

Half Time: Acts 1–12 Review

Devotional

A Chinese farmer, after having cataracts removed from his eyes, made his way from the Christian compound to the far interior of China. Only a few days elapsed, however, before the missionary doctor looked out his bamboo window and noticed the formerly blind man holding the front end of a long rope. In a single file and holding to the rope behind him came several blind Chinese whom the farmer had told about his operation. They all knew the farmer had been blind, but now he could see. He told them of the doctor who had cured him; naturally, all these other blind people wanted to meet the doctor who cured the blind man. The cured man could not explain the physiology of the eye or the technique of the operation. He could tell others he had been blind, the doctor had operated on him, and now he could see. That was all the others needed to hear. They came to the doctor. So it is in our Christian lives. We need not all be trained theologians. We need not understand all the intricacies of God's mysteries, nor be perfect examples of flawless Christian living. We can all tell everyone what Christ has done for us. We may not all be teachers. We may not all be like Mother Teresa. We can all be witnesses. That is the point of the Book of Acts, a written witness, a faithful telling of the work of God in the first days of Christianity and the church.

Acts is not a devotional book like the Psalms, nor a teaching letter like the epistles. It reads similar to some of the historical books of the Old Testament, and even more like the four Gospels which precede it. We call this kind of Bible writing “narrative” and recognize that we can learn the truth of God's Word and principles of Christian living by seeing how God worked with people in the early church. These are our brothers and sisters who faced many of the same kind of issues and problems we have experienced or will yet experience.... When we grasp the significance of new life in Christ and the internal power of His resurrection through the Holy Spirit, we can live out the words of a modern chorus, “Get all excited and tell everybody” that Jesus Christ the Son of God lives today in the lives of His people even as He did back in the days of the New Testament.¹

Open it

1. When have you had a chance to share with others some good news? What was the news and how did they respond when they heard it?

¹ Gangel, Kenneth. Holman New Testament Commentary - Acts: 5 (Kindle Locations 350-371). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Watch it

Instead of reading a specific passage, take 8 minutes as a group to watch this Acts 1–12 summary video.

<https://www.bible.com/videos/3087-acts-1-12-the-bible-project>

Apply it

Anyone who has been around parents with young children knows that parents often have to repeat their instructions many times. Parents have to reiterate the same ideas to their children to help them mature and to prepare them to live fruitful lives.

In a similar way, when we read the book of Acts, it quickly becomes evident that Luke addressed some themes many times. These repeated motifs run throughout his book and are important keys to understanding Luke's teaching. So, if we hope to grasp the significance of the book of Acts, we must pay careful attention to these repeated themes.

In this study guide, we will look at four major themes that Luke addressed time and again as he unfolded the spread of the gospel of God's kingdom in the days of the early church. Each of these themes has come up more than once in our studies and helps us to better understand the life and times of the church in Acts and the truths that remain applicable today.

THE PROMISE: THE HOLY SPIRIT UNLEASHES GOD'S POWER

Some five hundred years before the birth of Christ, a man by the name of Joel received a message from God. This message foretold a time when God would do something new and amazing. The prophet wrote, *"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh"* (Joel 2:28). At Pentecost, the Spirit of God came like a mighty rushing wind, filling those who were gathered. For a moment, God reversed the curse that he sent to confuse the language of man at the tower of Babel. Jews from the nations surrounding Jerusalem heard the disciples speaking in their own languages. That which sin had separated at Babel, the Spirit of God reunited at Pentecost. People from every tribe, language, and nation were welcomed into God's family through the death and resurrection of Christ. Through the cross of Christ, God fulfilled the promise that Abraham would be a blessing to all the nations on the earth (Genesis 12:1–3).

2. In Acts 2 we read that the Holy Spirit indwells the believers who are gathered in a room in Jerusalem. While we can't see the Holy Spirit, what is the effect, or fruit, that we then see in the lives of the disciples?

On the day of Pentecost, the promised Holy Spirit was poured out on these disciples and set the church on fire as a result. Throughout the rest of Acts we find regular ordinary people, like you and me, doing great things for Christ as he gives them power through the activity of the Holy Spirit. As we study Acts, we find that the things which were done could not be done by man alone. They required God's power. The same powerful activity of the Spirit is intended to mark our community as we seek to do mighty things for Christ. We are a community of ordinary people that God wants to set on fire to do the mission He has called us to. ²

3. The baptism and gifts of the Holy Spirit were given to every one of the 120 Christians who were together that day. This is a reminder that God empowers His people no matter gender, age, or position. What gifts has God given you to use to further His kingdom? In what ways are you using these gifts at this time?

"The Lord is pleased to pour His Spirit upon believers who are living in unity.... It was the believers' great unity that enabled the spread of the gospel."³

4. As believers we, too, have received the gift of the Holy Spirit at the moment of our conversion. What advice would you give someone who professes a relationship with Jesus but shows little change or few signs that point to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit?

"We pray for the privilege of reliving the book of Acts in our time—a massive outpouring of the Spirit, so that the Word runs like lightning through the church out into the world to change the face of our generation. ⁴

5. In what ways or areas should a church seek for the Holy Spirit to refresh, equip, and move people to fulfill the mission that God has for them? How does He go about accomplishing this?

² Commentary on Acts entitled "The Best Acts Commentary Money Can Buy" by Pastor Tim Badal; Village Publishers 2018

³ R. Kent Hughes, Acts: The Church Afire (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1996), 27, 70.

⁴ Quote by Ray Ortlund Jr. reproduced by Permission of Founders Press from Dear Timothy, edited by Thomas Ascol (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2004), 351.

THE PEOPLE: GOD UNITES HIS PEOPLE

Fellowship is at the heart of Luke's portrait of the church. Its importance is shown by the prominence it is given in his summaries. Of the fourteen verses in Acts 2:43-47; 4:32-35; 5:12-16, six deal with fellowship, three with the Apostles' ministry of witness and its supportive signs, and five with the impact of the Spirit's work on those outside the church. This is not to say that fellowship is more important than apostolic teaching and witness, but it does show that the church's life is more than preaching, and that the church's internal relationships affect its external testimony. Although fellowship is a familiar piece of Christian jargon, we should not assume that we know what Luke means by the term.

As the New Testament speaks of it, fellowship is deep, virile, and costly; too often today it is cheap and superficial. The higher we value our personal privacy and freedom from commitments, the shallower our grasp of fellowship will be—reduced to the moments of idle chitchat over steamed coffee before or after a worship service. Luke corrects our cheapened concept of fellowship. He uses the word [*koinonia*] only in Acts 2:42, but he offers a clue to its significance by using the related adjective close at hand: *"All the believers...had everything in common [koinos]"* (v.44 NIV).

The focus of fellowship is on what believers have in common with one another, what we share with one another, putting to practice the truth that we are woven together as members of one body. Often in the New Testament, [*koinonia*] has financial overtones (as it does here), expressing a willingness to share tangible, material resources with other members of God's family.⁵

6. In Acts 2 we see that fellowship began with a devotion of the people. What things keep people from enjoying true and deep fellowship as the early church did? In what ways can a church help its members with this devotion?

7. Why should believers be willing to help other believers—even to the point of giving away their money and possessions? How do we balance what we need to keep for ourselves and what we give to others?

⁵ The Message of Acts" by Dennis Johnson page 73. ISBN # 978-0- 87552-235-7. P&R Publishing

8. Lost to our society is the gift of hospitality. While we have the means and space to do it, gathering together to share a meal is happening less and less often. What is causing this trend and how can a church begin to reverse it?

THE PREACHING: SHARING THE GOSPEL BOLDLY TO ALL

Today, people have different views about preaching and the role of preaching in the church. At one end of the spectrum, some feel it is a thing of the past—an antiquated form of communication that won't connect with people today. Then, at the other end of the spectrum, there are those who feel that preaching is central to the life of the church and that a recovery of true preaching is one of the greatest needs in our day. Any Bible-believing church lands at this end of the spectrum. Christians are people who love preaching and believe that it plays a central role in any church. The preaching of God's Word has always played an important role in our understanding of the church and our mission together. The reason we value preaching is that we see in the Scriptures how God values preaching. One of the clearest places to see this is recorded in the book of Acts. About 20 percent of the entire book is composed of sermons by various people, and these sermons play a major part of the book and they teach us today about the priority that preaching should have in our churches.⁶

9. What things can tempt pastors to stray from teaching the Word? How has culture impacted the preaching ministry within the local church?

“By preaching, the Church of Christ was first gathered together and founded, and by preaching, it has ever been maintained in health and prosperity. By preaching, sinners are awakened. By preaching, inquirers are led on. By preaching, saints are built up. By preaching, Christianity is being carried to the heathen world.”⁷

⁶ Commentary on Acts entitled “The Best Acts Commentary Money Can Buy” by Pastor Tim Badal; Village Publishers 2018

⁷ J. C. Ryle, Mark (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 20.

10. In what ways does Biblical preaching and teaching bring health and vitality to a church? When has God used the Biblical teaching to change you? What about the teaching or teacher brought the change?

Isaiah 55:11 says, *“So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.”*

It’s not our responsibility to change people’s hearts. It’s not our responsibility to make them believe what the Bible says. Our responsibility is to share the truth with people; it’s the Holy Spirit’s work to convince them of that truth. God has given us the powerful words of Scripture for our good and to share with those around us. Peter’s sermon defended the ministry of the new church and the ministry of the Spirit with the Bible, and we should do that today as well.⁸

11. God calls some men to preach, but does that mean the rest are excluded from proclaiming Christ to others? Where are you preaching and proclaiming Christ? What things are necessary for us to be powerful witnesses for Christ to the lost world around us?

PERSECUTION: WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH, THE TOUGH GET GOING

When persecution comes, the church should pull together. Verse 24 says, *“When they heard it, they lifted their voice together.”* You can almost feel them, together as one group. They’re stronger together. We as a church are stronger together than any solitary individual.

We can do things together that we can’t do by ourselves. When we worship together, it’s special. You can worship alone—you can sing in the shower—and God receives glory in that. But there’s something special about being together. There’s something special about praying together, casting our cares on God in corporate prayer. Jesus said, *“Wherever two or three are gathered in My name, there I am in the midst of them”* (Matthew 18:20). And it was this sort of togetherness that we see in this group in Acts 4. You can almost feel their excitement in the face of great persecution. When I come to church and I’m struggling with something in my life, hearing Tim open the Word of God causes me to think, *“I’m with him. He and I are on the same*

⁸ Sermon by Jeremy Anderson Entitled “The Truth Is” found @<http://www.villagebible.org/sugar-grove/resources/sermons/the-truth-is/>

team.” That fires me up. And when I arrive at church, I see Mike out in the parking lot—who’s facing cancer yet still serving—and I think, “He’s on my team. I’m on his team. We’re together in this thing.” No matter where we are with all our different situations, we can come together as a church—and together, we’re stronger than when we’re alone.

The church in Acts was together in the face of real persecution. As they prayed together, they were fired up. I could go on and on about how my faith is bolstered by others. We get together in small groups and there are people raising kids the same age as mine, so I’m reminded that the Lord is with me and that it’s all about Him. When I’m alone I feel weaker. Together we’re the church and the gates of hell will not prevail against us (Matthew 16:18). **We can stand under persecution when the church pulls together.**⁹

12. What good comes from God allowing His people to experience persecution?

13. How can being an active part of a church empower you to endure trials and tribulations more effectively? When have you seen this to be true in your own life?

“Acts is a great book! It describes the most exciting phase in the history of the church.... There is a freshness and vitality running through Acts that makes it a favorite book for churches to study together as they long to be the kind of people God wants them to be.”¹⁰

14. What have you enjoyed most from this study of the book of Acts? What have you been challenged by most from this study thus far? What are you looking forward to as we pick up Acts this fall?

⁹ Sermon by Steve Lombardo entitled Persecution found @ <http://www.villagebible.org/sugar-grove/resources/sermons/?page=3&series>

¹⁰ Chris Green, *The Word of His Grace* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 9.

Note: This study guide was compiled by and questions were written by Pastor Tim Badal, Village Bible Church. www.villagebible.org/smallgroups