

Acts

Acts 1 – Wait for Power

Acts is the second volume of a two part work, the first part being the Gospel of Luke. In the gospel Luke explains his purpose in writing - “so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught”; his sources of information - “those who were eye-witnesses and servants of the word”; and his method - “I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning”. He tells us that he has written about “the things that have been fulfilled among us” so he clearly saw a link to Old Testament prophecy which he refers to in both his books.

The gospel is Luke's account of the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Acts 1 picks up where he left off with an account of resurrection appearances of Jesus and a fuller account of his ascension. We are told that Jesus talked with his disciples about “the kingdom of God”, and told them to wait in Jerusalem until they received “the gift my Father promised”, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They wanted to know whether this was the time he was going to “restore the kingdom to Israel” but he told them that times and dates were under the Father's authority and not their business. What they had to be were his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth, the Holy Spirit would give them the power to do this. There is a sense in which this provides an outline for the rest of the book of Acts, witnesses first in Jerusalem, next in Judea, then Samaria on into Galatia, Europe and eventually reaching Rome. They were witnesses of the resurrection and the ascension, proclaiming that Jesus is King the conqueror of death, ascended to the throne of heaven.

While the disciples stare into the sky as a cloud hid Jesus from sight, two men in white explain that Jesus has “been taken” from them “into heaven” but will come back from there “in the same way.” They had started to live in the period between the ascension of Jesus to the throne and the coming again of Jesus to restore everything. Just the period we are living in now. Their immediate task was to wait for the Holy Spirit, then to be witnesses.

In obedience they returned to Jerusalem and waited together in prayer with others, 120 of them. Peter took the opportunity to deal with the gap created by the betrayal and death of Judas. He saw from the word of God in the context of prayer that another should “take his place of leadership” so Matthias was chosen by lot from a short list of two. He fulfilled the criteria that he had been with the apostles all the time Jesus was with them from John's baptism until the ascension. Thus he was able to be a witness with the eleven of the resurrection.

Luke introduces many big themes in this first chapter, resurrection, ascension, the second coming, baptism in the Holy Spirit, the Kingdom of God, global witness, much to get your teeth into! My plea is that you approach this chapter as an introduction so you do not have to exhaust every theme now (and the rest of the group in the process). Try to understand what Luke is saying rather than bringing in your own views and be prepared for the Holy Spirit to speak to you through others in your group. Give time to the commit questions as they help us to apply what we learn. We leave the early church at the end of this passage waiting with anticipation for the promised gift from the Father, I pray that we will capture something of this anticipation as we wait on God together.

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Open

- If you know that you are to receive an exciting gift in the near future how easy do you find it to wait?

- Imagine a world without electricity, what difference would it make to your life?

Study

Read together Acts 1: 1-26

1. If volume 1, Luke's Gospel, is about what "Jesus began to do and teach" what do you think this book, Acts, is likely to be about? Why has Luke written these two books? (verse 1 see also Luke 1:1-4)

2. Read Luke 24:45-53 and compare it with Acts 1:1-5. How does Luke show that Acts is a continuation of the gospel story? Who are the key characters in these first five verses of Acts? What are the two key themes he introduces?

3. Why did the Apostles ask the question in verse 6? In what ways did it show that they were tuned into what Jesus was teaching? (see v3, Luke 1:32-33, Luke 22:28-30)

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4. In his answer to their question what does Jesus say is to be the focus, the agenda, and the equipping for the Apostles' future work? What does he warn them not to be distracted with? (vs 7-8, cf 1 Thess 5:1-2)

5. How was the way Jesus left on this occasion different from the other resurrection appearances? What was the significance of what happened, "before their very eyes", as explained by the "two men dressed in white"? (vs 9-11, cf v2 and Luke 24:50-52)

6. How did the apostles respond to this experience and who else was involved? (vs 12-14, cf v4)

7. How does Peter explain the betrayal of Judas, its consequence for Judas and the implication for the apostles? Where does he find the basis for this?(vs 15-22)

8. How did they decide on a replacement for Judas? Why do you think it was so important to have 12 apostles? (vs 21-23, see Luke 22:24-30, Matt 19:28)

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Commit

- Acts 1:8 is a key verse as it provides an outline for the rest of the book and the agenda for the lives of the apostles. To what extent should this be the agenda for our lives? How will it impact our priorities if it is our agenda?
- The resurrection and the ascension of Jesus are significant events in this passage. In what ways is the resurrection of Jesus significant in our lives? How is the ascension a significant event for us?
- What impact does the fact that we live between the ascension of Jesus into heaven and the coming of Jesus from heaven have on the way we live now? How should it influence the way we live?