

The Birth of the Church



Topic

The Holy Spirit

Theme

Christ gave the Holy Spirit to believers to empower them for His service.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will determine steps to take to grow in his dependence on the Holy Spirit.

Materials

- Resources 1–4

Scripture Focus

Acts 1; 2

Summary

This lesson presents Jesus' preparation of the disciples for the church and the establishment of the church through the gospel. It also emphasizes the Holy Spirit's empowering of the church.

Outline

I. Preparation for the Church (1)

- A. Jesus' preparation (1:1–11)
 1. Jesus' resurrection (1:1–3)
 2. Jesus' instructions (1:4–8)
 3. Jesus' ascension (1:9–11)
- B. People's preparation (1:12–26)
 1. Supplication to God (1:12–14)
 2. Selection of an apostle (1:15–26)

II. Establishment of the Church (2)

- A. Holy Spirit's arrival (2:1–13)
- B. Peter's explanation (2:14–36)
- C. The people's response (2:37–47)

Memory Verse

"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38).

GETTING STARTED

Living with the Invisible Man

The idea of building a television series around an invisible character has never caught on. The first attempt was in the late 1950s. That show lasted two seasons. Then in the mid-1970s, another series lasted just fourteen episodes. The third attempt in the early 2000s ran for forty-six episodes over two seasons. Perhaps the audiences lost interest in what they could not see!

ASK: Suppose an invisible person was coming to live with your family. How would you react? (Q1)

ASK: How might the person's presence affect the choices you make? (Q2)

Jesus' followers gathered together in Jerusalem to wait for the arrival of an invisible Person. That Person is the Holy Spirit. Imagine how they must have felt waiting for His arrival and how they must have reacted when He came!

The Spirit lives as an invisible Person in every believer. Yet most believers treat Him as if He doesn't exist. They have lost interest in what they cannot see. This lesson reminds us of the importance of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church.

Please, Just Go!

ASK: Have you ever had an unwanted guest staying in your home?

ASK: How did you get him to leave?

The Holy Spirit is a permanent guest in the heart of every believer. But some believers treat Him as if He were an unwanted guest. They do their best to ignore Him and even seem to tell Him to be quiet.

The early church embraced the Holy Spirit and welcomed Him into their lives. They understood that He was their power source for serving God.

This lesson will challenge us to obey God and serve Him according to the power of the Spirit.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. Preparation for the Church (1)

The church did not begin immediately after Jesus' resurrection. There were preparations that needed to be made by both Jesus and His followers.

A. Jesus' preparation (1:1–11)

Jesus' mission between His resurrection and His ascension was to prepare His followers for the birth of the church. So Luke began the book of Acts by revisiting Jesus' final activities on earth.

1. Jesus' resurrection (1:1–3)

Jesus specifically taught that the Old Testament Scriptures predicted His

resurrection (Luke 24:27–32, 44–48). The Old Testament prophesied that Jesus would die and rise from the dead for the remission of sins. Luke then connected Jesus' resurrection to the disciples.

READ: Luke 24:44–48. **ASK:** What did Jesus say was the connection between His resurrection and His disciples? (Q3) *Jesus called the disciples witnesses to His resurrection and commissioned them to preach about His death and resurrection.*

Jesus made it clear that there would be no church without His resurrection. His resurrection was essentially the first step in His preparation for the church.

Luke picked up the topic of Jesus' resurrection again in Acts. He said it was attested by *many infallible proofs* (Acts 1:3). What were some of those proofs? (1) Jesus appeared to over five hundred people. (2) The disciples touched His scars in His hands and feet (Luke 24:38, 39). (3) Jesus ate with the disciples (24:42, 43). (4) Jesus explained in detail how the Old Testament prophesied His coming, death, and resurrection (24:44, 45).

The disciples had ample proof that Jesus rose from the dead. In fact, the word *infallible* means *unmistakable*. The disciples were absolutely sure that Jesus was risen.

That fact of Jesus' resurrection is of utmost importance to the book of Acts. The book would be senseless if Christ is not raised from the dead. It would be pointless to tell others about a Savior Who is still in the grave. Jesus' resurrection was the essential first step in preparing for the birth of the church.

2. Jesus' instructions (1:4–8)

After Jesus rose from the dead, He gave specific instruction to His followers about what they should expect and what they should do after He was gone. Those instructions formed His second step in preparing for the birth of the church.

Jesus instructed His followers to wait in Jerusalem for the *promise of the Father* (Acts 1:4), a reference to the Holy Spirit. Jesus' followers who gathered in Jerusalem would be *baptized with the Holy Ghost* (1:5). Spirit baptism is simply the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell believers. Today the Spirit indwells believers at the moment of their salvation.

READ: John 14:16–18. **ASK:** For how long does the Holy Spirit indwell a believer? (Q4) *Forever.*

ASK: Why is that truth important for a believer to know? (Q5) *It means the believer is never powerless to obey and serve God.*

The disciples interrupted Jesus to ask Him about His Kingdom (1:6). They associated Spirit baptism with Jesus' earthly reign. Old Testament prophets spoke of an earthly reign of Messiah that would be associated with a unique work of the Spirit (Isa. 32:15–20; Ezek. 39:28, 29; Joel 2:28–3:1).

In response to His disciples, Jesus did not deny the promise of an earthly kingdom; He simply said it would come at a later, undisclosed time (Acts 1:7). God the Father would inaugurate the Kingdom when He was ready. Christ then changed the subject back to the coming of the Spirit (1:8). He explained that the Spirit would come in order to empower them to be His witnesses to the uttermost parts

During their earthly ministries, both John the Baptist (Luke 3:16) and Jesus (John 14:16–18, 26) talked about a future Spirit baptism.

The Old Testament prophets spoke of the pouring out of God's Spirit on His people (Isa. 32:15–20; Ezek. 39:28, 29; Joel 2:28–3:1). They had the beginning of the Millennium in view. At that time the redeemed who enter Christ's Kingdom will experience an indwelling of the Spirit that resembles the indwelling of church age believers. It is easy to see why the disciples would be confused by Jesus' instructions concerning the coming of the Spirit.

of the earth (cf. Luke 24:47–49).

The coming of the Holy Spirit is *the* event that birthed the church. The church could not exist without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). And without the Holy Spirit believers would be powerless to obey and serve God. Obviously it was extremely important for Jesus' followers to gather in Jerusalem as Jesus told them to.

READ: Acts 1:8. **ASK:** What might you say to someone who thinks he doesn't have what it takes to serve the Lord? (Q6) *Every believer has the Holy Spirit and thus has God's enabling power to serve Him.*

The rest of the book of Acts proves Jesus right. The Holy Spirit did empower Christ's followers to be His witnesses throughout the world.

ASK: If a church is not actively sharing the gospel, who's to blame? Has the Holy Spirit lost His effectiveness or His interest in saving the lost? Explain. (Q7) *The Holy Spirit has not diminished in His power. If a church is not witnessing and seeing people saved, then the people are not living by the Spirit and allowing Him to work through them.*

3. Jesus' ascension (1:9–11)

The third step Jesus took in preparing for the church was His ascension. The church could not start as long as He was on earth. His disciples would soon understand that.

READ: Acts 1:9. **ASK:** What words would you use to describe how Jesus' disciples must have felt as they watched Jesus disappear into a cloud? Remember that they expected Him to stick around, overthrow Rome, and eventually set up His Kingdom. (Q8) *The words loss, confusion, and disappointment might describe how the disciples felt. They may have also felt vulnerable as their leader disappeared before their eyes.*

The disciples did not yet fully understand God's program for this present age even though Jesus talked to them about it at length. His departure would have caused them a measure of bewilderment.

READ: Acts 1:10, 11. **ASK:** How would the angels' message have helped to focus the disciples on their new task? (Q9) *They would have turned their focus from Jesus' physical presence with them to His calling on their lives. They would have also sensed the need for the power Jesus promised them.*

By asking the disciples why they stood gazing into the sky, the angels were in essence directing the disciples' attention away from the physical presence of Christ. The angels, as God's representatives, wanted the disciples to focus instead on the ministry Christ called them to, a ministry they would need to be active in until Christ returned. That ministry involved witnessing to the lost and making disciples of those who trusted in Christ as their Savior.

In the meantime, Jesus returned to a place of exaltation with the Father. He is seated at the Father's right hand where He intercedes for believers. Eventually Christ will return, first for His church at the Rapture and then with His church at the end of the Tribulation when He establishes His Kingdom.

Hebrews 7:23–26 expands on the interceding ministry between Christ and His church.

ASK: Has Christ's mission for His church changed since His first disciples watched Him ascend? Explain. (Q10) *No. Christ still expects His church to make disciples of those who have trusted in Christ through their Spirit-empowered witness.*

With His ascension, Christ completed His part of the preparation for the church's birth. He had to get out of the way so the Holy Spirit could come (John 16:5-7).

B. People's preparation (1:12-26)

Jesus' followers gathered together in preparation for the coming of the Holy Spirit. The group included the apostles, some women, and Jesus' half-brothers and mother.

1. Supplication to God (1:12-14)

Jesus' followers prayed together in an upper room (Acts 1:12-14). As they prayed, they had one *accord*, meaning they had the same purpose and mind. Their focus was obedience and service to God. Their unified focus was crucial in effectively carrying out Christ's mission.

2. Selection of an apostle (1:15-26)

While Jesus' followers and family were gathered, Peter identified the need for a twelfth apostle to meet the mission Christ had for them (1:15-20). He quoted Psalm 69:25 and 109:8 in reference to Judas, who had betrayed Christ and then committed suicide. Peter's description of Judas's gruesome death may have served to point out the foolishness and tragedy of opposing Christ (Acts 1:18, 19).

Both the Scriptures Peter quoted and Jesus' references to twelve thrones in the future earthly kingdom (Luke 22:30; cf. Rev. 21:14) would have given Peter sufficient reasons to lead in the selection of a new apostle. Thus the Eleven chose two qualified men to consider as a replacement for Judas (Acts 1:21-23). After they prayed about the decision, they used the customary practice of casting lots to ascertain whom God had chosen (1:24-26). Casting lots did not mean that the selection came down to mere fate; God was guiding and directing in the selection of Matthias to replace Judas.

The apostles were *sent ones*, or missionaries in a sense. They would each play a role in leading in the fulfillment of Christ's mission for the early church. Some of them penned books of the New Testament (e.g., Peter, James, and John) while others served in relative anonymity. The apostles were important to Christ and were evidence that He had a plan for laying the foundation of His church.

ASK: Christ doesn't call men to be apostles anymore. Does that mean that He takes the work of building His church less seriously today? Explain. (Q11) *No. Christ still calls men into full-time vocational ministry, and He expects all believers to serve Him. The apostles had a ministry related to laying the foundation of the church. What we contribute in building on that foundation today is just as important to Christ.*

II. Establishment of the Church (2)

The Day of Pentecost was an annual grain harvest feast in which Jews presented portions of their wheat harvest to God (Lev. 23:15-22). The Feast of Firstfruits occurred fifty days prior to Pentecost and commemorated the beginning of the harvest.

Participants in the Feast of Firstfruits would wave a sheaf of the crop before the Lord and thank Him for the first portion of the harvest (23:10). The Feast of Pentecost concluded this celebration of the harvest. The annual Feast of Pentecost signified that God had completed what had begun at the Feast of Firstfruits. Like the Feast of Firstfruits and the Day of Pentecost, the resurrection of Christ began a process that the coming of the Spirit completed.

A. Holy Spirit's arrival (2:1–13)

The Holy Spirit came with the sound of rushing wind, tongues as of fire that rested above the believers, and the gift of speaking in tongues (2:2–4). God used these three illustrations to communicate, *I have returned*. In the Old Testament, wind, fire, and tongue-speaking are associated with God's presence (1 Kings 19:11; Exod. 19:18; Joel 2). The believers assembled in Jerusalem got the message loud and clear that God was back in the Person of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 10:44–48 and 19:3–7 also record speaking in tongues. Both cases involve an actual language that is foreign to the person speaking in tongues.

The gift of speaking in tongues in Acts was the ability to speak in a previously known but unlearned language (Acts 2:4–8). This caused amazement particularly on the part of those listening to foreigners speak their languages (2:7–11). They wondered out loud what the sign meant (2:12). Others were confused by the signs of God's presence while others mocked and said, *These men are full of new wine* (2:13).

The coming of the Holy Spirit into believers still occurs today. But there is no rushing wind, flames, and speaking in tongues to accompany the indwelling of the Spirit at the moment of a person's salvation. Those signs helped believers in the early church see and feel evidence of the coming of the Holy Spirit. God wanted them to know what had happened. God also wanted the believers to know that the gospel was for Gentiles as well as Jews. Speaking in Gentile foreign languages by the power of the Spirit communicated that fact loud and clear until the early church was established and the Scriptures had been written.

ASK: Since the Holy Spirit does not come into our lives with rushing wind and hovering flames, does that mean His presence in our lives is diminished? Explain. (Q12) *No. His presence is exactly the same, though what He enables us to do is different today.*

B. Peter's explanation (2:14–36)

Peter appealed to the book of Joel as proof that the recent miraculous events had indeed come from God (2:16–21). Joel prophesied about the *last days*, which started with the coming of Christ. Joel said there would be a pouring out of God's Spirit on *all flesh* (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17). The words *all flesh* indicate that the Spirit will come on anyone who trusts in Christ for salvation, including those in the categories Peter listed (2:17, 18).

The rest of Joel's prophecy quoted by Peter deals with Christ's future judgment on sin (Joel 2:30, 31; Acts 2:19, 20). Peter's point is that if Joel's prophecy about the present coming of the Spirit was fulfilled, then his prophecy about future judgment on sin will also be fulfilled. But until that day of judgment comes, God provides salvation to whoever calls on the name of the Lord (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21). Those listening to Peter should have taken note of their spiritual condition in light

of impending judgment and the offer of salvation.

RESOURCE: Display resource 3 to show the linkage between the past outpouring of the Spirit and God's still future judgment of the world.

Peter continued his sermon by emphasizing that the crucifixion of Christ, though carried out by some in Peter's audience, was God's plan all along (2:22, 23). Those who crucified Christ were guilty, but not hopeless. To demonstrate that point, Peter quoted David's prophecy about Jesus' resurrection and exaltation to the right hand of the Father (Psalm 16:8–11; Acts 2:25–28). Peter explained that David could not be talking about his own resurrection for David was still in the grave (2:29). Luke reported that even David knew the prophecy was about Christ. David believed God would raise up Christ to sit on David's throne in fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant (2:30, 31). Christ will sit on David's throne when He returns to set up His millennial Kingdom. Until then, the evidence that Jesus is indeed risen and in Heaven is His outpouring of the Spirit (2:33).

Peter quoted another Davidic prophecy about the exaltation of Christ (Ps. 110:1; Acts 2:34, 35). That prophecy again looked to the last days when God will cause Christ's enemies to be made His footstool, a picture of complete victory over all that opposes Christ and a warning to those who reject Christ.

In his sermon, Peter masterfully tied Israel's ancient prophets to both the coming of the Spirit and Christ's still future judgment of sinners and His final victory over His enemies. Those who looked honestly at the prophecies and the events unfolding before their eyes had to conclude that Jesus is both Lord and Christ (2:36).

C. The people's response (2:37–47)

Luke recorded that the Jewish hearers were *pricked in their heart*. Those pricks were evidence the Holy Spirit was working through Peter's sermon. Peter promptly told the crowd what to do to be saved, and more than three thousand of them trusted Christ as their Savior (2:37–41). What a start for the baby church in Jerusalem!

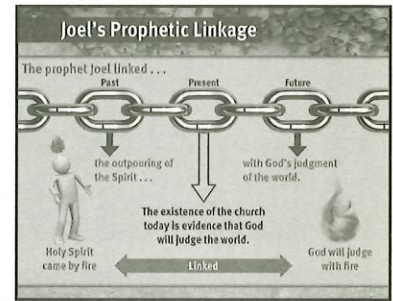
Perhaps nothing evidences the power of the Holy Spirit more clearly than a person putting his trust in Christ for salvation. When three thousand people respond in faith to the offer of salvation, the evidence is overwhelming. The apostles and the early church were seeing the beginning of what God can do through those who depend on the Spirit as they obey and serve Him.

READ: Acts 2:41. **ASK:** What is your response to this verse? (Q13)

READ: Acts 2:42–47. **ASK:** How does this passage describe the attitude, or tone, of the church? (Q14) *Fear and reverence for God, gladness and singleness of heart, praise, acceptance.*

The Holy Spirit continued to affect those who received Him either on Pentecost or at the moment of salvation (2:42–47). The Jerusalem church displayed the characteristics and qualities of changed lives and a true community of faith.

Luke finished his presentation with his first progress report: *And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved* (2:47).



Progress in the Book of Acts

Luke gave regular reports of continued church growth:

2:47	6:7	9:31	12:24	16:5	19:20
"and the Lord added to the church"	"and the word of God increased, and the number of disciples multiplied"	"the churches ... were multiplied"	"but the word of God grew and multiplied"	"so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily"	"so mightily grew the word of God"

Nothing can stop Christ from building His Church!

Living by the Spirit

Evidence of Living by the Spirit	Growing in Dependence on the Spirit
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spend time studying the Bible. • Pray about your service for God. • Ask God for guidance as you serve Him. • Evaluate your motives for serving. • Confess any prideful or selfish attitudes as you serve God.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

13. _____

The Word Spreads

RESOURCE: Display resource 2 to review the markers showing the church's growth in Acts.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Growing Dependence

RESOURCE: Display resource 4. **ASK:** How will you know if you are living by the Spirit? (Q15) (Record answers on the resource.) *The fruits of the Spirit will be evident in your life; you will be aware of and sensitive to His leading.*

ASK: What actions do you need to take to strengthen your dependence on and obedience to the Spirit? (Q16) (See list on the resource.)

Encourage your learners to be intentional in living by the Spirit.

Encouragement Opportunity

ASK: How should this lesson encourage those who are discouraged and who feel defeated in their service for the Lord? (Q17) *They show find hope in knowing the Spirit is in them and has all the power and wisdom they need to serve the Lord.*

Review Resource

Use resource 1 to review the response for this lesson: Serve God by the Spirit.