

WHITE MEMORIAL

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Men's Bible Study

Acts

Lesson 1

Read Acts 1-2

3 Questions:

Q1: Have you read Acts before? If you have read it before, can you write down three things to share with your discussion group? Do you know which book of the Bible it is linked to - with what book of the Bible does it share an author?

Q2: If there is a main verse - as in a thematic verse or a thesis verse of Acts, it just may be Acts 1:8. ⁸'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' In this verse Jesus is speaking. What does this verse mean to you? Why is it critically important? As you read chapter 1, is there a more important verse by your reckoning? Do we have it right, or do we have it wrong?

Further, what does this quote from Jesus - this promise and this command - have to do with the ascension of Jesus (Acts 1:9 - the very next verse after our key verse at 1:8) into heaven? Do you know what the ascension is? Ever been to an ascension service - if so what was it like?

Q3: Chapter 2. Here is where the Holy Spirit arrives on the day of Pentecost. It is a HUGE event for the early church. And it did not come without its fair share of confusion. Read 2:12 - 13 for evidence: what does this mean the people wonder? They must be drunk! This is the reaction of the crowd.

What is your reaction? How important is Pentecost for the narrative of Acts? Is the Holy Spirit essential to the success of the early church? Where would they have been without it?

3 Insights:

I1: Acts breaks into 3 major sections:

Witness in Jerusalem - Acts 1 - 8

Witness in Judea and Samaria - Acts 8 - 12

Witness to the Ends of the Earth - Acts 13 - 28

How does this breakout reflect the quote in Q2 above? It may be fair to say that Acts takes the command of Jesus at Acts 1:8 to heart and literally unfolds in the order that Jesus lays out in the first verses of the book itself. What would it mean if it didn't? Would we be here today, studying Acts, or would we know of Jesus had the earliest disciples and apostles not taken the words of Acts 1:8 to heart? What does this say about what we are supposed to be doing?

I2: From Willie Jennings, former WMPC Theologian in Residence and professor at Yale Divinity School:

"The book of Acts speaks of revolution. We must never forget this. It depicts life in the disrupting presence of the Spirit of God... [Acts] follows God on the ground, working and moving through the quotidian realities of struggle, of blood and pain, suffering and longing. [Acts] never loses sight of God or humanity, both locked in the drama of life together aiming toward life abundant."

(Jennings, Acts, 2017, WKJP page 1)

What is meant by life abundant? How does the Bible see it? How would you define it?

I3: From N.T. Wright:

“It is most significant, in light of the ascension, that the wind ‘came from heaven’ (2:2). The whole point is that, through the Spirit, some of the creative power of God himself comes from heaven to earth and does its work there. The aim is not to give people a ‘spirituality’ which will make the things of earth irrelevant. The point is to transform earth with the power of heaven, starting with those parts of ‘earth’ which consist of the bodies, minds, hearts and lives of the followers of Jesus. The coming of the Spirit at Pentecost is the complimentary fact to the ascension of Jesus into heaven. The risen Jesus in heaven is the presence, in God’s sphere, of the first part of ‘earth’ to be transformed into ‘new creation.’ In Jesus heaven and earth are thus joined. The pouring out of the Spirit on earth is the presence, in our sphere, of the heaven itself. The gift of the Spirit is thus the direct result of the ascension of Jesus.”
(Wright, Acts: 24 Studies for Individuals and Groups, 2010, IVP Connect, page 17)

3 Links to further study:

L1: The Bible Project is one of our absolute favorite Bible sites. Here is their introduction to the first 12 chapters of the Book of Acts.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CGbNw855ksw>

L2: Acts 1 and 2 have two major miraculous events: ascension and Pentecost. What is the ascension and why does it matter? N.T. Wright in I3 up above doesn’t think one makes sense without the other. See this blog by N. T. Wright:

<https://eerdword.com/2014/05/28/heaven-and-power-n-t-wright-on-jesus-ascension-part-1-of-2/>

If you really like that, here is part 2 of the blog entry about the ascension:

<https://eerdword.com/2014/05/29/heaven-and-power-n-t-wright-on-jesus-ascension-part-2-of-2/>

L3: There are thousands of paintings of Pentecost. This one caught our eye. Notice the dove. The flame. The chaos in the background. The heads of the people upon which the flames are lit. It’s inspiration comes from Acts 2:17 - from the heart of Peter’s sermon in Acts 2. If you don’t like this work of art, is there a painting or depiction which you do like?

<https://fineartamerica.com/featured/i-will-pour-out-my-spirit-on-all-my-people-marianne-gonzales-sims.html>

The painter is Marianne Gonzales, a contemporary painter in Sacramento California and from the looks of it she does a good bit of biblical art.