

The Book of Acts

You Will Be My Witnesses

Lesson #1 for July 7, 2018

Scriptures: Acts 1:6-8,9-26; Luke 24:25,44-48; Deuteronomy 19:15; Proverbs 16:33.

1. As we begin our study of the book of Acts, we are looking at a major junction in the history of this world. For almost 2000 years, God had been working primarily with the descendants of Abraham; but, at the end of Jesus's life, that mission was to be extended to the ends of the earth. In order for that to happen, the physical Jesus had to ascend to His Father and send in His place the Holy Spirit. As long as Jesus was there, the disciples would not leave Him.
2. Why was that necessary? Was it not because the disciples were not ready to accept the help of the Holy Spirit while Jesus was still with them? Were they not hoping mainly for a Messiah who would deliver them from the Roman oppression? Jesus needed to do some impressive things to change their paradigm—their way of thinking. Imagine what a change took place from that Thursday night supper in the upper room to the Sunday night appearance of Jesus in that same room! Over the next 50 days up to Pentecost, the disciples needed a complete change in their way of thinking. How many times did Jesus appear to them before Pentecost?
3. Could we need something like that to take place among God's faithful people at this point in history? What will it take to bring the latter rain?
4. The story of Jesus's return to Nazareth recorded in Luke 4 makes it clear that the Jews in His day had chosen to emphasize one set of Old Testament Messianic prophecies and ignore another. The first set emphasized the fact that, one day, the Messiah would come and rule this earth forever. (See Psalm 89:3-4,35-37; Isaiah 9:6-7; Ezekiel 37:25; Daniel 2:44; 7:13-14,27.) The passage in Isaiah 9 makes it clear that the One who was to do this would be none other than God Himself. On the other hand, passages like Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 22; and Daniel 9:26 make it clear that the Messiah must first come and suffer. Jesus Himself tried to make that clear to His disciples in His discussions with them as recorded in Luke 17:24-25; **18:31-34**; 24:25-26. Which of these ideas would you want to emphasize? Or, both?
5. Do you think you could point out any other passages in the Old Testament that clearly show that the Messiah was to suffer? From a human standpoint, is it any surprise that they preferred to think of a Messiah who would come and who would conquer the world and rule forever instead of a Messiah who would die for them? Even His own disciples clearly were hoping for a kingly and earthly Messiah. (See Matthew 16:16,20; Mark 10:35-37; Luke 9:46; 22:24.) Think of all the disciples had done while they were with Jesus! (Matthew 10:8)
6. What would Jesus say to most Adventists today? Could our picture of God and our understanding of the plan of salvation and the great controversy be so in error that God does not want us to tell others of our views? Is that why the end has not come yet?
7. Read Acts 1:6-7. Clearly, the disciples were still hoping for an earthly, kingly Messiah. This was just ten days before Pentecost. Why is it so easy to focus on believing the things we want to believe as opposed to what the Bible really teaches? What can we do to make sure we believe the truth? Why is it so difficult to give up ideas that we have cherished in the past, even when we discover that they are not really true?
8. Read Acts 1:8. This was a foundational verse for the disciples in New Testament times. There are four important elements in this passage about what God was calling them to do:
(1) God was to give them the gift of the Holy Spirit. (See Isaiah 44:3 and Joel 2:28-29 to see that this gift had been promised even in the Old Testament.) The Holy Spirit had been closely

working with Jesus while He was on this earth. (Luke 4:18-21) But, the real manifestation of the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. (John 7:37-39; Acts 2:33)

(2) What is the work of a personal witness? S/he is able to describe the event firsthand. S/he can give an account of what s/he has seen and heard. That, the disciples were fully qualified to do. (Acts 1:21-22; 4:20; 1 John 1:3) The truth of the gospel was so burning in their souls that they could not keep quiet about it. Think of what the disciples could witness to.

(3) The plan of the mission started in Jerusalem but was soon to spread to Judea and Samaria and, ultimately, to the ends of the world.

(4) A complete change was to take place in the orientation of their mission. Isaiah 2:1-5 make it clear that in Old Testament times, the people of Israel were to live such outstanding lives that the whole world would be attracted to come to them in Jerusalem. However, by the times of the New Testament, that objective had failed, and they were commissioned to go out into the world to carry the gospel to them.

9. Could it be true that, as many have believed, the evidence that Jesus gave to the two men on the road to Emmaus was to serve as a kind of outline for the future sermons they were to preach to the rest of the world for the rest of their lives? (See Luke 24:13-35.)
10. Don't you wish you could have been with Jesus and the disciples during those next forty days? What did Jesus say to them? What major changes took place in their thinking? Did they have a "fruit basket upset" in their understanding of Old Testament passages? Then, they read the Old Testament and understood it in light of the mission and message of Jesus including His death and resurrection. (Acts 3:17-19)
11. Read Acts 1:9-11. What do you think the disciples were thinking as they watched Jesus slowly ascend into the sky? Why did Jesus instruct those two angels to stay on this earth for a few moments and tell the disciples that Jesus would, one day, come again in the same way in which He went up? (See Deuteronomy 19:15.) It is interesting to notice that at each time in the gospel story when a major announcement was to be made, two angels were involved. Two angels sat in the tomb when Mary approached. (*Desire of Ages* 789.4) Who were those two angels? Those two angels had apparently served as Jesus's guardian angels throughout His lifetime.

While the disciples were still gazing upward, voices addressed them which sounded like richest music. They turned, and saw **two angels** in the form of men, who spoke to them, saying, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from [832] you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." [Acts 1:11, KJV]

These angels were of the company that had been waiting in a shining cloud to escort Jesus to His heavenly home. The most exalted of the angel throng, they were the two who had come to the tomb at Christ's resurrection, and they had been with Him throughout His life on earth. With eager desire all heaven had waited for the end of His tarrying in a world marred by the curse of sin. The time had now come for the heavenly universe to receive their King. Did not the **two angels** long to join the throng that welcomed Jesus? But in sympathy and love for those whom He had left, they waited to give them comfort. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" Hebrews 1:14.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 831.1-832.1. [Bold type and Bible reference in brackets are added.]

12. There are a number of passages in the New Testament suggesting that God raised Jesus from the dead. (For example, see Acts 2:24,32; Romans 6:4; 10:9; contrast John 2:19; and John 10:17-18.) So, what actually happened at the resurrection? Those two angels came down and:

When the voice of the mighty angel was heard at Christ's tomb, saying, Thy Father calls Thee, the Saviour came forth from the grave by the life that was in Himself. Now was proved the truth of His words, "I lay down My life, that I might take it again.... I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." Now was fulfilled the prophecy He had spoken to the priests and rulers, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." John 10:17, 18; 2:19.

Over the rent sepulcher of Joseph, Christ had proclaimed in triumph, "I am the resurrection, and the life." [This was spoken also at the resurrection of Lazarus. (John 11:25)] These words could be spoken only by the Deity. All created beings live by the will and power of God. They are dependent recipients of the life of God. From the highest seraph to the humblest animate being, all are replenished from the Source of life. Only He who is one with God could say, I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again. In His divinity, Christ possessed the power to break the bonds of death.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 785.2-3. [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

13. It would be impossible for Deity to die. The humanity of Jesus died; but, Christ—His divine side—which had remained quiescent during His lifetime on this earth, arose at the voice of the angel and proclaimed over the rent sepulcher of Joseph: "I am the resurrection, and the life." (John 11:25, *GNB**) Only God could make such a statement. Satan would love to be able to; but, he cannot.
14. The visible ascension of Jesus into the heavens and the promise of the angels make it clear that He will come again in a very visible manner. Of course, He will not be alone. He will be accompanied by the Father, by the Holy Spirit, and by the entire host of angels who will fill the entire sky with their bright, shining presences. No imitation of Jesus or false christ will be able to come in that way. (Luke 9:26; 2 Thessalonians 1:7) The promise of the second coming of Christ became a compelling issue to the disciples. They could not stop talking about it or witnessing about it. What about us?
15. Notice that in Acts 1:7-8 and Acts 1:9-11, neither Jesus nor His two angels revealed anything about the exact date or time when He will return.
16. So, the disciples returned to the upper room in Jerusalem to set about doing the work that He had left them, including needing to fill the vacancy left by Judas. Read Acts 1:12-14. Who else was present in that upper room?
17. We are told that by the time of the Pentecost, there were more than 120 regular followers of Jesus. The upper room in Jerusalem was in the home of John Mark's parents. (See Acts 12:11-15 when the same room was being used. Compare Mark 14:51. Who do you think that young man was?) In addition to the disciples, there were the mother of Jesus and His brothers as well as a number of other women. (Luke 8:1-3; 23:49; 24:1-12)
18. The "brothers" of Jesus were almost certainly the children of Joseph by a prior marriage. Jesus had older sisters as well. (See Matthew 13:55-56; Mark 6:3.) They were older than Jesus, and, thus, they felt that they could tell Him what to do. That is evidenced in several places in the biblical story. James, the eldest of Jesus's brothers, later became the leader of

the Christian group in Jerusalem. (See Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; and Galatians 2:9,12.)

19. A brief overview of the events between the crucifixion and Pentecost suggest that the disciples went back and forth frequently between the upper room and the temple in Jerusalem, praising God, worshiping together, and praying.
20. One of the first things that they needed to do was to replace Judas. How did they do that? They “cast lots.” See Acts 1:15-22. We do not know how they did that. This new addition to the group of 11 was to be a specific witness to the resurrection. (Acts 4:33) He was to be among those who had followed Jesus from the time of His baptism to the time of His ascension. How many people do you suppose fit those criteria?
21. Sometimes, I am asked the question: What is the difference between a disciple and an apostle? The disciples were the specific followers of Jesus who were learning from Him while He was on this earth. Later, the apostles were those who had been sent out to carry the gospel message to the world. Thus, Paul specifically included himself among the apostles. See 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8; and Galatians 2:6-9.
22. Did God intentionally hide specific information about casting lots from us to keep us from trying to duplicate it? Why don't we use that method to choose church leaders today? Does God give us direct guidance in making the choices that we must make in our day as He did in biblical times? If not, why not? Don't we live in just as significant a time as they did?
23. So, how do we fit in this whole story?

The Saviour's commission to the disciples included all the believers. It includes all believers in Christ to the end of time. **It is a *fatal mistake to suppose that the work of saving souls depends alone on the ordained minister.*** All to whom the heavenly inspiration has come are put in trust with the gospel. All who receive the life of Christ are ordained to work for the salvation of their fellow men. For this work the church was established, and all who take upon themselves its sacred vows are thereby pledged to be co-workers with Christ.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 822.2. [Bold type and italic type are added.]

24. The disciples were very anxious to find out when Jesus would return. We now know that there were several time-prophecies reaching far into the future of which they were ignorant. But, we have passed the end of the last time-prophecy, and Ellen White made it very clear that we must never again try to set a specific time for Jesus's coming.

There will never again be a message for the people of God that will be based on time. We are not to know the definite time either for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit or for the coming of Christ.—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*,* vol. 1, 188.1; *RH** March 22, 1892, par. 7; *6SDABC** 1052.4; *YRP** 329.4.

25. She added:

Any one who shall start up to proclaim a message to announce the hour, day, or year of Christ's appearing, has taken up a yoke and is proclaiming a message that the Lord has never given him.—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*,* September 12, 1893, par. 18; *TM** 61.1.

26. Doesn't God still need witnesses to the great controversy and especially to the life of Christ? The book of Acts makes it very clear that prayer, fasting, and fellowship with other believers were to be a major part of the church's mission and method. See Acts 1:24; 8:14-17; 9:11-12; 10:4,9,30; 13:2-3.

27. So, do we honestly feel like we are a part of the redemptive mission of Christ? What are we doing to confirm that? Or, do we feel that what happened 2000 years ago does not really involve us personally?

28. Would you agree with this statement from the *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*?

The historic expansion of the church was not solely the result of the work of humans, but of the power of the Holy Spirit. One could even say that we are studying not so much the Acts of the Apostles this quarter as we are studying the Acts of the Holy Spirit. How does the book of Acts confirm this assessment?—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 13.

29. It is interesting to notice that the book of Acts ends suddenly as if Luke had intended to write more. Could it be that God intended for the rest of the story to be written by His faithful followers down through the generations? Would that include us? Think of how much closer we are to the second coming than the disciples were. Shouldn't we be at least as excited as they were about the possibility of seeing Jesus come back in the clouds?

30. As we begin to study the book of Acts, notice this five point summary given by Luke of what we must do to be a part of it:

(1) be convicted about the mission of Jesus—Acts 1:1-3;

(2) be alert and wait for the reception of the Holy Spirit—Acts 1:4, 5;

(3) be more concerned about the *what* rather than the *when* of the kingdom—Acts 1:4-7;

(4) be ready to receive the Spirit—Acts 1:8;

(5) be witnesses in every place, from our homes to the world—Acts 1:8.—*Ibid.**
14.

31. What would happen if we all did those things? As Christians we are almost totally dependent upon the book of Acts for our understanding of what happened in the early history of the church. While Peter and Paul were the main characters in this book, a number of others had cameo appearances including Stephen, Philip, Cornelius, Barnabas, John Mark, Priscilla and Aquila, Dorcas, Luke, and others. But, the book of Acts makes it clear that everyone who claims the name of Jesus is to be a part of that ultimate group. So, what are we doing to finish the gospel? What percentage of our time is spent in doing that?

32. Dr. Luke—not a Jew but a Greek physician—wrote the Gospel of Luke, the longest account of the story of Jesus Himself. And then, in volume two of his writings, Luke gave us the book of Acts. We are so indebted to him for so many things. Would it be fair to call his books: “The Origin and History of the Christian Church”?

33. Did the disciples recognize that Satan had been defeated at the cross? Did they recognize that they had been given the most important message ever to be given to our world? Did they recognize that they had become a part of the kingdom of God? It is interesting to notice that in the *New King James Version*,* the word *kingdom* and its various iterations is used again and again in the Gospels: 50 times in Matthew, 13 in Mark, 37 in Luke, and 5 in John.

34. That new kingdom had a completely new orientation.

Of the poor in spirit Jesus says, “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” **This kingdom is not, as Christ’s hearers had hoped, a temporal and earthly dominion. Christ was opening to men the spiritual kingdom of His love,**

His grace, His righteousness. The ensign of the Messiah's reign is distinguished by the likeness of the Son of man. His subjects are the poor in spirit, the meek, the persecuted for righteousness' sake. The kingdom of heaven is theirs. Though not yet fully accomplished, the work is begun in them which will make them "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." Colossians 1:12.—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing** 8.1. [Bold type is added.]

35. A quick look at the task that Jesus assigned to His disciples might make one feel completely overwhelmed. But, Jesus did not leave them without some promises. Read John 14:1-3 and Acts 1:10-11. With this assurance and given this mission, Jesus has left even us a work to do.

The gospel commission is the great missionary charter of Christ's kingdom. The disciples were to work earnestly for souls, giving to all the invitation of mercy. They were not to wait for the people to come to them; they were to go to the people with their message.

The disciples were to carry their work forward in Christ's name. Their every word and act was to fasten attention on His name, as possessing that vital power by which sinners may be saved. Their faith was to center in Him who is the source of mercy and power. In His name they were to present their petitions to the Father, and they would receive answer. They were to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Christ's name was to be their watchword, their badge of distinction, their bond of union, the authority for their course of action, and the source of their success. Nothing was to be recognized in His kingdom that did not bear His name and superscription.—Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles** 28.2. [Bold type is added.]

36. How can we take up the mission of the disciples with the same excitement, urgency, and commitment? Repeatedly, we are told that it would be a terribly *fatal mistake*, as noted earlier, to think that this work was only the work of the pastor. How can we individually be involved? Maybe we do not feel like we are qualified. But, God has some very clear words for us.

Jesus chose unlearned fishermen because they had not been schooled in the traditions and erroneous customs of their time. They were men of native ability, and they were humble and teachable,—men whom He could educate for His work. **In the common walks of life there is many a man patiently treading the round of daily toil, unconscious that he possesses powers which, if called into action, would raise him to an equality with the world's most honored men.** The touch of a skillful hand is needed to arouse those dormant faculties. It was such men that Jesus called to be His colaborers; and **He gave them the advantage of association with Himself.** Never had the world's great men such a teacher. **When the disciples came forth from the Saviour's training, they were no longer ignorant and uncultured. They had become like Him in mind and character, and men took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.** [Acts 4:13]—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 249.4- 250.1. [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

37. Are you ready to take up your task?

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