

The Acts of the Apostles, Chapters 1-5

Chapter 1:

vs 1-5: The Promise of the Holy Spirit

-These first five verses are full of mystery and challenges to our faith: While Jesus walked, talked, and ate with the disciples; Luke says that he gave them instructions through the Holy Spirit. What do we make of this? Is it Luke's way of highlighting the unity, the one-ness of Christ and the Holy Spirit, or to show that the Apostles are empowered to speak the truth through the Holy Spirit? Or both?

vs 6-11: The Ascension of Jesus

-What do the disciples believe will happen when they receive the Holy Spirit?

-How will the power of the Holy Spirit be enacted in the Apostles? How are we witnesses to Jesus Christ?

vs 12-26: Matthias Chosen to Replace Judas

-The fate of Judas, his purchase of his homestead field 'Hakeldama' is written about in Psalm 69:25 and 109:8. Do you think Judas' fate was pre-ordained or that he had a choice? Why?

-The word 'Apostle' means 'One who is sent out'. The Apostles are named but there were one hundred and twenty believers present. What do you think is the difference between the witness of the Apostles and the other believers?

-Why do you think it was important that the replacement to Judas was one who had been with them from the beginning to the end of Jesus' ministry on earth? How do we experience knowledge of Jesus?

Chapter 2:

vs 1-13: The Coming of the Holy Spirit

-While Pentecost was originally a Jewish festival, called the 'Feast of Weeks' fifty days after Passover, it became for Christians the celebration of the 'Coming of the Holy Spirit' fifty days after Easter. Why do you think that it was necessary for the Apostles to be enabled to speak in other languages?

-How do you see the Holy Spirit at work in your life?

vs 14-35: Peter Addresses the Crowd

How do you think it was possible for the bungling Peter, who had it so very wrong so often, to rise and speak to the huge crowd of Jews gathered for their Feast-day? He uses examples from their scriptures, the Prophet Joel Psalm 16:8-11, 110:1, they were all familiar with. If you were going to tell someone the good news about Jesus Christ, what would you say? Use The Scriptures? Relate your own relationship with Christ? Both? Why or why not?

vs 37-42: The First Converts

-Mass rallies such as the 'Billy Graham Crusades' are no longer in the news, but many came forward after the 'Altar Call'. Do you think that the power of the Holy Spirit is still received by us in the sermons or other church activities? Or have we 'domesticated' the Spirit into our comfort zone? Why? Why not?

vs 43-47: Life Among the Believers

-The growing group of Jerusalem believers were struck with awe, which is a mix of fear and adoration, at the spirit-powered work of preaching and doing wonders of the Apostles, which caused the community to live together and support one another through sale of their possessions (and I suppose their ongoing labor), they spent much time together in the temple with prayer and sharing food. How does this make you feel? Do you think we should try and make our church more like this early church community?

-Do you think that if membership to our congregation were tied to submitting the offering of a tithe of our income, it would improve our sense of unity in the Body of Christ?

Chapter 3:

vs 1-10: Peter Heals a Crippled Beggar

-Peter's words and actions testify to the power of the name of Jesus Christ in the healing of this man. Do you believe that our faith in Jesus Christ contributes to the healing in our bodies and minds, and souls?

-What do you think about 'Faith Healing' we see on some religious T.V. programs?

-Do you think that the high level of medical expertise is solely the result of scientific learning and training, or is it a gift of God to humankind?

vs 11-26: Peter Speaks in Solomon's Portico

-Peter testifies to be an eyewitness to the truth of the trial, the conviction, the cruel death, and the resurrection of Jesus. Do you accept Luke's record of Peter's testimony as truth for you? Why or why not?

-Peter, the Jew, accuses his fellow Jews of killing Jesus. Do you think we Gentiles have license to hold all Jews responsible for Christ's murder? All of them or just the Jewish authorities of the day? Why?

- If we agree with Peter that Jesus is the fulfillment of Moses' prophecy, what does that say about God?

Chapter 4:

vs. 1-22: Peter and John Before the Council

-In this powerful speech before the lawmakers, Peter defends his action to witness to the truth of Christ 'filled with the Holy Spirit'. In the face of our modern opposition and unbelief in the Christ, would you give such a verbal witness to your Lord Christ, or do you think you are not sufficiently equipped? Why? Why not?

vs 23-31: The Believers Pray for Boldness

-What does it mean to you to pray for boldness in faith? When might you offer such a prayer?

vs 32-37: The Believers Share Their Possessions

-Are there some areas in the daily life of our congregation which might benefit from following the model of this early Christian Community? Which might that be?

Chapter 5:

vs 1-11: Ananias and Sapphira

-What is your reaction to this story? How did Ananias and Sapphira lie to God?

-Can fear become a positive force in a church? Yes? Or never? Why?

vs 12-16: The Apostles Heal Many

The early church in Jerusalem became a place for healing. How is today's church and how are our Pastors instruments of the Spirit's healing power?

vs 17-42: the Apostles Are Persecuted.

-The Jewish leaders were antagonistic to them because the work of the Apostles caused the church to grow in leaps and bounds. Today, our leaders are engaged in the process of condensing and joining congregations because membership has tumbled. What do you think the church must do to reverse this trend? And what do you think is the best way to communicate this to our leaders?

May we pray together:

Dear Lord Christ, this book of the Acts of the Apostles presents to us the church, filled with the Holy Spirit empowering its leaders and members to bravely act and witness in the name of Jesus Christ, in the face of powerful opposition. Today we have become discouraged and question or even mistrust the power of the Holy Spirit within, given at our baptism, and are content with the huge reduction to the witness in your name. Kyrie eleison! Have mercy Lord! Grant us and our leaders new visions, and transform us into the church under your rule, that is needful to our modern world. In your name we pray, Lord Christ, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit. One God, now and forever. Amen