themes of Acts

Besides the ministry of the Spirit mentioned above, two themes seem to stand out: ***The geographical spread of the gospel*** (1:8) and ***the numerical growth of the Church*** (2:41, 4:4, and 5:14). Woven among these two are other themes like community life of the early Church, persecution, political attitudes towards Christianity, Jew and Gentile relations, spiritual conflicts both from within the Church and outside the Church, and so much more. Let's jump into the book of Acts and start exploring these themes and see if we, too, can continue the Great Awakening of the Church.

READ ACTS 1:1-8

1. Verse 4 records Jesus' command to not leave Jerusalem but to wait for what the Father had **promised**. Then Jesus reminds them of the words of John the Baptist regarding the coming of the Spirit. The promise of the coming of the Spirit goes back hundreds of years. Peter even mentions it in his speech in Acts 2:33 & 38-39. Look up the following passages from the Old Testament to see the beginning of this promise of the Father.

Ezekiel 36:25-27 Notice specifically what the Spirit is going to do for the believer.

Joel 2:27-29 Peter uses this passage in Acts 2 after the Spirit has come.

John's gospel records the most specific teachings of Jesus regarding the coming of the Spirit. Let's look up the following passages in which Jesus told His disciples what the Spirit would be like when He came upon them. Carefully examine them and discuss the different elements of the Spirit's ministry mentioned in these verses.

John 7:37-39 "Living waters" is a phrase used to describe a creek that is has moving water as opposed to a pool of stale water, or even worse, a cistern. Having the Spirit is like drinking water from a cool stream as opposed to a lukewarm, stagnant cistern. (See also 1 Corinthians 12:13 for a comparison of the Spirit and drinking).

John 14:16-17 What, do you suppose, is the significance of the switch from the present tense to the future tense in the phrase, "*He abides with you and will be in you?*" What is the difference between the Spirit being *in* you as opposed to *with* you?

John 14:25-27 The disciples are promised that the Spirit will teach them all things and bring to their remembrance all that Jesus said. Is this a promise to the Apostles only, or also to all believers? How certain can we be that the Holy Spirit is teaching us and not some other influence?

John 16:5-11 This can often be heard: "I would prefer to have Jesus physically present with me as opposed to the Spirit who I cannot see." How would you respond to this statement? What is the advantage of having the Spirit in you instead of having Christ physically present?

John 16:12-15 Again, the Spirit is promised to guide into truth. This verse also promises that the Spirit would reveal the future to the Apostles. I believe that this latter promise is primarily given to the Apostles, but what's the application for us?

Back to the Book of Acts. Jesus mentions the Baptism of the Spirit as the fulfillment of this promise of the Father. This phrase is mentioned seven times in the New Testament: Mathew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5, 11:16, and 1 Corinthians 12:13. The meaning of the Baptism of the Spirit has been greatly debated among Christians in the last 120 years. The two primary views are as follows:

The Pentecostal/Charismatic Interpretation: The Baptism of the Spirit is work of the Spirit after salvation (sometimes called the Second Blessing because it is not essential to salvation) whereby you receive power to serve God (see Acts 1:8). Traditionally, Pentecostals held that you must speak in tongues as the disciples did in Acts 2:4 as proof that you received this baptism. Many modern charismatics would say that it is preferable, but not required. Most equate the baptism of the Spirit and the filling of the Spirit as the same thing.

The Traditional Interpretation: This is the position of Grace Church. The Baptism in/with the Spirit is the work of Jesus that follows His death, burial,

and resurrection. It is the last work of God which inaugurates the New Covenant (Ezekiel 36:27). It is core to salvation and results in the believer being incorporated into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). We do not see it as a second blessing, but something that happens automatically to all believers at salvation. We separate the filling of the Spirit and baptism of the Spirit as two separate works of the Spirit. The baptism happens once, but the filling happens time and time again, as Acts will demonstrate.

With this in mind, reread Acts 1:4-8.

2. The disciples want to know if Jesus is going to set up His kingdom at this point. In verse 7, Jesus basically tells them "*none ya*" (that is short of *none of your business*). Why do Christians so often ignore Jesus' words and repeatedly set dates for His coming?

What does Jesus tell them their focus should be on?

4. In verse 8, Jesus tells them that when the Spirit comes, they would receive power to be His witnesses. Share a time when you were very aware of the Spirit's power in your life as you were witnessing about Him.

Jesus gives the geographical plan for the spreading of the gospel in verse 8. Look at the maps at the back of your Bible; find one titled, "Paul's Journeys." Try to find the following places...I know some of you hate geography, but it is very important to the story of Acts:

Jerusalem

Judea

Samaria

Damascus (Ch. 9, Paul's home)

Caesarea and Joppa

Asia Minor

Greece

Athens

Rome