

The book of Acts picks up where the gospel of Luke ends. In the first chapter, Jesus gives the apostles a parting command as He ascends to His Father. They are to return to Jerusalem and wait there until they receive “the promise of the Father” (the Holy Spirit) Who will empower them to fulfill His command that they would be witnesses of Him throughout the whole world.

The book of Acts is written by Luke, who is the author of the gospel that bears his name. Both documents are written to the same person (Theophilus – Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1) and seem to be Luke’s researched documentation of both the life of Jesus Christ and what He accomplished through His apostles. This book is sometimes titled “The Acts of the Apostles” but it could easily be titled “The Acts of the Holy Spirit Through the Apostles.” The book covers the time period from the ascension of Jesus Christ through to the Apostle Paul’s first Roman imprisonment, a span of roughly three decades.

To properly understand the book of Acts, we must remember that this book is descriptive but not always prescriptive. Many of the events in Acts are one-time occurrences and do not describe things that should occur repeatedly throughout church history. Acts is also a book of transitions, documenting how God’s focus transitions from Israel alone to the church, the body of believers in Christ composed of both Jew and Gentile. It also shows the transition of the church from being filled almost exclusively with believing Jews to being filled predominantly with Gentiles due to the rejection of Christ by the bulk of the Jews. Acts 11:18 marks the point when the Jews begin to realize that God’s promise of salvation through Jesus Christ extends to the Gentiles as well as the Jews. While the first half of Acts focuses predominantly on Peter and his ministry to the Jews, the second half focuses on Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles.

Verses 1-3: Luke introduces the book of Acts as a continuation of the gospel of Jesus Christ that he had previously written to Theophilus. The previous “treatise” (account) ended with the ascension of Jesus (Luke 24:50-53) and the book of Acts picks up with the same event, which occurs at the end of the 40 days that Jesus had spent with them after His resurrection.

4 And, being assembled together with *them*, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, *saieth he*, ye have heard of me. 5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

The apostles were gathered together with Jesus on the Mount of Olives (v. 12) and He gives them one last command before He ascends. They are to return to Jerusalem and remain there until they receive “the promise of the Father” that He had told them about previously (Luke 11:13; 24:49; John 7:39; 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). This promise was of the coming of the Holy Spirit and that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit in a few days. Jesus compares and contrasts the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the water baptism performed by John the Baptist. The Greek word used for “baptized” is *baptizo*, which means “to immerse; to be overwhelmed.” Just as water overwhelms a person being baptized, making them fully wet, the Holy Spirit overwhelms a person who has been saved, transforming them through the new birth and making them a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). The apostles were saved but they had not yet become indwelt by the Holy Spirit. They would receive this gift in about a week (Acts 2:1).

6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

Since they knew that Jesus was the Messiah, the promised king that would rule and reign over Israel, this was a natural question for the apostles to ask. Jesus had been teaching them about the kingdom of God (v. 3), both before and after His crucifixion. The kingdom of the Messiah had been prophesied about for centuries and now that He had come, He had been crucified and resurrected. They obviously thought that this would be a great time for Jesus to establish His kingdom here on earth.

7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. 8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

“And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power [authority]” – The timing of prophetic events, including when Christ’s kingdom on earth will begin, are things that the Father has not chosen to reveal to mankind. Thus, even the apostles were not privileged to know these things.

“But ye shall receive power [dunamis: miraculous power], after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you” – In the meantime, the apostles would receive power from God that would enable them to accomplish the task that Jesus is about to give them.

“and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” – The purpose of the apostles receiving this miraculous power is so that they can be witnesses of Jesus Christ, not only locally in Jerusalem, but extending out to the ends of the earth. This power would associate them with Jesus Christ, Who did many miracles during His earthly ministry. This power was not to glorify the apostles but to point people to Jesus Christ. **John 14:11-12** “*Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.*”

Verses 9-11: When Jesus had finished saying these things, He ascended up into heaven. As He ascended, there were two angels standing nearby that told the apostles that Jesus would return to earth in the same way He left. Jesus left from the Mount of Olives and He will return to the same spot (Zech. 14:4). Christ will return in great power and glory (Matt. 24:30; 2 Th. 1:7-10; Rev. 19:11-16).

12 Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey.

The apostles obey Jesus' command to return to Jerusalem to await the promise of the Father (v. 4). This verse tells us that they had watched Jesus ascend from the Mount of Olives. A "sabbath day's journey" was about a half mile and represented the maximum distance a Jew could travel on the sabbath without violating the prohibition given in Ex. 16:29 that no one should "go out of his place" on the sabbath.

13 And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James *the son* of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas *the brother* of James.

"And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room" – Commentators suggest that this upper room may have been the same upper room where the Last Supper was celebrated (Mark 14:15) and/or where Jesus appeared to the apostles after His resurrection.

"where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James *the son* of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas *the brother* of James" – The eleven apostles (Judas Iscariot was dead by this time) lived in this upper room over the next week or so as they waited for "the promise of the Father." Pentecost was 50 days after the Passover when Jesus was crucified. Since Jesus spent three days in the grave and then 40 days with the apostles, Jesus apparently ascended 43 days after Passover, leaving 7 days until Pentecost. Judas, the brother of James, is also called Thaddaeus (Mark 3:18).

14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.

"These all continued with one accord [one mind; one passion or purpose] in prayer and supplication" – The apostles and those gathered with them sought God in prayer as they obeyed Jesus' command to wait for the promise of the Father. They no doubt asked God for guidance since they did not know exactly what was going to happen. According to v. 15, there were about 120 people gathered in this upper room, all with one purpose and desire in their hearts: to be spiritually prepared for what was coming.

"with the women" – These likely included Mary Magdalene, Mary the wife of Clopas, the sisters Mary and Martha, and Salome. These women followed Jesus during His ministry and some were present at His crucifixion. Commentators suggest that it was likely that the wives of some of the apostles were also present.

"and Mary the mother of Jesus" – Mary, Jesus' earthly mother, had believed on Him since the angel Gabriel had appeared to her (Luke 1:26-38) and she is still following Him. This is the final time that Mary's name appears in the NT.

"and with his brethren" – These were the half-brothers of Jesus, James, Joses, Judas, and Simon (Mark 6:3). They had not believed in Jesus before the crucifixion (**John 7:5** "For neither did his brethren believe in him.") but they apparently came to faith after seeing the resurrected Jesus. James becomes the leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:13-22) and is the author of the epistle that bears his name. Judas (also known as Jude) wrote the epistle of Jude.

Verses 15-26: The apostles realize that they are one short of the original twelve disciples chosen by Jesus because of the betrayal and subsequent suicide of Judas Iscariot. In order to have a full complement of twelve apostles, they ask God to help them choose a replacement for Judas. The replacement apostle must be someone who had been with them from the baptism of John until the ascension of Jesus, and they find two candidates: Joseph and Matthias. Using the method of casting lots to discern God's will, they choose Matthias to be the twelfth apostle.