

Witnesses of the Faith (1)

A Study of The Acts of the Apostles

Date:	
(7/3)	Lesson 1 (Acts 1) “You Will Be My Witnesses”
(7/17)	Lesson 2 (Acts 2:1-41) “Men of Israel, Hear These Words”
(7/24)	Lesson 3 (Acts 2:42-47) Day by Day
(7/31)	Lesson 4 (Acts 3) “Repent Therefore, and Turn Back”
(8/7)	Lesson 5 (Acts 4:1-31) “We Cannot But Speak”
(8/14)	Lesson 6 (Acts 4:32-5:11) Of One Heart and Soul
(8/21)	Lesson 7 (Acts 5:12-42) “We Must Obey God Rather Than Men”
(8/28)	Lesson 8 (Acts 6:1-7) “Pick Out From Among You Seven Men”
(9/4)	Lesson 9 (Acts 6:8-7:60) Stephen, Full of Grace and Power
(9/11)	Lesson 10 (Acts 8) Those Who Were Scattered
(9/18)	Lesson 11 (Acts 9:1-22) “Saul, Why Are You Persecuting Me?”
(9/25)	Lesson 12 (Acts 9:23-43) Preaching Boldly in the Name of Jesus

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• Lesson 1 (Acts 1) • “You Will Be My Witnesses”

Acts 1 documents the last words of the risen Lord Jesus Christ before his ascension into heaven. Last words are significant, aren't they? Last words are typically chosen carefully. Can you imagine hearing Jesus' last words? Having spent so much time with his apostles, what words would he choose before his departure from them? Having conquered death itself, how would he bring his time with them to a close? What final thought would he want them to remember for the rest of their lives? Answer: **“You will be my witnesses.”**

A Bit of Background

The Acts of the Apostles begins by pointing our focus backwards.

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach... (1:1)

The author is Luke, most likely the “beloved physician” referenced by Paul in Colossians 4:14. Luke's occasional use of “we” indicates that he was a companion of Paul on some of his “missionary” journeys (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16). In his letter to the Colossians, Paul indicates that Luke was a Gentile. In Colossians 4:7-11, he lists “the only men of the circumcision” (Jews) who were among his “fellow workers for the kingdom of God.” Paul then goes on to list other names—including that of Luke—who were also struggling with him for the sake of the gospel (4:12-14; see also Philemon 24). There was even a time during his final imprisonment in Rome when Paul would write, “Luke alone is with me” (2 Tim 4:11).

Luke addresses this book to Theophilus, a man whose Greek name means “friend of God” or “lover of God.” The fact that Luke addresses him as “most excellent” (Luke 1:3)—sometimes used as a title for a person of rank (Acts 23:26; 24:3)—has led some to speculate that Theophilus may have held some position of authority.

The “first book” that Luke references in Acts 1:1 is The Gospel According to Luke. “Having followed all things closely for some time past,” Luke had written “an orderly account” of “the things that had been accomplished among us” so that Theophilus could have “certainty” concerning the things he had been taught about Jesus of Nazareth (Luke 1:1-4). Luke's Gospel ends and The Acts of the Apostles begins on “the day when [Jesus] was taken up” (Acts 1:2).



“He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days.” (Acts 1:3)

Post-Resurrection Encounters with Jesus

- Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9-11; John 20:11-18)
- Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (Matt 28:1-10)
- Two men on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35)
- Cephas (1 Cor 15:5)
- The disciples (Luke 24:36-49; John 20:19-29)
- Seven disciples by the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-23)
- More than 500 brothers at one time (1 Cor 15:6)
- James (1 Cor 15:7)
- The eleven on a mountain in Galilee (Matt 28:16-20)
- The eleven in Jerusalem (Mark 16:14-18)
- The ascension (Acts 1:3-11)
- Stephen (Acts 7:54-60)
- Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:1-9; 1 Cor 15:8)
- John (Rev 1:9-20)

⇒ Beginning with Acts 1:1-2, we will run across the word “apostle” quite frequently in Acts. What was an apostle? Acts 1:21-22 may prove helpful.

⇒ Of all the ways Luke could summarize Jesus’ teaching over the course of nearly six weeks, he uses a simple phrase—“the kingdom of God.” After Jesus’ ascension, this idea continues to be spread (Acts 8:12; 14:21-22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 30-31). Why? In contrast to the earthly examples readily available to an inhabitant of the first century, what were Jesus and his messengers talking about? And perhaps most importantly, how was this kingdom different?

And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” (Acts 1:4-5)

Jesus had reassured his disciples, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth.” (John 14:15-17)

- “He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” (John 14:26)
- “When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father... he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness.” (John 15:26-27)
- “When he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.” (John 16:8)
- “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.” (John 16:13)

Our English word *baptism* is from the Greek word *baptizo*, which literally means “to dip, sink, immerse, or plunge.” As we read Acts we will find many examples of men and women being immersed in water “for the forgiveness of” their sins. How was what Jesus was promising in Acts 1:4-5 different? In what way would this be a “baptism” and what would it do to the apostles?



⇒ “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (1:6)
What does this question tell us about the apostles?

⇒ On the other hand, Jesus tells them, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (1:8). What does it mean for someone to serve as a witness?



“And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight” (1:9).

For an interesting complement to this earth-bound view of Jesus’ ascension into heaven, check out Daniel’s vision of the Ancient of Days and the son of man who comes to him in Daniel 7:9-14.

⇒ “And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven’” (1:10-11). What should we make of this promise? Does it involve us? If so, in what way?

⇒ The eleven apostles are listed as being together in an upper room, along with “the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers” (1:12-14). John 7:1-5 documents that Jesus’ brothers had not believed in him. By this point in Acts 1, these brothers are in “one accord” with the others, “devoting themselves to prayer.” Here’s the question: what changed their mind about Jesus?

⇒ Carefully read Peter’s words to the group of about 120 people in Acts 1:15-20. The apostles had been firsthand eyewitnesses of what Judas did to Jesus. What do Peter’s words to the group tell us about how Jesus’ disciples have come to process (or been led to process over the course of the last 40 days by Jesus himself) what had happened in Jerusalem?



On the topic of “casting lots” (1:26), R.C.H. Lenski writes in his commentary on Acts, “Probably two marks, each with one name on it, were placed into a vessel which was shaken so hard that one flew out. This one indicated the choice. The custom of casting lots in this way was very ancient; dating back to Homer” (54). The land of Canaan had been divided and assigned to the different tribes by lot (Num 26:55). The guilt of Achan was determined by lot (Josh 7:14). Saul, first king of Israel, was selected by lot (1 Sam 10:20-21). The same method was used to determine which of two goats would serve as the “scapegoat” (Lev 16:8). Proverbs 16:33 even says, “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.” Other than the Roman soldiers who cast lots for the garments of Jesus (John 19:23-24), this is the only instance of the use of lots in the New Testament.

⇒ **THOUGHT QUESTION:** Why was it important that someone be selected to bring the number of apostles back up to twelve?

A-C-T-S made personal

Based on my study of Acts 1:



A - doration: God is worthy of my **praise** because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture reminded me to **evaluate**...

T - rust: my **faith** in my Savior has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...