

# Acts: The Risen Lord



We continue our journey down Route 66 at Exit 5, the book of Acts. We are working our way toward Exit 27 in the New Testament to the book of Revelations. It is my prayer that together, after surveying the whole Bible, you will understand the big picture of the Bible; which ultimately is about the redemption God has provided and secured for us in His Son Jesus Christ.

I am going to tell you how young I am. I am 54...54 years young. Yesterday, as part of my birthday present, my son and his wife gave me three boys for the whole weekend. What a birthday present! My wife decided that yesterday was one of those camera days. You know what I am talking about, we didn't get a lot done because every time we were doing something, we would have to stop, smile, and take a picture. Now, I am supposing we did that so that years down the road, when I am really old, when I want to look back and see what it looked like when I was young, I could pull out those pictures. There was a day when you actually had to have a picture developed. No one develops pictures anymore. We pack them around on our phone. We leave them on our computers. But you know there was a time if you wanted to capture the moment; you could capture it in an 11x14, 8x10, 5x7 or a 4x6. I don't know how your family was, but mine couldn't afford many 8x10's. So when we selected our 8x10, it would be the picture that captured the big story. But sometimes there was a lot of other stuff that happened that told the details of the big story. So you wanted to have a few 5x7's and 4x6's printed too. You might

put the 8x10 on the wall, but you would put the 4x6's and 5x7's in a book. So when someone asked about the picture on the wall, you had the photo album close by to show them as much as they wanted to see.

That is how we are going to approach Acts. One of the literary devices Luke used in his historical narrative of the early history of the Church was to take snapshots. He took pictures, and he gave us progress reports. There are six of them after the big picture of the Church. We are going to look at Acts chapter 2 verses 42-47 first, and this is going to be the big picture, the big story of Acts. It is the picture Luke wants us to see of the Church. Then, we are going to look at six 5x7's, if you will, and that will just be one verse long.

I hear people all the time say that Paul wrote more of the New Testament than any other writer. That is not true, Luke wrote more of the New Testament than Paul or John. Paul just wrote shorter letters to the churches and there were more of them so folks feel like he wrote most of the Bible. Luke, who was a medical doctor, authored 30% of the New Testament. When you read his gospel and you read the book of Acts, medical terminology is all through the book. He puts his hand on the book as the Holy Spirit guided him. Now remember, when he wrote his gospel, he wrote to Theophilus and wanted to make sure he had an accurate detailed account so that he could be secure in his beliefs. When he began the second volume, the second part of the work; he reminds Theophilus that he has already written to him of everything that Jesus began to do and teach, then he just takes off. Now for our minds, Luke wrote his gospel so that we would know what Jesus began to do and teach. If you notice, he ends his gospel with the ascension of Jesus to Heaven. When he opens the book of Acts, he begins it the same way he ended his gospel; with the ascension of Jesus. So, he told us that at the end of Jesus life, He is in Heaven. When he opens the book of Acts, he reminds us again that Jesus is in Heaven. The gospel is what Jesus did while He was here on the earth. Acts is what Jesus continued to do while He was in Heaven. This is still a book about Jesus, what He began to do and what He will continue to

do. When He walked on this planet, He had a body. People were thrilled to encounter the body of Christ. When the book of Acts opens, He is in heaven, and His body, the Church, is still on the earth. Just as Luke began the earthly life of Jesus with an infancy narrative, he begins the book of Acts with an infancy narrative too; the infancy of the Church that Jesus built while here on the earth.

## **Scriptures**

Chapter 2:42-47:

***"And they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and the fellowship to the breaking of bread and the prayers and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believe and were together and had all things in common. They were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need. Day by day attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts. They were praising God and having favor with all the people. The Lord added to the number day by day those who were being saved."***

Wow, is that amazing? That is the 8x10 Luke wants us to see of the Church. Now look at these six 5x7's in chapter 6:7:

***"And the word of God continued to increase and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem. A great many of the priests became obedient to the faith." Acts 6:7***

***"So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied." Acts 9:31***

***"But the word of God increased and multiplied." Acts 12:21***

***"So the churches were strengthened in the faith and they increased in numbers daily." Acts 16:5***

***"So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily." Acts 19:20***

***"...proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the word Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindering." Acts 28:31***

## **The Expansion of the Gospel**

What is the theme of Acts? It is the expansion of the gospel by the Church with the divine enabling of the Holy Spirit, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile. Once you see what Luke is trying to do, then you easily see the structure of his writing. It is a historical narrative. He has quite a lengthy introduction. As a matter of fact, I believe the introduction to this second part of his work is the thesis where Christ's work continues through the Church, with the enabling of the Holy Spirit, starts in verse 1 of chapter 1 and does not conclude until the 47<sup>th</sup> verse of chapter 2. Chapters 3:1 through 12:24 is the expansion of the gospel to the Jews. The first half of the book is where Peter seems to be the rising star of the Church; the lead speaker, so to speak, to the Jews. Then, the second half, in chapter 12:25 to the end of the book, shows the gospel expansion to the Gentiles as well. Now, Luke breaks each half into three parts. I don't know why he does that he just does.

- **First to the Jews**

In the first half, you have the introduction from chapters 1:1-2:47. Then in chapters 3:1-6:7, he starts the expansion of the gospel in Jerusalem. Then you see Jerusalem saturated now with the gospel message. But they weren't supposed to just speak to the people in Jerusalem, but also to Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth. So in chapters 6:8-

9:31, they now take the gospel to Judea and Samaria. Then, in chapters 9:2-12:24, they now take the gospel past Jerusalem, past Judea, past Samaria, and they go into Galilee and as far north as Syria with the gospel message. But Luke says that they primarily spoke to the Jews. They are neglecting the Gentiles in large measures. They are only telling folks like them who Jesus is and what He came to do. But some men who had been sent by Cornelius knocked on Peter's door and he has a vision of unclean animals. And now, we see the expansion of the gospel past Jerusalem, past Judea, past Samaria, and now it is going to go as far as Rome. But it is destined to go to the end of the earth.

- **Second to the Gentiles**

Starting chapters 12:25-16:5, we start seeing the expansion of the gospel into Asia Minor. They take a short missionary trip, so to speak, but they come back. Then, in chapter 16:6, the gospel is going to break out past Asia Minor and start encompassing what we call Eastern Europe, or what was the Eastern Roman Empire of that day. But when you get to chapter 19:21, Luke starts putting all of his attention towards Paul. He is going back to Jerusalem one more time, but not just going to Jerusalem; going to Jerusalem on his way to Rome. This book is going to end with Paul in Rome, supposedly under house arrest and chained to a Roman guard.

Can you imagine being the guard chained to the Apostle Paul for six hours at a time? There were four different soldiers a day for two years. When the book of Acts ends, it looks like the gospel is chained and the gospel is bound. But it is not bound, because Paul, under house arrest, is proclaiming the gospel to whoever will come and visit him. A Roman soldier, a different one, every six hours is hearing the gospel. The Bible says there is nothing hindering the gospel; that is the message. Ultimately, as the gospel goes from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and to the ends of the earth, there are people who will listen to the gospel. They will hear the gospel, and they will respond to the gospel by putting the faith and trust in Jesus Christ; going down into the waters of baptism, identifying their faith

in Him and becoming part of the body of Christ. Luke wants us to know that we are a part of this; part of the expansion of the gospel, from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.

## **Law of Subtraction**

Now, let's get into some important details of the book. Now, we need to remember that Luke is a medical doctor. He was trained by the government in the best techniques of medicine they had at that time. You will discover while reading the book of Acts that one of Luke's favorite subjects in school must have been math. In Luke's narrative of Acts, he records numbers many times. He starts off with the law of subtraction. In his introduction, he pictures the Church in its infancy, but they are minus one of their numbers. He really wasn't ever a member because he never really was a follower of Christ; he was a devil. But right off the bat, we are confronted with the picture of subtraction, they are minus one. So we see the law of subtraction replaced with the law of addition; they add one apostle, so that there are not eleven, but twelve apostles.

But the eleven were with Jesus on the mountain when He told them that when He got back to His Father's right hand side and took His seat on the throne of David, He was going to send the Holy Spirit on them. When they received the Holy Spirit, they would be His witnesses. They would be witnesses with power, and they were to start where they were, in Jerusalem; go to Judea, then Samaria and then the uttermost parts of the earth. But He said, don't you move! Don't dare start this until you are endued from the power from on High.

- **The Infant Church**

Now they have replaced Judas, and there are 120 members of the Church at that time. The Bible says that the early Church was in one accord; 120 people in one accord! They weren't Baptist...every time 120 Baptist get together they divide and split and start another church down the road! This church was in one accord, they were in prayer together, and now it is the

day of Pentecost, (a Jewish feast that celebrated harvest) and God pours out the Holy Spirit upon them. Peter and the apostles began to preach, and there were Jews gathered from all known nations, and they were amazed. They were looking at the speakers going whoa, aren't they from Galilee? Then how is it we hear them speaking in our native tongues? You see, when the church received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, everyone there heard the message in their own language. It was causing a stir, to the point where someone said these men were drunk! Now I never drank, but I have been around men who have and I have never seen a drunk man that has speech that gets better. As a matter of fact, their speech was kind of slurred. You couldn't even understand what he was saying in his own language much less hearing what he is speaking in another language! Peter grabs the moment and says hey, it is too early in the morning for us to be drunk.

This is what Joel talked about! The Spirit would be poured out in the last days. That is what the book of Acts is adding to the big story of the Bible. The Jews kept waiting for the last days, and according to Doctor Luke, we have now entered the last days. The evidence that we are in the last days is that God has poured His Spirit out upon all flesh! In the Old Testament, the Spirit of God was reserved for the leader, the priest, the kings, and the prophets. God's Holy Spirit would come upon the leaders, wrap them, and clothe them with power and anointing so they could carry out a task. But you would see the Spirit leave those men when God was through with them. In the Old Testament, they did not have what we have today; the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit. In the last days, the Holy Spirit wouldn't just be upon the leaders, it would be in all flesh. It didn't matter if you were a man, woman, old, young, free or a slave. All those who know Christ will be immersed with the Person of the Holy Spirit of God. It would have been one thing to have been the twelve and walked with Jesus when God was in the flesh and they were beside him seeing God every day, but it is another thing when we think about who we are. We are the church. We do not have God beside us all day, we have God in us all day; third Person of

the triune God! In the gospel, we talked a lot about Jesus. But here, Jesus tells His disciples that when He goes away He will send another Comforter, but He will not dwell alongside you. He said, the world can take Me away because they can see Me, but they will never be able to take the Holy Spirit from you because He is in you. The infant church, not a full grown mature church, now has the Holy Spirit of God inside them; they are immersed with Him.

- **Peter Preaches at Pentecost**

Peter began to preach, and it is a message of the early church. It is really simple. The first half of the book was to the Jews, so the preacher said, you killed Him. You murdered the Prince of Life; you killed God's Son! You killed the Messiah that God sent, but God raised Him from the dead. The message of the early church was that Jesus, though He was killed by the Jews, is not dead because of the determinate hand of God. Jesus was really delivered to them so that they could kill Him. God had determined it before the foundation of the world, and once they had accomplished God's sovereign purpose, God reached down and raised Him back alive, and Peter said, we are witnesses of this.

You really need to study Peter's sermon in Acts chapter 2. Peter said David knew that God had promised that one of his descendants would one day sit on his throne. Then he quotes Psalms about David's flesh not seeing corruption once it went into the grave. Peter said, if you want to go open David's tomb, you'll see those bones are still there. So David couldn't have been talking about himself. Peter said that David, being a prophet, not just a king, saw the day and prophesied about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is why Luke tells us that Jesus ascended twice, once at the end of his gospel and again at the end of Acts. Why is the ascension so important? Because the Bible wants us to know that Jesus Christ, right now, is sitting at the right hand side of God on David's throne reigning over His kingdom! Therefore, whoever calls in the name of the Lord will be saved. The



penalty of sin has been paid for all and the power of sin will be broken in every life who calls upon the name of the Lord!

Then, those who crucified Jesus got convicted. They asked what they must do. Peter gives that famous sentence, "*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself.*" For those who think divine election hinders evangelism, did you hear that? As the church advances the gospel message, we are not doing this in our own power. We are doing it under the sovereign plan of God who is going to call sinners to salvation! And we do it with the divine enabling of the Holy Spirit, and He qualifies us to be witnesses of what we know is true!

## **The Law of Addition**

When the dust settled on the day of Pentecost, 3000 souls were saved and added to the church. Now do the math; there is already 120, then add 3000. In one day, we go from 120 to 3120! How would you like to be the adult director trying to get all those in small groups, amen? Immediately, Luke says, ok, let's get everybody together and take a picture, click! Now, you and I, in the church today, have an 8x10 of the early church.

Because this is a survey, there are two words that just jump out at me: "Devoted themselves." I know that is two words, but I mean it to be one word. I want you to put those together, "devoted-themselves." There is another reoccurring word, "day by day," "day by day," "day by day." They devoted themselves to four things:

- 1. The apostles doctrine**
- 2. Fellowship**
- 3. Breaking of bread**
- 4. Prayers**

Awe, reverence, and respect came upon every soul because God was doing some really neat things through the leadership of the early church. As this church walked around in Jerusalem, they were really sensitive to each other's needs. They started noticing there were people who had needs. People began to sell what they had and gave it to people who had needs. Now they are having favor with God and with all the people, the Bible says, "daily," "day by day." God was adding to their number such as was being saved.

In English, the word "devoted" means the same thing in Greek. It means 'to be dedicated, to be consecrated.' There is a negative and a positive to this word. The positive is if you are dedicated to something, you will gain a great reward. You will gain something you don't have, which requires a negative. In order to be dedicated, in order to be devoted, in order gain, you are going to have to give up something. If you are going to be devoted, it is going to cost you. Now we use this term in Hardin a lot. For example, four guys plan a fishing trip, they get to lake, and only three guys show up. Inevitably, they look around and someone says, "Where is Bill?" Bill has called one of them and said he wasn't going to be there. They said, "You know Bill! He is devoted to his wife." You know what that means. The reason Bill didn't show up to go fishing was because he was devoted to his wife! Now I promise you, those three guys are going to snicker behind his back and maybe even make fun of him. But Bill knows that to be devoted to his wife, there is a great reward for him. But he knows to get that great reward of being devoted to her, he has to sacrifice something. So when he weighs out his wife and what she could bring to his life, and what fishing can bring; hands down, he is going with his wife every time.

If we took a snapshot of our church, what will you miss out on that one of your friends could say that you are devoted to the church? Or will your church's leaders get together sometime and have a new thought of a ministry and when your name is mentioned, they will never call you because you aren't devoted to the church? You will never sacrifice in order

to gain something in the church. If you were to say what you were devoted to, what would it be?

### **1. The Apostle's Doctrine**

They were devoted to the apostle's doctrine. For us, that is the Bible. They devoted themselves. This word, "themselves," means the emphasis is that they did it *themselves*. No body lit a fire under them to do it, not even God! They, themselves, devoted themselves to the doctrine, the teaching of God's Word. How can a nation that has as many churches as we have, take a poll and now be in favor of same sex marriages when 10 years ago we weren't? Being in a Democratic society, the Supreme Court is more concerned about the people than God. We think we know best, rather than what God says is best. Are we willing to pay the price to be devoted to the teachings of God as revealed in His Word?

### **2. Fellowship**

Are you devoted to the partnership? This word, "fellowship," should really be translated as *partnership*. Baptist have this idea of fellowship as when we get together and everyone brings their best pot luck. Man, Baptist can do fellowship really well! Even every meeting we have is like, "What are we going to serve; appetizers, dessert?" That is not what this word means in the New Testament. It is where we get our English word, *partnership*, from, as in 'you are made a partner in the firm.' It means you have a responsibility; it is yours, you are just not showing up. You play a part. If you don't do your part, the firm, the corporation, the church, will never do its part.

### **3. Breaking of Bread**

Breaking of bread is coming together in a meal. You are fellowshiping, not only with each other, but ultimately, with God, through His Son Jesus Christ. You sit down with each other and take the cup and the bread in remembrance of Jesus and His death on the cross.

## **4. Prayer**

Then, they were devoted to prayer. Do you know how often they did this? They did this day by day; day by day.

When you see this snapshot, do you see all these things that Luke is talking about? Do you see them as what the early church did, or do you see this as who the early church is? I see this as who the early church is. If you only do church weekly, then church is only a place you go. If you do church day by day, then it is who you are. Church is not a place we go, church is who we are. We have to be devoted, not weekly or monthly, but day by day.

## **The Law of Division**

The church is being added to every day. Then, starting in chapters 3:1-6:7, you see the church saturate the city of Jerusalem with the gospel. Let me tell you what inevitably happens. When the expansion of the gospel has been accomplished and a church saturates its local community, and you don't expand past your community, you quit looking out, and the only other place to look is in. When we get to Acts chapter 6, there was a murmuring. We knew that was going to happen...We had 3,000 added and they are being added daily. In another place, there was 5,000 added. Some historians believe that by the time you get to Acts chapter 6, there may have been as many as 40,000 people in Jerusalem converted to Christ, out of a population of 70,000. That's a lot of people! The church is growing and you have a murmuring. This is going to surprise you because it surprised me, but the first murmuring in the church took place in the Senior Saints Ladies small group. The little old, sweet, whitehaired ladies, who had lost their husbands were fellowshiping together. This would have really been bad if it had been our day and age because it wouldn't have been just from mouth to ear, it would have been on Facebook, Tweeted,

and on social media. All of a sudden, the “Hellenistic” ladies (the Greek speaking) Jewish ladies, are noticing that the ladies who speak the original tongue of Israel (Hebrew) are getting more bread than they are getting. The next thing you know, we have trouble. Here is where Satan gets every church in the expansion of the gospel. We saturate our local area and bring a lot of people in, and the law of addition is working. But there is another principle in mathematics called the law of division. Now we have a division, and division always lowers the numbers. I never liked division in school very much. I like things to get bigger not smaller. Here is a prime example where the church could have practiced the law of division, but they didn’t. They caught it and set apart some men who were going to take care of the physical needs of the membership so that the apostles could keep on preaching and praying.

## **The Law of Multiplication**

What the Bible says in 6:7 is important. It is just a  $5 \times 7$ , but it is big. Once they solved this problem and ordained deacons and they began to minister to the needs of those who were hurting and neglected, the number of disciples is now being multiplied. It is one thing to add  $5+5$ , but it is another thing to multiply  $5 \times 5$ . Now you have an expansion rate being multiplied of the gospel. Priests started being saved...people who believed and taught that the way you earned the right relationship with God was through the law, and now they are converting to Christ!

- **Persecution of the Church**

But the church is only in Jerusalem, so do you know what God does? He sent one of those deacons out and he preached a message. Being filled with the Spirit, he looked into Heaven and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and when told them what he saw, they stoned him. God had protected the church up to this point, but now, one goes down. When he went down, they all came at the church and they began to persecute them. They scattered. It is my opinion that because the church would not break out of only Jerusalem, God allowed them to be persecuted. I think that He

allowed them to be persecuted so they would get their mind on the main thing. The main thing was to start in Jerusalem, then go to Judea. Once we have saturated Judea, we go to Samaria. Once we have saturated Samaria, then we go to the ends of the earth.

- **Beyond Jerusalem**

Now you see the expansion. It goes into Judea, then to Samaria and the Spirit is directing the work. A man is holding a revival in a big city and a lot are being saved, and the Spirit tells him to go down to the desert. When he goes into the desert, he sees a chariot and joins up to it. A guy is reading his Bible but didn't understand what he was reading. They are out in the desert, and the last thing you expect to see in the desert is a person! The last thing you expect to see after a person is water! And he gets baptized. Church, hear me say this! In the New Testament, you will not find people becoming believers and then deciding whether to identify with Jesus or not. In the expansion of the gospel, when a person believes in Jesus and has their sins forgiven, the first thing they do is go down in the water to identify that their faith is in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Now the gospel gets past Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and it is now going out into Galilee, but we have a problem in the church. According to Luke, they won't talk to Gentiles, they will only talk to Jews. We find Peter down in Joppa and he goes to bed and has a dream. He sees a sheet descend of unclean animals, and God asks him to rise and eat. He can't eat them because he is a Jew, but God tells him to rise and eat because he has cleansed all animals. Next, there is a knock on the door. Some men came and told him that Cornelius said God sent for him, and he is supposed to tell him and his household how to be saved. And if I can say it this way, Peter, the Jew, crosses the railroad tracks. He gets out of his comfort zone and goes into the home of Cornelius, a Gentile. Cornelius said, God said you were going to tell us how to be saved. Peter said, the prophets testify that through faith in Jesus' name, you will receive forgiveness of sins. Now

Peter had brought some Jews with him as witnesses, and when the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius' house, Peter said, *"Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"*

We have to close with this thought. When Peter spoke to the Jews on the day of Pentecost, it looked like in order to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit you had to repent and be baptized. Now, you have Gentiles receiving the Holy Spirit just like the Jews did before they were baptized. Whoa...They baptize them and Peter gets called on the carpet. He has to go back to Jerusalem and say why he did what he did. In Acts 11, he said, who was I to withstand God? God gave them the same gift He gave us, and He saved them just like He saved us; by faith. Therefore, I believe God has granted repentance to life for the Gentiles. Do you hear this? The moment we proclaim the gospel to a person and they believe in Jesus, God gives them His Holy Spirit just like He has given us. As evidence that they have the Holy Spirit of God, God wants them to go down into the water and identify that their faith for salvation is in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus!

Now the gospel goes to the Gentile nation. We get to the final chapter and Paul is under house arrest. Jews are coming to him, but they won't believe. Then he quotes the Old Testament saying, Gentiles will listen. Then he is proclaiming the kingdom, boldly and without hindrance, and it stops. Some scholars believe that Luke was going to write a third book, but I don't believe that. Some scholars say it doesn't end right; we ought to know about the death of Paul. Why...who is Paul? If you think the book of Acts is a story about Peter and Paul, you have missed it! It is a story about the expansion of the gospel by the church with the divine enabling of the Holy Spirit to the Jew first, and to the Gentile. We know that Paul died, so what? Your pastor is going to die one day, so what? The only death that really mattered that shaped the world was the death of Jesus on a cross! But He is not dead, He is alive!! The book of Acts ends with us knowing Jesus is alive and the gospel hasn't gotten to the end of the earth yet. So what

does that mean? This book has not ended yet, and will not end until the gospel is taken to the ends of the earth.

What will our chapter look like? Have we saturated our city? Have we taken the gospel to other counties? Are we concerned about those who live in other states? The next time we hear about what another religion has done that we call a terrorism, instead of wishing they were dead, how many of us will pray they get saved? We are a part of the expansion of the gospel and Acts says they will listen. Let's go and tell. Let's be a witness of who Jesus is.