

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church  
Study of the Book of Acts  
Easter Season 2024

**Week 1**

**Orientation**

The Book of Acts is considered to be the second work by the author Luke. The Gospel of Luke and Acts are a continuation of the story of Jesus and the beginning of the Christian Church.

“The Greek manuscripts title the book “Acts,” and many add “of the Apostles.” The Greek word translated “Acts” (praxeis) was often used to describe the achievements of great people. Acts does feature the notable figures in the early years of the church, especially Peter (chapters 1–12) and Paul (chapters 13–28). But the book could more properly be called “The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles,” since His sovereign, superintending work was far more significant than that of any human being.”

MacArthur, John F.. Acts (p. 1). HarperChristian Resources. Kindle Edition.

“Like many Greek historians, whom Luke imitates in part, Luke supplemented his narrative with speeches appropriate to significant occasions. These speeches, which amount to nearly one third of the total text, are Luke’s own creations, inserted into the narrative to instruct and please the reader. They also serve to demonstrate the unity of the earliest Christian preaching even as they present Luke’s own interpretation of the event surrounding the emergence of the church.”

“Written from the perspective of the late first or perhaps early second century CE Acts alone among the documents of the earliest Christian period offers a narrative sequel to the accounts of Jesus’ words and deeds found in the Gospels. The book of Acts can be compared with the Hellenistic historical monographs of the time. The account was intended to Give Christians of his day an unshakable confidence in their future through an instructive survey of their past.”

The New Annotated Oxford Bible Commentary, Michael D. Coogan Editor

“Some believe Luke wrote Acts after the fall of Jerusalem (A.D. 70; his death was probably in the mid-eighties). It is more likely, however, that he wrote much earlier, before the end of Paul’s first Roman imprisonment (ca. A.D. 60–62). That date is the most natural explanation for the abrupt ending of Acts—which leaves Paul awaiting trial before Caesar.”

As the first work of church history ever penned, Acts records the initial response to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20). It provides information on the first three decades of the church’s existence—material found nowhere else in the New Testament. Though not primarily a doctrinal work, Acts nonetheless emphasizes that Jesus of Nazareth was Israel’s long-awaited Messiah, shows that the gospel is offered to all people (not merely the Jews), and stresses the work of the Holy Spirit (mentioned more than fifty times). Acts also makes frequent use of the Old Testament: for example, 2:17–21 (Joel 2:28–32); 2:25–28 (Psalm 16:8–11); 2:35 (Psalm

110:1); 4:11 (Psalm 118:22); 4:25–26 (Psalm 2:1–2); 7:49–50 (Isaiah 66:1–2); 8:32–33 (Isaiah 53:7–8); 28:26–27 (Isaiah 6:9–10).

MacArthur, John F. Acts (p. 4). HarperChristian Resources. Kindle Edition.

## Chapter 1

The Book of Acts begins with Luke summarizing the information from his first book the Gospel of Luke. The receiver of the story Theophilus meaning “dear to God” is possibly a symbolic dedication to the reader as well as a common pattern of addressment in ancient literature.

The number 40 represents the Biblical number frequently used for transitions within the Old Testament. It then becomes the number to represent the Easter season. When presenting the ascension of Jesus there are many parallels between Luke’s Transfiguration account and the final leaving of Jesus. The reference to the two men in white, may again refer to Moses and Elijah.

Chapter one gives us the restoration of the twelve disciples after the loss of Judas. The election of Matthias corresponds back to representation for the twelve tribes of Israel. To become an apostle one must have witnessed Jesus in some real capacity. The definition of becoming a witness to Jesus’ resurrection leaves out Judas who died prior to the resurrection and Paul who although he experienced his own witness of Christ was not there at the ascension.

## Chapter 2

The second chapter begins with the day of Pentecost. For the Israelite culture it was a day to celebrate the spring barley harvest and is fifty days after Passover. In the Jewish tradition the law was given and remembered on this day. But this time we have the wind, almost sweeping away the Old and bringing in the new. We have the speaking in foreign languages and flame like light emitting from the disciples.

\*Just a note: was this Pentecost experience the healing for the Tower of Babel?

The story of the Tower of Babel explains the origins of the multiplicity of languages. God was concerned that humans had blasphemed by building the tower to avoid a second flood and get closer to Heaven so God brought into existence multiple languages. Thus, humans were divided into linguistic groups, unable to understand one another which in turn keep them from working together.

We also have the proclamation of who Jesus is and the foundation of the church in Acts 2:36  
*“Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.”*

And with that the community began to form as they met to teach, have fellowship, pray and eat together.

### **Chapter 3**

“With the coming of the Spirit upon the followers of Christ (chapter 2), the church was born and immediately began to grow. Chapters 3—5 describe the impact of this new program in the eternal, unfolding plan of God. The Apostles Peter and John are the initial human leaders of this new entity. A healing at the temple gives them an open door to declare plainly that Jesus, crucified and resurrected, is the long-awaited Messiah who fulfills all the predictions of the prophets. Their preaching, however, quickly gets them in trouble with the Sanhedrin, the same authorities who arrested and killed Jesus, that dangerous rabbi from Nazareth. These religious leaders now seek to intimidate and silence His followers.”

MacArthur, John F.. Acts (p. 16). HarperChristian Resources. Kindle Edition.

### **Chapter 4**

“Undaunted, the believers pray for courage and continue living in such a way that the world sits up and takes notice. Those outside the church are startled to see believers care for one another and share with one another in extravagant ways.”

MacArthur, John F.. Acts (p. 16). HarperChristian Resources. Kindle Edition.

In Chapter 4:31 it seems as if there is another Pentecost moment only a smaller presentation with the Holy Spirit filling them with boldness, followed by the communal sharing of all assets and goods which even included real estate sales.

### **Questions to Ponder**

Someone once quipped that God has had to endure three great humiliations: (1) becoming man in Christ, (2) becoming sin on the cross, and (3) the church. Why would this need to be the case?

What instructions and insights did Jesus give His followers concerning the Holy Spirit? Do you feel you continue this tradition?

What was the thrust of Peter’s sermon to the gathered crowd at Pentecost? Do you hear these themes repeated through the first three chapters of Acts?

Reflect on your prayer habits (and your church’s). What specifically and practically do your prayers want to emulate from the early church in this area?

