

Acts Ch. 1–7

STUDY NOTES

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

00:00–00:38

Tim: One of the earliest accounts about Jesus of Nazareth, his life, death, and resurrection, was written by a man named Luke.

Jon: We know it as the gospel of Luke, but Luke continued the story in a second volume...

Tim: ...called the book of Acts, and it's all about what Jesus continued to do after his resurrection.

Jon: Acts begins with the disciples, who are hanging out with Jesus, who's just come back to life, which is mind-blowing to imagine!

Tim: And then for weeks, the risen Jesus kept teaching them about his upside-down Kingdom, the new creation that he launched through his death and resurrection.

Jon: This is exciting stuff, and the disciples are ready to go tell the world.

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Tim: But then Jesus tells them to wait and to stay in Jerusalem until they receive a new kind of power, so they can be faithful witnesses to Jesus and his Kingdom. Then he says that their mission is going to begin in Jerusalem, then move out to Judea and Samaria, and then from there out into the nations. It's like a roadmap for the whole book of Acts. Then the disciples saw Jesus enthroned as king of all creation.¹

Jon: So the disciples wait, wondering when this power is going to come, and then comes the time of Pentecost.

1. In Acts 1:8, Jesus commissions the disciples to be witnesses to the gospel "in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and

to the ends of the earth." This becomes the framework for the entire book of Acts.



Tim: So this is an ancient Israelite festival. It's during the early summer, and thousands and thousands of Jewish pilgrims would come back to Jerusalem from all over the world, all these different languages and cultures colliding in the city.²

Jon: And the disciples of Jesus were together in a house, which is suddenly filled with rushing wind, along with fire, the fire splinters off into "tongues of fire" hovering over people's heads. What's this all about?

Tim: Yeah, so Luke is tapping into a repeated Old Testament theme. When God's presence showed up similarly at Mount Sinai, he made a covenant with Israel and gave them the ten commandments. Then later, when God's glory came in a pillar of fire, it filled the tabernacle when he came to live among them.³

Jon: But that was one pillar of fire, not many.

Tim: Exactly. Luke is making an important point here. This is God's personal temple presence, God's Spirit that was foretold by Israel's prophets. And now it's come to take up residence in the new temple of Jesus' body, that is, his people. They've become little mobile temples where God now dwells.

Jon: And they start to tell stories about Jesus, but they're speaking in languages that they didn't know before, yet all the visitors can understand them. What is this all about?

2. God's purpose is to create the new covenant family of King Jesus that will cross all social, cultural, and ethnic boundary lines. Acts 2 is the first realization of Jesus' promise, as Pentecost brings together Israelites from all over the diaspora map of the ancient world to receive the Holy Spirit. There are fifteen places mentioned in 2:5-11, and they circle the entire span of the compass, and archaeologists

estimate that between 500,000 to 1,000,000 visitors would flock to Jerusalem for pilgrimage feasts like Pentecost.

3. You can go back and see this repeated Old Testament image in Exodus 40:34-35, Leviticus 9:23-24, 2 Kings 8:10-11, 2 Chronicles 5:13-14, and 2 Chronicles 7:1-2.

Tim: Well, Peter gets up to explain that this is the fulfillment of Israel's hopes based on the Scriptures. God's plan was always to use the unified family of Abraham to bring peace and justice to the world, but the tribes of Israel had been scattered because of the exile. Now here at Pentecost, representatives from all the tribes come back together, and they're introduced to their Messiah, the crucified and risen Jesus, so they can now become the restored people of Israel.

Jon: And thousands of them start following the way of Jesus.

SECTION 3: THE NEW TEMPLE

02:44–04:06

Tim: Which brings us to Luke's tale of two temples. So you've got the temple that Herod built in Jerusalem, where Jesus' disciples worship like the rest of the Israelites. But now there's also Jesus' temple, which consists of people. This temple is meeting together in homes all over Jerusalem, and they were approaching life in a radical new way.⁴

Jon: Right, think about it. Many of these pilgrims aren't even from Jerusalem, so they formed these new families, and they're all depending on each other.

Tim: Yeah. People would sell their stuff, provide for the poor among them. They ate their meals together; they said their daily prayers together.

Jon: They were learning from the apostles what it means to live as if Jesus is the true King of the world. It must have been exhilarating.

4. Peter and the apostles are performing "signs, healings, and wonders" in the temple "in the name of Jesus." "The name of Jesus" is mentioned eleven times in chapters 3-5, recalling the

promise of Deuteronomy that when God establishes the temple, it will be "the place where I choose for my name to dwell" (Deut 12:5, 11, 13).

Tim: But it wasn't all fun and games. Being God's temple is serious business, just like in the Old Testament. So you might know about that strange story in the book of Leviticus about two priests who disrespect God in the temple and then suddenly die.⁵ Well Luke includes here a similar story of two disciples who dishonor God's Spirit in this new temple, and they suffer a similar fate.⁶

Jon: So there's corruption in the community, but the bigger problem is coming from the outside.

Tim: Yeah, from the other temple. Its leaders are threatened by this new messianic movement, and so they arrest the apostles to try and stop them. And this brings us to the final story in the Jerusalem section of Acts. We are introduced to a new disciple, Stephen.

SECTION 4: THE MARTYRDOM OF STEPHEN

04:07–05:45

Jon: Oh yeah, Stephen. He's on fire! He steps up as a leader among the disciples to serve the poor, and he would go to the temple courts to teach people about the way of Jesus.

Tim: So the temple leaders arrest him, and they find false witnesses to accuse him of dishonoring Moses and of being a terrorist who's threatening the temple.

Jon: In response, Stephen gives this powerful speech about how predictable this whole situation was.⁷

5. You can read the story of Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10.

7. Take the time to read this incredible speech in Acts 7.

6. This is the story of Ananias and Sapphira found in Acts 5:1-11.

Tim: Yeah. He retells the Old Testament story, highlighting characters like Joseph, Moses, and the prophets, people who were consistently rejected and persecuted by their own people. Israel's been resisting God's representatives for centuries, and so their rejection of Jesus and now his followers is a rejection of God himself.

Jon: They get angry, and they start to execute him by picking up rocks and smashing him to death.

Tim: And as he's dying, he commits himself to the way of Jesus, to suffer because of the sins of others. He even cries out, "Lord! Do not hold this sin against them!"

Jon: This is basically what Jesus said at his death!⁸

Tim: Exactly. Stephen becomes the first martyr of the Jesus movement, with many more to come. But this persecution contains seeds of hope, which is why Luke introduces us to a new character here: a religious leader named Saul. He stands over Stephen's dead body and even approves of the whole thing.⁹

Jon: Wait, Saul! You mean the guy who becomes the Apostle Paul?!

Tim: Yes! Luke is showing how even this tragic murder can't stop Jesus' Kingdom. And so many persecuted disciples scatter out of Jerusalem, and just as Jesus said, they head into Judea and Samaria. Now the story of what happens there, that's what the next section of Acts is all about.

8. Jon is referring to the words of Jesus on the cross, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing," recorded in Luke 23:34. Much of Luke's portrayal of Stephen in Acts 6-7 runs parallel to his representation of Jesus in Luke 22-23, culminating in their last words.

9. See Acts 8:1-3.