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Acts

church on the edge

PART ONE



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Acts

church on the edge

PART ONE



by Cathie Brassler
and Micki Hilbrand


**FAITH
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Christian Resources

Grand Rapids, Michigan

*“You will be my witnesses . . .
to the ends of the earth.”*

—Acts 1:8

We are grateful for the many comments and helpful suggestions of interested small groups and leaders who contributed to the development of this study.

In this study of Acts the lessons are written by Cathie Brassler, and the Break Away (at-home readings) are written by Micki Hilbrand.

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Printed in the United States of America.

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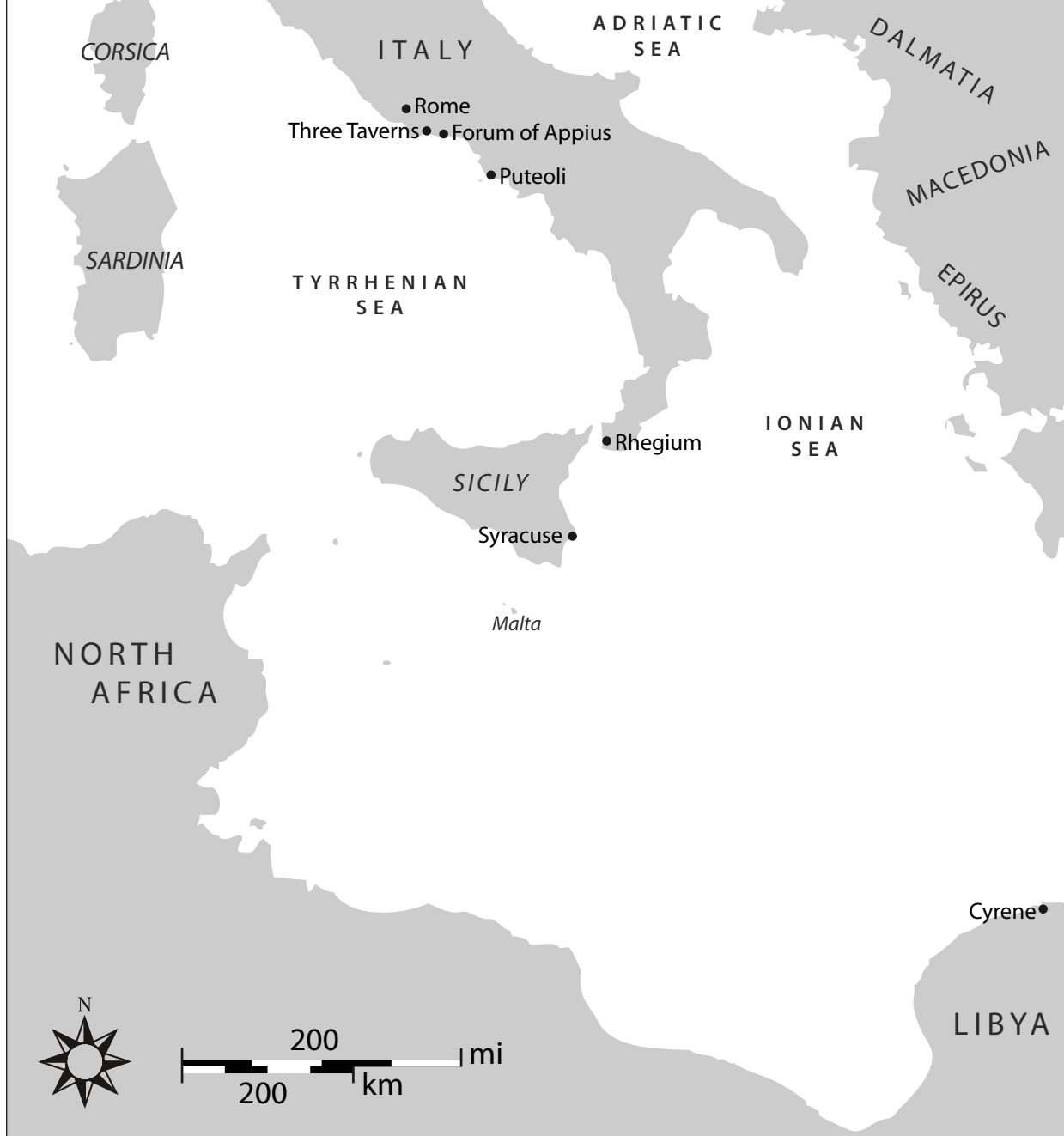
ISBN 978-1-59255-527-7

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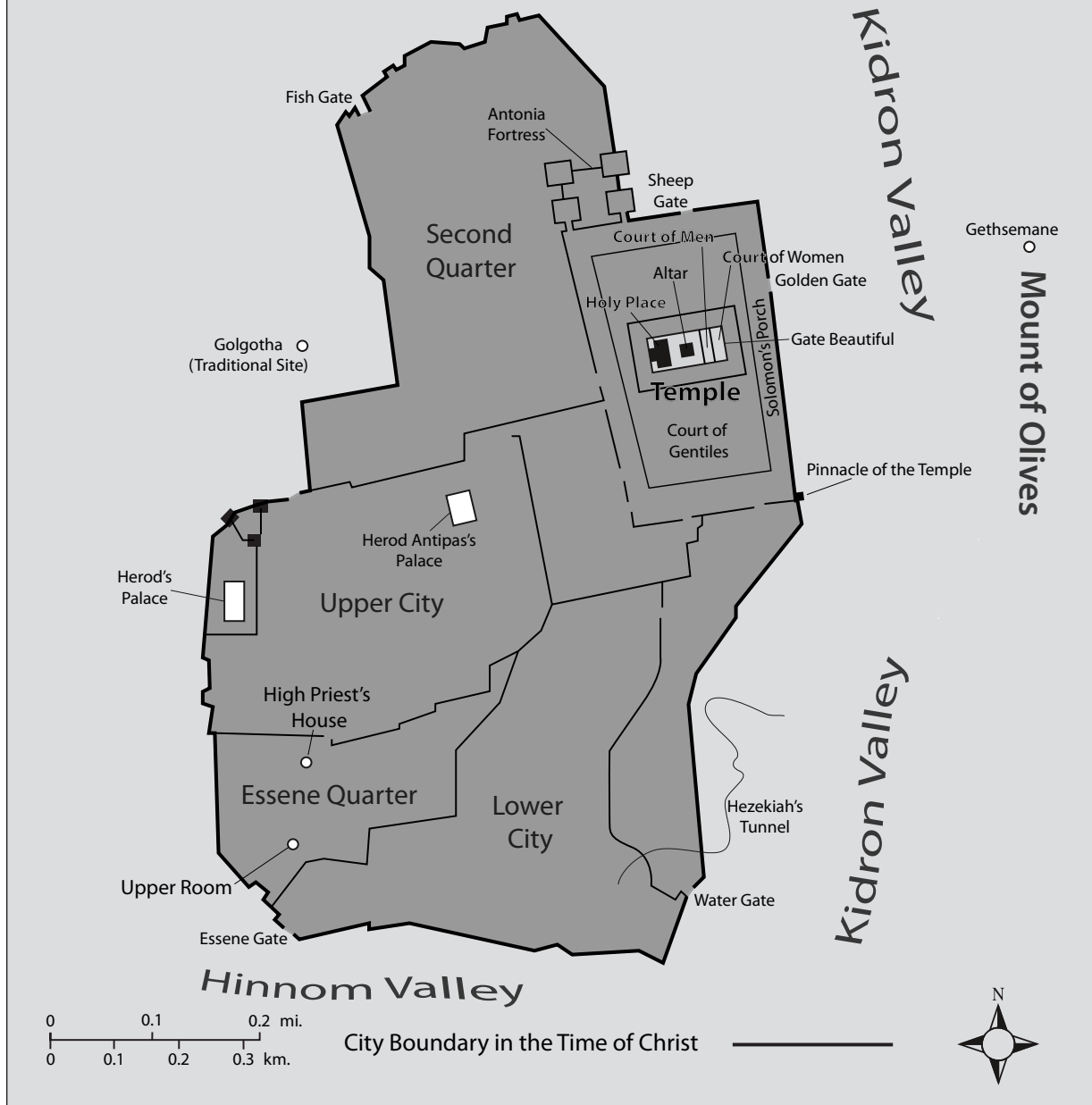
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The World of the Early Church (First Century A.D.)





Jerusalem in Jesus and the Apostles' Day



Glossary

Abraham—father of the Jewish people (Israel), renowned for his faith in God’s promises (Gen. 12:1-7; 15:6; Heb. 11:8-16). Also called “the father of all who believe” in Christ (Rom. 4:11).

angels—supernatural beings created by God to be messengers, to carry out God’s will in this world, and to serve and care for all who belong to God (Ps. 91:11-12).

apostle—“one sent forth”; refers to a messenger sent on a special mission. The New Testament apostles were leaders in the early Christian church; they were specially chosen by Jesus to be his witnesses (Mark 3:13-19; Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8, 21-25; 9:1-15; 1 Cor. 9:1-2).

baptism, baptize—the act of sprinkling with or immersion in water as a sign of God’s claim on a person’s life to be part of the covenant family of God. Baptism is an outward sign that Christ’s blood washes the believer clean of the guilt of sin.

blasphemy—scoffing at or misusing the name of God.

Christ—see **Jesus Christ, Messiah**.

circumcision—removal of the male foreskin. God commanded Abraham and his descendants to do this as a sign that they belonged to God and as a symbol of the cutting away of sin from their lives (Gen. 17). In the New Testament circumcision is replaced with baptism in

Christ. True circumcision is of the heart, not the flesh (Jer. 4:4; Col. 2:9-12).

covenant—a mutually binding agreement between two parties. In the Old Testament God made covenants with his chosen people Israel in which he promised to be their God, and they pledged to be faithful to him. These agreements form the basis of their relationship with God.

David—Israel’s greatest king in the Old Testament. The Lord promised that one of David’s descendants would rule faithfully on his throne forever (2 Sam. 7). As Matthew 1 shows, Jesus Christ is that “Son of David.”

disciple—a follower; one who is taught. This term refers commonly to followers to Jesus.

faith—defined in Hebrews 11:1 as “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” Can be defined in simple terms as “belief and trust.” True saving faith is a gift that consists of knowledge and confidence—a sure knowledge by which we accept as true all that God has revealed in his Word, and confidence that all our sins are forgiven for Jesus’ sake.

fast (fasting)—ancient religious practice in which people go without food and/or water for set periods; in the Jewish tradition fasting was often accompanied by prayer to God for help in a time of great need (see 2 Chron. 20:2-4).

the Father—the first person of the Trinity. The other two persons are God the Son (Jesus Christ) and God the Holy Spirit. They are three persons in one being.

flog—to beat with a rod or whip.

Gentiles—all people who are not Jews.

good news—see **gospel**.

gospel—literally means “good news” and refers to the message of God’s salvation from sin and the promise of eternal life through Christ.

grace—God’s undeserved favor and forgiving love. Jesus is the full expression of God’s grace for the salvation of all who believe in him as Lord and Savior (Eph. 2:8-10).

holy—pure; set apart to bring glory to God.

Holy Spirit—the third person of the Trinity. The other two persons are God the Father and God the Son (Jesus Christ). They are three persons in one being. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, works true faith in our hearts, and empowers us to live holy lives. The Spirit’s presence in our hearts guarantees that we will receive God’s promises (John 16:7-15; Rom. 8:11; Eph. 1:13-14).

hope—in combination with faith this means looking ahead in solid trust to the fulfillment of all God’s promises (Heb. 7:19; 11:1).

idols—anything worshiped or honored ahead of or in place of God. Idolatry can mean bowing down to a physical image of a god; it can also mean allowing one’s possessions or desires to become more important than God.

Isaac—Abraham and Sarah’s son, who inherited all the promises God made with Abraham.

Isaiah—a Hebrew prophet from around 700 B.C. who foretold the coming of Christ (Messiah) and described his service and suffering.

Jacob—Isaac’s son whom God renamed Israel (Gen. 32:28) and who became the patriarch of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Jerusalem—Israel’s historic capital city. As the location for God’s temple, it became the center for the Jewish religion and the spiritual headquarters of the nation of Israel.

Jesus Christ—the sinless Son of God, who gave his life as the payment for our sin. *Jesus* means “Savior,” and *Christ* means “Anointed One.” He is the second person of the Trinity. The other two persons are God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. They are three persons in one being. See also **Messiah**.

Jews—the people of Israel, descendants of Abraham; God’s special people chosen to be a blessing to all other nations (Gen. 12:2-3).

justified—declared forgiven and righteous by God through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Those who are justified are not merely pardoned: the demands of the law have been fully met through the atoning work of Christ.

kingdom of God—God’s rule over all things, especially evident in the lives of his people, who follow Jesus and believe in him as Savior.

last days—generally considered to be the period ranging from the time of the Messiah’s (Jesus’) birth until his second coming (see Acts 2:17).

law—(the law of Moses) the Ten Commandments and hundreds of ceremonial and social laws given by God to the nation of Israel and prescribed in Genesis through Deuteronomy.

the Law and the Prophets—the teachings of the Old Testament. See **Scriptures**.

Levites—descendants of Jacob’s son Levi. God set aside this tribe to be priests, to care for the house of God, to attend to the details of worship, and to teach the Israelites God’s ways. They continued in this role until Jesus fulfilled all the requirements of the law and the ceremonial laws were no longer necessary (see Heb. 7-10).

lots (casting lots)—a method of decision making that involves throwing or choosing objects in order to know God’s will. Lots approved by God for use in ancient Israel were the Urim and Thummim (Ex. 28:30).

Messiah—the promised deliverer of God’s people. Both the Hebrew word *Messiah* and the Greek word *Christ* mean “Anointed One.” Through the prophets God promised to send the Messiah, the Savior-King, to deliver his people from oppressors and to rule in righteousness forever. The people misunderstood those promises, however, and looked for a Messiah who would be a political ruler and gather an army to rout all physical enemies (see John 6:15; Acts 1:6). But as Jesus revealed through his work and teaching, the Messiah came to save God’s people from the oppression of sin and death and to give them new life forever with God. He rules today in heaven at the right hand of the Father, and when he comes again at the end of time, he

will fully establish God’s everlasting kingdom of righteousness on earth. (See Matt. 26:63-64; John 16:5-16; 1 Cor. 15; Rev. 21:1-5; 22:1-5.)

Moses—the Old Testament prophet who led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and brought them to the promised land of Canaan. During his leadership Moses received from God and taught Israel the laws that would govern them as God’s chosen people.

Nazareth—a small town in the province of Galilee where Jesus grew up.

Passover—This feast took place each spring to celebrate the Israelites’ exodus from slavery in Egypt. The name commemorates God’s protection of Israelite households during a final plague sent to convince the Egyptian king (pharaoh) to let the Israelites go. God promised that upon seeing the blood of a sacrificed lamb on the doorframes of a house, God would *pass over* that house and not allow the plague of death to take the life of the firstborn there (see Ex. 12). The feast pointed to our ultimate deliverance from sin through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God (John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7; Rev. 5). All Jewish men were required to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem, bringing their families from all over the Roman Empire.

Pentecost—the first day of the Festival of Weeks, this was the fiftieth day (Pentecost) after the Feast of Passover; it was also called “the day of firstfruits” (Num. 28:26), in which people brought a thank offering of new grain to the Lord, the firstfruits of their harvest. For this yearly festival people gathered in Jerusa-

lem from all the Jewish communities scattered around the Roman Empire and beyond (see Acts 2:9-11).

Pharisees—one of three main religious sects at the time of Christ and the apostles. The other two groups were the Sadducees and Essenes. Pharisees emphasized precise obedience to scriptural and traditional law. A number of Pharisees were part of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council.

Pilate—Roman governor of Judea to whom the Jews brought Jesus for sentencing.

priests—see **Levites**.

proconsul—governor of a Roman province.

prophet—someone who speaks God’s message (see Deut. 18:17-19); generally a person who preached God’s Word and (in some cases) foretold the future as revealed by the Lord.

repent—to turn back to God out of sorrow for sin.

righteous—considered right with God. As God’s people, we are called to be righteous and are credited with Christ’s righteousness: we are made right with God through Jesus’ death and given the ability to live in right relationships with others through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 3:21-26).

Righteous One—another name for Jesus Christ.

Sabbath—the seventh day of the week (Saturday), set aside as a day of rest and restoration according to the law of Moses.

Sadducees—one of three main religious sects in Jesus’ day. They recognized only the five books of Moses as the law of God and did not

believe in spirits, angels, resurrection, or life after death. See also **Pharisees**.

Sanhedrin—the ruling council of the Jews, made up of seventy-one officials including Pharisees, Sadducees, leading elders, legal experts, and priests.

Satan—this name means “accuser” (see Zech. 3:1) and refers to the fallen angel who tempted humanity to sin and wants to destroy God’s kingdom.

Scriptures—the Jewish Scriptures, which today make up the Old Testament part of the Bible. As a whole, these Scriptures are sometimes called “the Law and the Prophets” in the New Testament (Matt. 22:40; Rom. 3:21), and they consist of the Law (*Torah*, Pentateuch, first five books [of Moses]: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) and books known as “the Prophets” (Joshua through Kings; Isaiah through Malachi) as well as “the Writings” (remaining books of history, poetry, songs, and wisdom literature).

sin—disobedience to God; refers to breaking God’s law (1 John 3:4).

Spirit (Holy Spirit)—see **Holy Spirit**.

synagogue—a place where local Jews gathered for religious instruction, worship, and prayer. A synagogue could be organized if a Jewish community had a minimum of ten men.

temple—the religious center of Judaism in the Old Testament and in Jesus’ day. Located in Jerusalem, it was the place of worship and sacrifice, the site of major Jewish festivals, and the gathering place of religious thinkers, teachers, and leaders.

How to Use This Study

This Bible study aims to help people engage in lively discussion and learning without having studied the text before doing each lesson together.

Map, Glossary

Near the front of this booklet are maps and a glossary that can be useful for locating places and the meanings of terms mentioned in the book of Acts. Use the map on pages 4-5 to trace the earliest missionary journeys!

Questions for Discussion

The main questions for discussion are numbered and are in bold print. Along with these questions you'll find points "to think about as you discuss" to help spark ideas for responding to each main question. In addition, you'll often see questions that help to connect the story to everyday life under the subheading "What does this mean to me?"

Please do not feel you have to answer every question in the lesson material. Our goal is to help make Bible study a creative, flexible, exploratory exercise in which you engage with your group and grow to know God and each other better.

Follow-up Ideas

At the end of each lesson are Explore! ideas that you might like to use for follow-up. These include

activities that can help you learn more about items of interest related to the lesson and apply your learning to everyday life. There are also music and video suggestions.

Break Away (at-home readings)

After the study material for each lesson you'll find readings for use at home. Take a break with God and do some thinking about the lesson material and how the Lord can use it to shape your life. If you like, clip these pages out and set them in places around your home or at work where they can remind you to spend time with God. You might also like to memorize some of the Scriptures used in these pieces.

An Invitation and Prayer of Commitment

If you're searching for a relationship with God, or studying with a friend who is searching, see An Invitation (to believe and commit to God) and a Prayer of Commitment provided at the back of this booklet. These can be helpful in talking one-to-one with God or with someone who is ready to make a faith commitment to God.

Leader's Notes

At the Faith Alive website page featuring this Bible study—see www.FaithAliveResources.org, search for "Acts: Church on the Edge," and click

on the link to “Leader’s Notes”—you’ll find tips for leading this small group study.

We wish you God’s blessing as you participate in Bible study together. Have fun as you learn and grow closer to God and one another!

Introduction

The book of Acts picks up where the story of Jesus and his followers leaves off in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. As the narrative continues, we discover what happens

- as Jesus goes to the Father (John 16:7; Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9-11),
- as the Holy Spirit comes to Jesus' followers (Acts 1:8; 2:1-41),
- and as the church forms and spreads.

Acts presents the new community of the church in its finest hour—facing struggles and often under attack, but unstoppable with the incredible power and living presence of the Holy Spirit.

The book of Acts was written by Luke, a Greek physician (see Col. 4:14), around A.D. 60-62. Acts is a sequel to Luke's first book, the gospel of Luke, one of the gospel ("good news") accounts that give us the story of Jesus' life and mission. (Note the opening lines in both Luke and Acts, referring to a "Theophilus"; Acts 1:1-3 summarizes what is written in the earlier book;

early Christian writers from the first and second centuries are unanimous in saying Luke is the writer of Luke and Acts.)

We aren't told how Luke became a believer in Jesus, but we do know that he traveled with Paul on some of his missionary journeys. Paul mentions Luke in some of his letters to churches that they planted (Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philemon 24), and in the second part of Acts, the writer sometimes uses "we" and "us," describing events from his own perspective, showing that he was with Paul during those episodes (see Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:19; 27:1-28:16).

In this study we will gain a glimpse into the events and personalities that make up the history of the early church, especially as the Spirit of God works through believers in Christ to bring the good news of God's love and salvation "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8; see John 3:16).

Before you begin . . .

Think of something in your lifetime that began very small but then grew rapidly and took the world by storm (a fad, new technology, political movement, other?). Why did it have such a great influence?

Lesson 1

Anticipation

Acts 1

I picked my young kids up from school one Friday afternoon and told them to pack an overnight bag; we were going on a “surprise ride.” At home I heard excitement in their voices as they opened and closed drawers and closet doors to gather their gear.

Back in the car, they were surprisingly quiet, looking for clues as we got onto the freeway and headed north. The anticipation grew as we put miles behind us. Just when they thought they couldn’t stand it any longer, they spotted the gigantic sign of a well-known theme park. Shouts of joy and excitement rang out as they realized where we were going. As they recall that day now, the kids laugh about the excitement of the unknown and how much they enjoyed the anticipation that day.

In Acts 1 we find Jesus’ followers anticipating the mysterious gift he had promised them. Obediently they suspended “business as usual” and gathered in Jerusalem to wait for this gift, without much of an idea of what it would look like.

Opener (optional)

Share an experience of anticipation that has made an unforgettable impact on your life.

EPISODE 1

Acts 1:1-5

1. What do we learn about Jesus in these opening verses of Acts?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- some of the “convincing proofs” (see Luke 24; John 20-21)
- what it might have been like to be with Jesus at this time
- what Jesus’ followers (disciples, apostles) were expecting

See **glossary** for info about **disciples** and **apostles**.

Wouldn't You Be Staring?

In Acts 1:3 the original Greek text for “appeared to them” is *optanomenos autois*, which literally means “being seen by them.” Our word *ophthalmologist* (“eye doctor”) comes from the same Greek root. Scholars suggest that the use of this word means Jesus was being “eyeballed,” “stared at,” or “scrutinized” by his followers. If your friend and teacher was crucified and came back to life and now stood before your very eyes, wouldn't you be staring too? The disciples weren't the only ones who stared at Jesus. According to 1 Corinthians 15:6 Jesus appeared to more than 500 eyewitnesses after his resurrection.

2. What did Jesus command the disciples to do, and why?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- the “gift” the Father promised
- baptism with water, baptism with the Holy Spirit (see Matt. 28:19-20; Luke 3:16; 24:46-49)

Acts 1:6-8

3. How does Jesus' view of the kingdom compare to that of the disciples?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- the apostles' hope and expectation (compare with John 6:15; 19:12-15; see also Matt. 20:20-28)
- Jesus' response (see also Mark 1:15; Luke 11:20; 13:18-21; 17:20-21; John 18:36-37)

Baptism

In shipping terms, a ship that is sunk is “baptized,” meaning saturated, overcome, filled. How does this image help us when we think about baptism with the Holy Spirit?

In Luke 3:16, John the Baptist says, “I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

When the early Christians spoke of being baptized with the Holy Spirit, they had these things in mind:

- the Holy Spirit gradually changes believers to be like Jesus (2 Cor. 3:18).
- The Holy Spirit fills believers with his presence, giving them power to do God's will, immersing them in the thinking, values, and character of Jesus (Acts 2:4).
- Baptism is also a symbol of being cleansed in Christ (Acts 22:16; 1 Cor. 6:11), and immersion is a symbol of dying and rising with Christ (Rom. 6:3-4).

4. How did Jesus assure the disciples that they would receive the Holy Spirit? How would they be involved?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- the vastness of the mission, and how that might affect the apostles
- what it means to be a witness (see Isa. 43:10-12)

What does this mean to me?

- Where is your Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria . . . ?

Acts 1:9-11

5. Picture and describe what happened next. How do you think this affected the disciples that day? Why was this event important?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- who the “men dressed in white” were (see Matt. 28:1-3; Luke 24:4; John 20:12), how they explained this event, and the promise they mentioned
- why it was good that Jesus went away (see John 16:7-15)

Witness, Martyr?

Our word *witness* comes from an Old English word, *wit*, meaning “knowledge.” A witness is someone who can give testimony based on knowledge.

The Greek word that is translated as “witnesses” in Acts 1:8 is *martyres*, from which our word “martyr” comes. **What does this add to our understanding of Jesus’ declaration that we will be his witnesses?**

A Handy Outline

The itinerary Jesus establishes becomes the outline for the book of Acts:

- Jerusalem—Acts 1-7
- Judea and Samaria—Acts 8-12
- the ends of the earth—Acts 13-28



View of the Mount of Olives today as seen from the temple mount in Jerusalem.

What does this mean to me?

- Have you ever found yourself awestruck by a situation or event? What were you feeling? What got you moving again?
- Reflect on some of your favorite promises from God. Describe one and explain how it helps you.

EPISODE 2

Acts 1:12-14

7. What do these verses tell us about Jesus' followers and what they did after Jesus ascended?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- the apostles' activities as they returned to Jerusalem (see also Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:4)
- age, gender, and other characteristics of the group members
- the fact that some were Jesus' family members (see also Matt. 27:55-61; Mark 3:20-21, 31-35; 6:1-6; Luke 23:49; John 7:1-10)

Digging Deeper

The following Scriptures help to explain more about Jesus' ascension:

- Romans 8:31-39
- Ephesians 1:18-23; 2:6; 4:7-16
- Philippians 2:5-11
- Hebrews 1:1-4; 12:2
- Revelation 5

Apostle Trivia

Not only did several of the apostles have the same first name (Simon, James, Judas—see Luke 6:13-16), but one of them was called “Simon the Zealot.”

What was a zealot? In the apostles' day this term referred to someone who had great zeal for the Jewish law and the kingship of God, and who may have belonged to a revolutionary political party that wanted to overthrow the Roman rule in Israel. Though he wouldn't have remained part of that group, Simon the Zealot probably kept his “nickname” to avoid being confused with Simon Peter (see Matt. 4:18; Luke 5:8; John 1:40-42).

Acts 1:15-22

8. What was the apostles' motivation in replacing Judas? What was their main purpose as Jesus' followers?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- Peter's reasoning in verses 17 and 22
- how this connected with Jesus' statement in verse 8

9. What do these verses tell us about Judas?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- how the apostles (as his friends and coworkers) felt about and dealt with Judas's betrayal and death
- other passages about Judas's betrayal and death
 - Matthew 26:14-16; 27:1-10
 - Mark 14:10-11, 43-46
 - Luke 22:1-6, 47-48
 - John 13:18-30

Acts 1:23-26

10. What was the apostles' solution for replacing Judas?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- casting lots
- qualifications of the replacement (see Acts 1:21-22)

The Death of Judas

In Acts 1:18-19 Luke gives us a gory description of the apostle Judas's death. This account provides some additional details to the description given in Matthew 27:3-10, which explains that the chief priests bought the field on Judas's behalf after Judas, stricken with remorse, returned the "blood money" that they had paid him to betray Jesus (Matt. 27:5-6). Though Matthew doesn't say it, the place where Judas hanged himself and "fell headlong" (Acts 1:18) was apparently the same field bought with the "blood money" and named "Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood" (Acts 1:19; see Matt. 27:8).

See **glossary** for info about **lots (casting lots)**.

More to Think About

- By watching your life, who or what would people say you follow?

Explore!

- Do a character study on some of the “characters” in Acts 1. Go to the library or online and get to know some of the interesting people that spent time with Jesus, such as Peter, John, James, Mary, and the others listed in Acts 1:13-14. Find out what happened to them. What was their part in history? How did they respond to Jesus’ commission to go out and be his witnesses? Where did they end up?
- Prepare yourself to be a witness by writing out your personal testimony. Then ask God to open your eyes to opportunities to share it with others.
- On the map on pages 4-5, pencil in lines or circles where Jesus said his disciples would be his witnesses (Acts 1:8). What progression or order do you see in the pattern described by Jesus? What does this show us about the spread of the good news of salvation in Christ?

Break Away (at-home readings)

Take the Best Shortcut

Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”
—Matthew 28:18-20

Before ascending into heaven, Jesus gave instructions to his disciples in three parts. He told them to “go and make disciples . . . baptizing them . . . and teaching them.” He was also very clear about what he wanted them to teach: “everything I have commanded you.”

Where can we find these teachings today? Well, we can listen to Christian radio, go to a local church, spend time in prayer—these are all helpful in growing spiritually. But reading the Word of God is the best shortcut we can take to get to know Jesus and his teachings. The Scriptures are as relevant in our world today as when Christ walked the earth two thousand years ago.

Do you believe Jesus has “all authority,” as he stated in Matthew 28:18? This means he is the ruler of all things in heaven and on earth (Eph. 1:18-23). How can you be more obedient to the ruler of all creation this week?

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. . . .
Whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.
—James 1:22, 25

Is It a Ghost?

He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”
—Luke 24:38-39

Acts 1:3 reminds us that after his suffering, Jesus “presented himself” to his disciples “and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive.” I hate to admit that I probably wouldn’t have been able to believe my eyes if I had seen Christ’s body, alive and well, after witnessing his crucifixion. Imagine placing your fingers into the nail-pierced hands of your Savior, to feel the scars left behind, cruel reminders of the agony he endured as he hung on the cross. I want to feel more intensely the awe, the relief, the hope, and the great love the disciples must have felt when they realized Christ had been raised from the dead . . . just as he said he would be. Amazing!

Spend some time today thinking about the pain and suffering Jesus went through as he paid the price for our sin. Thank him for that. But don’t stop there. Experience also the joy of knowing that he is alive—and that he promises he will come back again!





Waiting

Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.

—Psalm 27:14

“The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”

—John 14:26

Jesus told his disciples to wait for “the gift” the Father had promised (Acts 1:4). They obediently waited, not knowing what this gift would look like. They returned to Jerusalem after Jesus ascended into heaven. While they waited, they prayed and worshiped together. On Pentecost, Jesus’ followers were rewarded for waiting when their counselor and comforter, “the Advocate, the Holy Spirit,” roared into the room and “what seemed to be tongues of fire . . . came to rest on each of them” (Acts 2:3).

There are times in our lives when we get impatient while waiting for an answer or direction from God. We want to take action and do it our way. This week, let’s practice waiting on God.

Worth So Much More

“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”

—Matthew 10:29-31

Each spring, I welcome the return of many kinds of birds that we feed in our backyard. We put out suet, birdseed, sunflower seeds, and hummingbird feeders. It’s such a pleasure to watch the different kinds of birds and to look up unfamiliar breeds in my bird book.

The migration of birds shows that our God is a God of creativity and order. He shaped the ruby-throated hummingbird to weigh less than a coin with wings that beat 60 to 80 times per *second* in normal flight. This tiny bird requires a diet of approximately its weight in nectar or sugar water each day. And yet it migrates back and forth from Canada to Central America, up to 3,200 miles. Experts claim that the ruby-throated hummingbird crosses

the Gulf of Mexico, about 525 miles, in an estimated 20 hours of non-stop flight.

When God created “every winged bird according to its kind” (Gen. 1:21), he saw that it was good. Even more, the same creative God who made the hummingbird also designed us human beings and made us in his image. And then, when we fell into sin, God showed that he also had the answer for us to be saved—through Jesus Christ.

What imagination and care there is on display for us in all of life! We truly serve an amazing God.

Strike a Match

If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

—1 John 1:7

I was touring Mammoth Cave in Kentucky a few years ago with my family. As we entered a chilly underground cavern with a high cathedral ceiling, the guide gathered our group together and turned out the lamp. We were standing in total darkness. My eyes widened but couldn't find any light. We all froze where we stood, afraid to take a step into the darkness. After a few moments, the guide lit a match. I was amazed at how much light one little match had the power to give off. All eyes were drawn to it. I breathed a sigh of relief as I felt the tension in my body release.

God wants to be our light to guide us through life. In Psalm 119:105 God's Word is compared to a lamp that lights our way, illuminating the path we need to follow. If we get ahead of the light, we will stumble and struggle, unable to find the way we need to go.

Do you have big decisions to make? Pray like the disciples did, interact with others, and read God's Word—but also wait on the Lord to show you his will for your life. Do you thirst for the truth of God's Word? Ask God to light your path so that you can find your way in this dark world.



The book of Acts picks up where the story of Jesus and his followers leaves off in the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John). As the narrative continues, we discover what happens as Jesus goes to the Father, as the Holy Spirit comes to Jesus' followers, and as the church forms and spreads.

Acts presents the new community of the church in its finest hour—facing struggles and often under attack, but unstoppable with the incredible power and living presence of the Holy Spirit.



Infuse Bible Studies aim to help people discover where faith and life meet. With these studies you can engage in lively discussion and learning without having studied the Bible before doing each lesson, and you can use these effectively for small group or personal study.

The approach to Bible study in this series emphasizes discovery (the reader discovers what the Bible has to say by asking questions and seeking answers from the passage studied). Additional insights from history and other sources help to fill in details that connect this story to the larger story of God's love and care for us all.

We hope this study stirs your heart to fully know God and the abundant life the Lord intends for us.