

# From Easter to Pentecost and Beyond: A Church-Wide Study in the Book of Acts

Clarksville First United Methodist Church  
April 8 — May 12, 2020  
Brian Shelton, Teacher

## Week 1

### Gospel to the Jews

Wednesday, April 8

#### Introduction



The book of Acts begins with the resurrected Jesus still among the disciples. Acts 1:3 says, “Being seen by them during forty days” after Easter. This is much of the interim time until Pentecost. As he ascends into heaven, the disciples return to Jerusalem to be in the Upper Room in chapter 2. The Holy Spirit descends on them, and they emerge speaking multiple languages to the many people groups in Jerusalem for the Festival of First Fruits. Peter preaches to these Jews, explaining Jesus from the Old Testament. The apostles continue to preach in the city and the temple until they are arrested by Jewish leaders. These leaders instruct them not to preach about Jesus—notice the use of the term “in Jesus’ name” for these events. Yet, they continue to do so, as Peter explains in 5:29: “We ought to obey God rather than men.”

These first five chapters explain how the humble 12 disciples emerge with boldness, confront individuals and groups with the gospel, represent the movement that Jesus began, and lead the church into being a discipleship community. Passages like Acts 2:42-27, 3:32-35, and 5:12-16 describe the community values of the early church that perpetuate in the church today. One guiding question can be, “Do we look enough like this church just after Pentecost?”

#### Questions

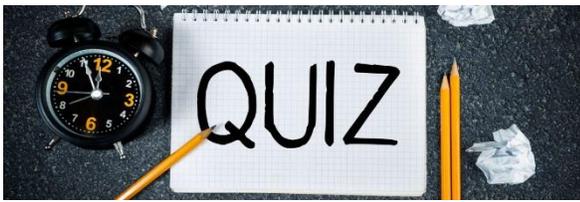
Since this is the first week, there is no last week of inquiries from the class. This slot remains to remind you all that if you have comments or questions, I’ll share them here each week. Usually what one person is curious about or moved by represent what other people in the class care about, too. Share your thoughts with me by email at [wbrianshelton@gmail.com](mailto:wbrianshelton@gmail.com) and I’ll turn them around in the section in the next week.

#### Reading

Acts chapters 1-5.

As you read, watch for the three themes introduced in the video: story, mission, and identity. These are early church qualities being formed in these early chapters. The “story” is both the story of the launch of the church, but the continued story of the individuals of the gospels—disciples—who take this message to the uttermost parts of the earth. The “mission” is the one Jesus inaugurated—belief, repentance, and

love. The “identity” of the church has certain characteristics that are highlighted in these early chapters of Acts. Read slowly and read well.



### Quiz

After you have read the passage, if you want to engage in a self-assessment—a quiz over the reading—it’s here as an option for you. The questions might include important facts or trivial facts from the reading. The answers are at the end of this module under the title,

“Answers to the Quiz.”

1. When Jesus ascended into heaven, he instructed the disciples to remain in what city?
2. Who asked the disciples, “Why do you stand gazing into heaven?” after Jesus’ ascension?
3. Who took the place of Judas Iscariot among the twelve disciples?
4. Name one physical characteristic of the presence of the Spirit in the Upper Room at Pentecost.
5. When the audience of the disciples’ Pentecost preaching asked what they should do with the message, what simple instruction did Peter give?
6. What outward sign did the lame man give that he was healed?
7. What Levite was named “Son of Encouragement,” who sold his land and gave the money to the church?
8. When Peter accuses Ananias of pretending to give his proceeds of land sale to the church, to whom did Peter say that Ananias had lied?
9. How did the arrested disciples get out of prison?
10. What wisdom did Gamaliel show to other Jewish leaders about how to handle the apostles’ preaching?

Bonus: Name as many of the eleven apostles (Judas Iscariot has been removed) as you can.



Remember that if you missed some, no one will ever know. You’re allowed to cheat. You received the sought-after bonus question. May it merely be a reinforcement to your reading of scripture!

### Overview of section

Acts chapters 1-5 shows the empowering of the disciples through boldness, language, and other signs and wonders. This is a fulfillment of the key verse of Acts, found at 1:8: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Immediately, this movement has its first collective opposition

from Jewish leaders, while it still bewildered some people who see the miracles. For these chapters, the application of this empowerment is still in Jerusalem and still primarily to Jews. Such is how all great movements start.

### Chapter 1

The book of Acts opens with Luke referencing a “former account” that he made. From the introduction material, we learned that the same recipient Theophilus is named in Luke 1. Both of these works combine to tell the story of Jesus’ ministry and the apostles’ ministry. The account prioritizes accuracy for credibility of the claims that it makes.

Jesus has not yet ascended to start the book of Acts. He has resurrected and he reminds the disciples that what they heard him preach. He explains that while John the Baptist baptized with water for repentance, they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. As Methodists, we recognize these two works as an entrance into the life of the new covenant with baptism and as an empowering to live that Christian life with holiness. We even speak of a “second work of grace” in which the Spirit empowers the life of a Christian for that holy life and for service. The disciples cannot imagine what is about to come. In the gospels, they are often presented as confused, misguided, and taking matters into their own hands. They return to Jerusalem as Jesus instructed and they are together in the Upper Room when the Holy Spirit comes (ch. 2).

The gap left by Judas Iscariot bothers them. The number twelve is important for Judaism, primarily because the twelve tribes of Israel embodied the notion of the people of God. Jesus had said that his followers would “sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30). In Revelation, at the restoration of God’s people in the great city, the wall “had twelve foundation tones, and on them *were* the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (Rev. 21:14). So, like the Old Testament culture they knew, they cast lots for Judas’ replacement. Notice the criteria to be his replacement: “One of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us— one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection” (Acts 1:21-22). The lots fall to Matthias.

There remains an underlying “what’s next?” for the apostles. They don’t have to wait long.

### Chapter 2

When the Day of Pentecost came, “they were all with one accord in one place” (2:1). This foreshadows the great quality of unity that would characterize the apostles and all of the early Christians in the New Testament. They are ready for something when the Holy Spirit descends on them. At first, fire appears



over their heads as divided tongues. The tongues which divide their cultures would suddenly be overcome by the disciples’ ability to speak in other languages “as the Spirit gave them utterance” (2:4). This phenomenon echoes Genesis 11:5-9 where people built the Tower at Babel to achieve god-like status. There, God confused them by introducing multiple languages into their midst so that could continue in unity against Him. Here, God overcomes the language division by enabling the disciples to connect with foreigners to share the good news of Jesus and reintroduce a potential for unity.

While the disciples were in a house room when this happened, next they are among the people who hear them speaking in other tongues. Several regions of the ancient world are named—Jews in Jerusalem for the Feast of First Fruits, or Pentecost. They hear the message spoken in their own

language and they are amazed. Peter stood among the crowd and explained that the prophet Joel had spoken that someday God would “pour out my Spirit on all flesh...they shall prophesy. I will show wonders in heaven above” (Acts 2:17-19). The unity theme is here when the recipients will be sons, daughters, the elderly, and servants—a diversity of people were participating without distinction or discrimination. Peter then explains why this happening. Relating Jesus death not so long ago in Jerusalem, he was the one anticipated by the promises to King David, central of which is to have his son rule over his people forever (2 Sam. 7:12-16). When the people asked what they should do, Peter instructed them to repent and be baptized. This message represents the central message of the gospel. The preaching, or *kerygma*, of the early church was this: Christ was the anticipation of the Old Testament, Christ died for his people, Christ resurrected, and his people should repent in belief.

Acts 2:42-47 describes the qualities of this early church. Believers were baptized and joined the Christian community. Here, they dialoged about Jesus’ and the apostles’ teaching, celebrated the agape meal we call the Lord’s Supper, fellowshiped together, prayed, showed signs and wonders, shared with each other, and showed gladness and simplicity of heart. God added to their number regularly as the Holy Spirit worked on the hearts of gospel hearers.



### Chapter 3

When Peter and John go up to the temple, they encounter a lame man. He had been handicapped since birth and sought alms from people going into worship. Peter remarks that he has no alms to give, but he has something else to offer the lame man: “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” And the man does.

Here we are confronted with a theme that might be troubling to the contemporary church. Why does the church in Acts have miracles and healings at the very touch—like Jesus did—but we tend only to attribute miracles through medical healing? Many Christians would say that our faith prevents these miracles because we doubt them and we ignore them. While this may be true, we should also recognize that there are special times of signs and wonders in the history of God’s people. The Old Testament miracles are not as common as stories of regular people doing regular things that have great effects. The Old Testament relates many stories without miracles. During this New Testament intense time of launching the church, it might be that God was delivering more miracles to convince people of His credibility behind the message. When Peter speaks in tongues, it enables him to address the attentive crowd and it provides a miracle in support of his message. The same happens here at the gate of the temple. Peter heals the lame man and the people “were filled with wonder and amazement” (3:10) so that they listened and believed better. We should not discount miracles or spiritual gifts! We are reminded that God provides this power, and sometimes He chooses to provide it with a higher concentration.

Note Peter's sermon in the temple to the crowds: it's the *kerygma*, the core message of the gospel.

#### Chapter 4

As the mission goes forth into the streets and the temple, and as the identity of the church is formed, the Jewish leaders object. In chapter 4, the old enemies of Jesus reemerge to resist the preaching of the kingdom of God. Two of them, Annas the high priest and Caiaphas, were even present at the trial of Jesus (John 18:13-14). They arrested Peter and some other disciples, demanding by what authority they healed the man. Peter preaches Christ, even using the Old Testament—a subject about which the leaders were seen as authoritative. This led them to notice Peter's boldness and they marveled because "they were uneducated and untrained men." This means the disciples were not rabbinically trained like the Jewish leaders. In a profound moment, "They realized that they had been with Jesus." For the judges, they merely made the association between the disciples and their Master. For anyone reading Acts, the effect is that they were different—changed and confident—because they were with Jesus. It's an encouragement to us who are with the same Jesus.

While the leaders prohibit the disciples from continuing teaching this message of Jesus, Peter says, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." After all, they had been with Jesus. To close this chapter, Luke again shows what characterized the early church in 4:32-35: they shared material goods, displayed power, and witnessed about the resurrection. Barnabas is introduced as a Levite priest from Cyprus who was recognized by his encouragement skills and he will be instrumental later in Acts. When he brings his money from the sale of a land, it sets up a contrast with the events to follow.



#### Chapter 5

Twice Luke told us that the early church was unselfish with their goods. They shared with one another, providing for needs and uniting in service for the church and its members. Chapter 5 opens with a man named Ananias and his wife Sapphira, who sold a possession and pretended to lay all of the proceeds at the feet of the apostles like Barnabas had done. However, they took glory that they shouldn't, because they feigned sacrifice and partially held the sacrifice back. They're not guilty of failing to tithe 100%; they are guilty of pretending to be spiritual when they're not. That's why judgment came to Ananias. Peter accused him of lying to the Holy Spirit and thus lying to God (5:3-4). When he suddenly died, it was because God was showing the consequences of his false humility. While this passage may be troubling, it should be an illustration of how the Old Testament God who did similar judgments is still the God of the New Testament. Sinners deserve to be judged, but are usually not immediately punished and fortunately they have an opportunity to repent. Yet, when Sapphira appears before Peter without knowing God's judgment on her husband, Peter asks and she lies again. She too, dies immediately. The people are now afraid. They liked the healing of the sick and the boldness before abusive authorities,

but their picture of God is now rounded out and the Holy One isn't simply a provision dispensary for those who call themselves His.

As the preaching continued, the high priest and Sadducees were angry. They arrested the apostles this time and imprisoned them. When the council gathered to try them, they were not there because an angel had released them. Finding them in the temple preaching again, the leadership reminded the apostles that they were not supposed to be preaching anymore. Peter responds, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (5:29).

As the council reconvened without the apostles, they discussed the threat of the situation. One Gamaliel was held in respect by his peers and he advised the leaders to leave the apostles alone. He shows wisdom in pointing out that if they are like other radicals of the day, eventually they would die out. However, if they are of God, the council does not want to be caught obstructing the work of the Lord among his people. So, they beat the apostles, ordered them again not to preach, and set them home. The Christians show perspective in their response: "Rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name" (5:41).

### **Commentary**

For those interesting in reflecting more, here are some of the other interesting elements contained in Acts chapters 1-5:

- 1:1-3—Luke makes it clear that what Jesus taught is what the apostles continued to teach.
- 1:3—If Jesus was with the believers for 40 days after his resurrection, then they were only without him in Jerusalem about 10 days before the Holy Spirit comes.
- 1:8—"When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will receive power..." is the key verse in Acts.
- 1:23—Joseph Barsabas Justus came in second to replace Judas Iscariot. I wonder how that felt, to place (in "win, place, show" at horse races) at the opportunity to become the twelfth by drawing the short straw. He does seem to be the same figure who reappears in Acts 15:22 to accompany Barnabas on mission.
- 2:22, 4:10, 5:30—When Peter preaches, it isn't an impersonal call to recognize general sin. Concerning the blame for Jesus' death, he says, "You took lawlessly," "you crucified," and "you murdered." This is a call to personal recognition of our own sin paid by Jesus' death. In that sense, we all caused it and he died for us.
- 2:41—When 3,000 souls were harvested at Peter's preaching on Pentecost, it has a sense of fulfillment for the harvest theme of the feast. Pentecost is the "first fruits" of the harvest that Jews gave to God (Lev. 23:10, 15-16); this is the first fruits of the preaching of the gospel in the early church.
- 3:7—Luke mentions the healing of the lame man by describing the ankle and foot bones when they were healed, evidencing his interest and descriptive style for medical details.
- 3:11—The force of the healing of the lame man among the people was chaotic. "The people ran together in the porch" to see for themselves. The energy is high around the work of the Holy Spirit in town these days.
- 3:13—Peter draws off of the Old Testament regularly for the Jewish recipients in these chapters. It's most obvious when he provides the formula, "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," which all Jews recognize.
- 3:25—"To all nations" comes the gospel. While it is first to the Jews, gospel availability is already mentioned as being for gentiles, women, young and old, and servants.
- 4:4—Another 5,000 are converted to add to the first fruits of Pentecost.

- 4:12—“There is no other name given among men by which you must be saved” is a powerful verse, speaking against other religions as a means of salvation. The use of the word “name” throughout these five chapters is very common. Even the religious leaders instruct the disciples not to preach by the name of Jesus (4:18).
- 5:12-16—Here is another unity passage to match 2:42-27.
- 5:19—When the apostles are freed by an angel, this would not be the first time Peter experiences this (Acts 12).



### Application

- How much does CFUMC or your local church look like the early church in passages like 2:42-47? Do we share selflessly with one another? Do we show unity? Do we center our fellowship on the Lord’s Supper and the sharing of food?
- There is little discrimination between types of people who receive the gospel or participate in the life of the church. The apostles have a place of preeminence, but there is no genuine person who is rejected. Does this lack of discrimination characterize our church? Do we have social classes or spiritual levels that alienate one another?
- What lesson do we learn about the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira? Are you like them sometimes, pretending to be somebody you’re not in front of other church members?
- When we suffer hard times, how do we respond? Do we keep a good attitude and recognize the effects of suffering, or do we complain about them?

### Further Application

Here are some questions for you to reflect more deeply about the life of the church:

- How much *should* our church look like the church in Acts?
- How much are we supposed to share of our own material goods? Is volunteering to give sometimes really enough?
- How much suffering can we really withstand in the face of persecution? While we have not had to answer this as much as the apostles, are we really as strong as we think?
- Is Peter’s shadow really healing in Acts 5:15? What does this mean for the church today?

### Answers to the Quiz

1. Jerusalem (1:4)
  2. Angels, “two men in white apparel” (1:10)
  3. Matthias (1:26)
  4. A sound from heaven, a rushing wind, tongues of fire, speaking in tongue (2:2-4)
  5. Repent and be baptized (2:38)
  6. He leaped, stood, and walked (3:8)
  7. Barnabas (4:36-37)
  8. To the Holy Spirit (5:3), which is to God (5:4)
  9. An angel opened the door and brought them out (5:19)
  10. Leave them alone; if they are false teachers they will die out, but if they are from God they should not be resisting it (5:38-39)
- Bonus: Peter (Simon), James, John, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew (Nathaniel), Matthew (Levi), James (son of Alphaeus), Simon (the Zealot), Judas (son of James) (1:13)