

Acts 1 Study and Discussion Questions

Lesson One: Pentecost and the Young Church at Jerusalem – Acts 1-5

Unless otherwise noted, all questions in this and subsequent lessons refer to the underlined Scripture references listed at the beginning of each of the five sections within the lesson (often given as readings).

Read Acts 1:1-11.

- 1) According to Acts 1:3-8 and Luke 24:44-49, what went on during the forty days between Jesus' resurrection and ascension (also skim John 20:19-21:14)? **Jesus appeared to His disciples on a number of occasions between His resurrection and ascension.** These appearances seem to have been sporadic, not a continual forty-day visit. The Acts and Luke references say that during this time, Jesus instructed His followers, explaining the meaning of the Scriptures (our Old Testament) and how they point to His person and work. Luke says He "opened their minds so they could understand." Previously, the disciples had not understood that Jesus had to die and be resurrected (John 20:9), despite His announcements. Therefore, after His resurrection, He enlightened them and also charged (commissioned) them to be His witnesses.
- 2) With what did Jesus say His disciples were not to concern themselves and what *was* to be their concern? Jesus foretold the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5). Immediately thereafter, the disciples asked a question (Acts 1:6) that reflected their expectation that the coming of the Holy Spirit immediately usher in Christ's physical (political) kingdom. Jesus redirected them, saying they were not to be concerned with discovering when prophecies would be fulfilled. Rather, they were to be concerned with what the Holy Spirit would empower them to do at the present (witnessing to their world [Acts 1:7-8]).
- 3) Before whom will you intentionally represent Jesus as His witness today? **Personal sharing**

Read Acts 1:12 – 2:47.

- 4) An alternate name for the Feast of Pentecost in the Jewish calendar is the Feast of Weeks. From Leviticus 23:4-16 (especially verses 15-16), tell how the Feast of Weeks (or Pentecost, meaning "fiftieth") got its name. **Pentecost, one of three festivals Jewish males were required to attend in Jerusalem annually, was so-named because it occurs fifty days after the Passover celebration (or seven weeks, resulting in the name "Feast of Weeks").**
- 5) According to Acts 2:6-8, were the "tongues" heard by the large crowd at Pentecost unknown "heavenly" languages or known earthly languages? **Those attending the Feast in Jerusalem recognized the "tongues" the disciples were speaking as their own native languages (therefore, known human languages). However, some believe that the disciples spoke in heavenly languages and that those attending the Feast were miraculously able to hear and understand them in their own native languages.**
- 6) Reread Acts 2:42-47.
 - a) What characterized the young church at Jerusalem? **Those in the young Jerusalem church devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching, fellowship, prayer, sharing of possessions, daily meetings in the Temple and in homes, and joyful praising of God. They experienced awe, wonder, and miraculous signs, glad and sincere hearts, the favor of all people, and many being added daily to their number (verses 43, 46-47).**
 - b) What could you begin doing to foster one of these qualities among those with whom you fellowship? **Personal sharing**

Read Acts 3.

- 7) Describe the circumstance that brought unexpected attention to Peter and John in Acts 3? **Peter and John were making a routine trip to the Temple when they encountered and healed a man who had been born crippled.**

- 8) Which verses and phrases give the immediate results of the healing? Acts 3:8 (the man jumped to his feet, walked, and praised God) and Acts 3:11 (astonishment; the people came running from all around, presumably to see what the commotion was about).
- 9) Examine Peter's second spontaneous sermon to the crowd in Acts 3:11-26 and compare it with his first spontaneous sermon in Acts 2:14-39.
- What false impression does Peter correct in each? Peter corrects the false impression that the disciples were drunk at Pentecost. Following the cripple's healing, Peter corrects the false impression that he and John had ability (in themselves) to heal.
 - What accusation does Peter make in both sermons? That the Jews killed Jesus, "the Author of Life" (3:15) and Messiah (2:23, 36)
 - What central truth(s) does Peter convey in Acts 2:31-36 and Acts 3:13-15? The truth of Christ's resurrection, exaltation by God, and Lordship.
 - What does Peter use to support his premises in both sermons (see 2:17-21, 2:25-30; 3:18-24)? The words of the prophets ("Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days." [3:24])
 - What explanation does Peter offer concerning the apostles' mindset and mission in Acts 2:32 and 3:15b? They were firsthand witnesses of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.
 - What does Peter command of his listeners (2:38 and 3:19)? Repentance
 - In these sermons, Peter directly addressed the issues that prevented his contemporaries from receiving truth about Jesus and about their need of Him. What issues prevent your contemporaries from receiving these truths (be as specific as possible)? The issues may be cultural or personal, intellectual or matters of the heart. Encourage specific responses within these. Personal sharing

Read Acts 4.

- 10) Acts 2:37-41 and 4:2-18 describe the responses of the crowd and the Jewish religious leaders to the work and words of the Holy Spirit through Peter. Which phrases summarize their responses (include the references)? The crowd was "cut to the heart and said 'what should we do?'" (2:37). "3000 were added to their number" (2:41). The Jewish religious leaders were "greatly disturbed" (4:2). "They seized Peter and John" (4:3). "But many who heard the message believed" (4:4). "They were astonished [by Peter and John's courage] and took note that these men had been with Jesus" (4:13). "[They] commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus" (4:18).
- 11) According to Acts 4:23-31, the Church responded to opposition with prayer.
- Analyze this prayer. What are its elements? Acknowledgment of God's general sovereignty in life and over all creation (verse 24), the quoting of Scripture, affirming that God's Messiah (and God's people) would be opposed (verses 25-26), acknowledgement of this opposition in recent history (verse 27), acknowledgment that the evil opposition is not outside God's power and will (verse 28), a request for boldness to stand up to the opposition (verse 29), a request for more miracles (verse 30 [the very thing that brought some to salvation also brought about the opposition the disciples were facing])
 - Why do you suppose this prayer resulted in such a powerful response (4:31) from God? One likely reason is that the disciples asked for God's will and for courage and humility to face their unpleasant circumstances in order that the Kingdom would advance. They did not ask God to remove their trials, only that He would help them face the trials boldly and bring glory to God. Additionally, the Church was young and did not yet have the New Testament writings to strengthen them in their faith. It seems that God gave many demonstrations of His presence and power in physical and miraculous ways in this place and time in history.

- 12) Write out Acts 4:12 below and try to memorize it this week. How does this verse challenge the philosophy of the world in which you live? **Personal sharing (Acts 4:12 insists that Jesus is the exclusive means to a relationship with the God of Heaven. In the post-modern, western world, the concepts of exclusivity and absolute truth have been replaced by relativism and tolerance of all viewpoints).**

Read Acts 5.

- 13) What was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira (include verses or phrases that support your answer)? Can you suggest a possible reason why God might have judged Ananias and Sapphira with such severity and immediacy (consider Acts 5:11)? **In Acts 5:3-4, Peter states that the actual amount of money for which Ananias and Sapphira sold the land was at their disposal. In other words, they had no obligation to give all of it to the Lord. The implication is that they gave a portion of it but lied and said that they had given the entire sum. According to Acts 5:8, Peter directly asked Sapphira, "Is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" Peter condemned her for answering "yes." The fragile, young church needed to understand that they could not continue experiencing the Holy Spirit's power and at the same time, grieve Him. In this instance, God's judgment was more immediate than we often experience today. Perhaps we can assume that, since God's plan was to use this relatively small (and thus, vulnerable) group of people to reach the entire world, it was critical to immediately purge them of anything that could promote decay and snuff out their witness.**
- 14) What were Gamaliel's words of wisdom to the Sanhedrin? How could you apply this wisdom to a circumstance in your life today? **According to Acts 5:38-39, Gamaliel said, "If their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God." Personal sharing**
- 15) List evidences from each chapter (Acts 1-5) that Peter emerged as the leader of the early church and then list *specific* ways that *you* can demonstrate leadership within your areas of influence this week. **Acts 1: Peter "stood up" (1:15, probably implying leadership) and initiated Judas' replacement. Acts 2: Peter again "stood up" (2:14) and then preached to the crowd on Pentecost Day. Acts 3: Peter healed the cripple and preached to the amazed crowd. Acts 4: Peter preached to the Jewish religious leaders, following the incidents of chapter 3. Acts 5: Peter confronted Ananias and Sapphira and also acted as the apostles' spokesman (5:29) when the Sanhedrin arrested them. The sick hoped that Peter's shadow might fall on them (5:15). Personal sharing**