**The Acts of the Apostles**

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\*note: several questions are from *The Acts of the Apostles: Discussions for Group Bible Study*by Doris Irwin, Marilyn Kunz, and Catherine Schell

**Witnesses for Jesus**

Luke 1:1-4

Acts 1: 1-11

Who is the person in your life who has had the greatest influence on you? How did this person influence you? What direction has your life taken as a result?

The book of Acts was written by Luke and describes the acts of Jesus’ followers in the years after his death and resurrection. After Jesus’ death they were a small, frightened group. Jesus resurrection and the power of the Holy Spirit turned them into bold witnesses who were ready to give their lives to tell the whole world about Jesus.

**Terms**

Theophilus – means “friend of God”; he was possibly a real person or the book may be addressed to anyone who loves God

Proclaimed – presented; taught

Excellency – excellent person; a title of great respect

Holy Spirit – Spirit of God

Apostles – Jesus’ twelve special followers, originally called disciples

Baptized – dipped in; water baptism symbolizes cleansing from sins and dying and being raised with Jesus. Being baptized in the Spirit implies a new life and power from God’s Spirit

Galileans – Jesus’ apostles (they were all from the province of Galilee)

Two men dressed in white – probably angels, spirits who are God’s servants and messengers

**Questions**

1. Luke starts his book like a letter with a note of explanation. Who is Luke writing to? Why is he writing?
2. Where does Luke get his information from? What does he want his readers to know?
3. How is the first sentence of Acts like the start of Luke?
	1. What is the subject of each?
4. If all we had to read from the Bible was Acts 1:1-11, what would we know about Jesus?
5. How does Luke emphasize Jesus really rose from the dead?
6. What command does Jesus give his apostles after his resurrection? What promises does he give?
7. The Jews believed the Messiah would deliver their country from Roman occupation. Jesus’ resurrection proved to his followers that he was the Messiah. What do you think the apostles were thinking about when they asked him the question in v. 6?
	1. What was Jesus answer to their question?
8. What is a witness? Where will they witness? Who will they witness to? How will they have the power to witness?
9. Look at v. 8. If it summarizes the rest of the book of Acts, what do you think the rest of the book will be like? How does that verse describe what Christians do today?
10. How does Jesus leave his disciples?
11. What promise does Jesus give?
12. What would you have thought and felt if you had been a follower seeing Jesus return to heaven?

What is the Holy Spirit’s part in continuing Jesus’ work on earth? Christians believe the Spirit is still living in Christians today. How important is his role? What makes you think so?

Filled With the Holy Spirit

Acts 2:1-22

Jesus had returned to God in heaven after he rose from the dead. Before he left, he made some very specific promises to his followers: that they would not be alone, that he would send God’s Spirit to them, that they would be baptized in the Spirit. His followers were to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit, who would fill them with power. Then they would be witnesses for Jesus in Jerusalem, the surrounding area, and the ends of the earth.

**Terms**

Believers – Jesus’ followers; people who trust in Jesus

Holy Spirit – the Spirit of God

Apostles – ones sent out; a term used for Jesus’ 12 special followers

Prophet – person chosen by God to speak for him

Great and glorious day of the Lord – term referring to the day of final judgement

**Questions**

1. Why do you think Luke refers to Jesus’ followers as “believers”?
2. What do the believers hear, see, and do as the Spirit comes and fills them?
3. What kind of crowd gathered when the noise of the Spirit’s coming was heard? What were they excited about? What were their questions?
4. How does Peter answer them?
5. What parts of Joel (the prophet Peter quotes) fit what is happening?
6. How is the Spirit being “poured out”? On whom?
7. Describe the signs that will accompany God’s final judgement. Who will be saved in that time?

The Holy Spirit allowed the believers to proclaim God’s message in a way that was understood by everyone listening. What part does the Spirit play today in making God’s witness understood?

**Jesus is Lord**

Acts 2: 22-47

On the Jewish harvest feast of Pentecost, those who believed in Jesus were gathered waiting for the promised coming of God’s Spirit. It came upon them with the noise of a mighty wind and flames of fire, attracting a large crowd. All the believers began to tell about Jesus in many different languages. The crowd is confused and Peter begins to answer their questions.

**Terms**

Israelites – people of Israel; Jews

Nazareth – town where Jesus grew up

Divine – a god

Miracles and wonders – happenings outside normal occurrences

Mortal – subject to death

Prophet – person chosen to deliver God’s message

Messiah – deliverer promised by God

Lord – master; ruler

Apostles – ones sent out; a term for Jesus’ 12 special followers

Awe – amazement combined with fear and respect

**Questions**

1. If you were a stranger in Jerusalem and heard Peter’s words, what would you have learned about Jesus?
2. What proved that Jesus’ power and authority came from God?
3. What important events of Jesus’ life happened according to God’s plan? Why do you think it was part of God’s plan for Jesus to die and rise again?
4. David, the greatest king of Israel, had written a song thousands of years before which Peter quotes. What is David saying about himself? About God?
5. Who does Peter say David’s words describe?
6. Where does Peter say Jesus is now? What is his relationship to God?
7. What gift did Jesus give to his followers? How do we know?
8. Why do you think Peter’s listeners were deeply troubled?
9. What was Peter’s answer to their questions?
10. What does it mean to turn away from your sins?
11. What do you think it means to be baptized in the name of Jesus?
12. What gift do those who follow Jesus receive? Who can follow Jesus?
13. What does Peter urge his audience to save themselves from? What does he say will happen to those who don’t trust in Jesus?
14. What kinds of activities did the new believers take part in? How did they act towards one another?

Much of Peter’s witness involves quoting scripture about Jesus and explaining it. What role can scripture play in our witness?

**The Power of Jesus’ Name**

Acts 3

Throughout Luke, we saw that Jesus was a person sent from God with authority from God. This was proven by the miracles and wonders he did. After the Holy Spirit filled his followers, they also did miracles and wonders. This proved that God’s power was working through them.

**Terms**

Temple – the center of Jewish worship

Nazareth – town where Jesus grew up

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – the three famous ancestors of the people of Israel

Pilate – the Roman governor of the Jews who gave the order to crucify Jesus

Glory – wonderful brightness

Faith – belief or trust

Messiah – Anointed One; deliverer promised by God

Repent – turn around; turn away from sin and to God

Holy – chosen by God; separate from sin and wrong things

Prophets – people chosen to speak for God

Moses – most important leader and prophet in the Old Testament. God gave the Jewish laws to Israel through Moses

Covenant – agreement between God and men describing their relationship

Bless – bring good upon

**Questions**

1. Where did Peter and John go? Who else was there?
2. How did the lame man support himself? What do you think his expectations were for the rest of his life?
3. What did the lame man think he would get from Peter and John? What did he get instead?
4. Try to imagine the lame man’s feelings. What do you think went through his mind during this entire event?
5. How did other people react?
6. What questions does Peter answer?
7. Where did the power to heal the lame man come from?
8. Peter calls Jesus by three different titles: Messiah, prophet, servant. What does each title mean? What part of Jesus’ work do each describe?
9. How responsible was Peter’s audience for what happened to Jesus?
10. What does Peter urge his listeners to do? What will the result be?
11. To Peter’s audience, Moses and the prophets were the greatest religious leaders. What is their relationship to Jesus? Why are Peter’s words important to the audience?
12. Who are God’s promises for?

What was the need of the lame man? What was the need of Peter’s audience? What are the needs of people today?

**Obeying God Rather Than Men**

Acts 4:1-31

Have you heard of believers in Jesus being persecuted or oppressed because they followed Jesus? Why do you think this happens?

**Terms**

Sadducees – a religious group within the Jews who believed the law written by Moses was the only message from God to men; didn’t believe in life after death

Apostles – ones sent out; used for Jesus’ 12 special followers

Christ – Greek word for *Messiah*; the deliverer promised by God

Salvation – deliverance from God’s judgement on sin and evil

Council – group of priests and religious leaders who ruled over Jewish matters

Gentiles – people who are not Jews

Herod – the king over Jews appointed by Rome

Pilate – the Roman governor of Judea

David – the greatest king of the Jews

Proclaim – teach; preach

**Questions**

1. Who stops Peter and John from speaking to the people?
2. Why were they arrested?
3. What was the reaction of the people to Peter’s message? Why do you think the people reacted differently from the leaders?
4. The leaders Peter and John talk to are the same ones who planned Jesus’ death. What do they want to know from Peter? Why?
5. How does Peter answer them?
6. Where does salvation come from?
7. How do you think the council felt after they heard Peter’s answer? Why can’t they argue with him?
8. The leaders didn’t believe Peter, even though the lame man was healed. Why do you think they refused to trust in Jesus? Why did they want Peter and John to stop preaching?
9. What command did the leaders give Peter and John? How did they answer? Why?
	1. If you were a leader, what would think about their answer? Why?
10. After they were released, Peter and John met with other believers to pray. If you were them, what would you have prayed for?
	1. What did they pray for? What don’t they ask for? What is most important to them?
11. How does God answer their prayer?

Have you faced opposition for believing in Jesus? When does a Christian disobey his government?

**Putting the Spirit to the Test**

Acts 4:32-5:11

Hypocrisy is pretending to be something while you are actually something else. The people Jesus spoke the most against were hypocrites. They appeared very religious and were proud about keeping rules and rituals, but forgot about the important things in God’s law like justice and mercy.

**Terms**

Satan – the chief evil spirit that opposes God; the devil

**Questions**

1. What was the life of the new believers like? How did they treat one another?
2. Why do you think new believers shared what they had with one another?
3. What did Joseph do? Given his nickname, what do you think he was like?
4. What did Ananias and Sapphira do that was like Barnabas? What did they do differently?
5. What is Ananias’ sin? Was he required to give all (or any) of his money to the group?
	1. Why do you think he held back part of the money? Why do you think he lied?
6. What happens to Ananias after Peter talks to him about his sin?
7. How did Peter test Sapphira when she came in? What do you think he wanted to find out?
8. Peter said their lies had tested God’s Spirit. What do you think that meant?
9. The immediate punishment was a sign from God to the believers. How did everyone feel? How would you have felt? What would you have learned?

How important do you think it is for a follower of Jesus to be honest and truthful? How should followers of Jesus react to temptation of impressing others with false words and actions? This was the first recorded time that new believers tried to lie to God. Christians know from personal experience that this was not the last time, but immediate death isn’t the usual response. However, the Bible shows those who only pretend to believe in Jesus are still separated from God.

**Worthy to Suffer for Jesus’ Sake**

Acts 5:12-42

People sometimes undergo hardship and difficulty for a cause or movement they believe in. Jesus had already warned his followers that they would be brought before “kings and governors” for his sake, but that they were not to worry about what to say – God’s Holy Spirit would give them the words.

**Terms**

High priest – the Jewish chief priest who was the highest religious and political official

Apostles – ones sent out; a term for Jesus’ 12 close followers

Sadducees – Jewish religious group with some political power

Angel – messenger; a spirit that serves God

Pharisee – Jewish religious group that was very strict about obeying the law

Law – the laws given to God by the people of Israel written in the first 5 books of the Bible

**Questions**

1. How did people outside the group of believers feel about them?
2. What kinds of signs did the Spirit do through the believers?
3. Why do you think those outside the group would not join the believers in the temple for worship?
4. Who opposes the apostles? Why?
5. What do they do to the apostles?
6. What does God do for the apostles?
7. Why didn’t the apostles run away and hide when they were released from prison?
	1. How would you have felt if you were an apostle?
8. If you were a member of the council, what would you have thought the next morning?
9. What is the high priest’s complaint? What do you think he is afraid of?
10. How did the apostles answer the high priest?
11. What is the work of God the Father? God the Son (Jesus)? God the Holy Spirit?
12. How has God shown himself to be more powerful than the council?
13. How did the council react to the apostles? Why do you think they were angry?
14. Who is Gamaliel? What was his advice? What do you think of it?
	1. If he were alive today, do you think he would say the movement of the followers of Christ was from men or God?
15. What did the council decide to do?
16. How did the apostles react to what happened to them? Why?
17. What did the apostles continue to do? Where? Why?
18. If an angel could lead them out of prison, why couldn’t they have been stopped from getting whipped?
	1. If you were an apostle, what would you have thought about this?
	2. Why were they happy to suffer for Jesus’ sake?

**Ready to Die for Jesus’ Sake**

Acts 6:8-8:13

We read about conflicts every day. Hatred between groups results in senseless killing. What kinds of issues raise feelings to such a level that killing others seems like a reasonable alternative? Jesus told his followers that if they wanted to come with him, “he must forget himself, take up his cross every day, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever wants to love his life will save it.”

**Terms**

Synagogue – building where Jews met for worship and religious education

Moses – greatest leader of the Jewish people in the Old Testament

Council – the group of Jewish leaders who tried Jesus and condemned him to death

Temple – center of Jewish religious ritual and worship in Jerusalem

Stoned – being killed by rocks thrown at you

**Questions**

1. What were the characters of Stephen’s life?
2. Who opposed Stephen? How? Why did they lose their arguments?
3. When they failed in their arguments, what did they do? What did they accuse him of?
4. What threat do you think these men felt from the believers of Jesus?
5. How had God worked through Moses? What did the people following Moses have a history of doing? Who did Moses say God would send in the future?
6. Can the worship of God be confined to a building? Why or why not? Where is God?
7. What does Stephen say about his accusers and listeners? How have their ancestors opposed God’s will?
8. Who is the righteous servant that Stephen says they betrayed?
9. How does the council react to Stephen’s accusations? Why are they angry?
10. How does Stephen resist their hatred? Why don’t you think he responded with more hatred? Whose example is he following?

Witnesses in Samaria

Acts 8:1-25

Are there groups of people that don’t get along well with each other in your country? How do barriers between different groups come about? Samaria was not far from Jerusalem, but was very culturally different. Jews and Samaritans despised and hated each other, because they worshipped God in different places and with different customs.

**Questions**

1. What happens to the church after Stephen’s death?
2. What did Saul do? What do you think he wants to accomplish?
3. Where do the believers go? What do they do when they get there?
4. Did the persecution of the church lead to a bad or a good thing?
5. What does Philip do when reaching Samaria? How do the people of Samaria receive him?
6. Who is Simon? What kind of person is he?
7. Compare what Simon and Philip each did. How are they different?
8. What happens as a result of Philip’s preaching?
9. What do the leaders in Jerusalem do when they hear about the new believers in Samaria?
10. Why is it an important sign when the Holy Spirit comes on the new believers?
11. What was Simon’s reaction to the Holy Spirit? What do you think his motives are?
12. What does Peter think about Simon’s offer?
	1. Some people today say God will make you rich if you give them money. What would Peter say about this kind of teaching?
13. What is God’s motivation for his gifts? What were Philip’s and Peter’s motivation for sharing the gifts with others?

**Witness to Africa**

Acts 8:26-40

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

**Terms**

Eunuch – a man who has been made physically incapable of sexual reproduction

Prophet – person chosen by God to deliver God’s message

Isaiah – a prophet in Israel about 700 years before Jesus lived

Scripture – writings; the Bible

Disfigured – bent out of shape

Marvel – wonder at; be amazed at

Sacrifice – an offering or gift to God

Baptism – to dip in water; symbolizes belief and trust in Jesus

**Questions**

1. Even though many people in Samaria were becoming Christians, Philip leaves them. Why?
2. What is the man like that Philip was sent to? Why did he travel to Jerusalem? What is he doing while he travels?
3. What does God’s spirit lead Philip to do? Why?
4. What did the Ethiopian want someone to do? What did Philip do?
5. What did the passage say? How does it describe Jesus?
6. What will be the end result of the work of God’s servant?
7. If we were told God became a man, what would we expect him to be like? What was surprising about Jesus?
8. What were the reactions of the world to Jesus while he was on earth? How did his life end?
9. In what ways are these verses a description of the arrest, trial, death, and burial of Jesus?
10. What was the purpose of Jesus’ death and resurrection?
11. What happened to the Ethiopian official who heard the good news about Jesus?

Look at the four mentions of Philip so far (Acts 6:3,5; 8:4-5,26-29,39-40). What was Philip’s life marked by? What do you learn from Philip about being a witness for Jesus Christ?

**The Persecutor Meets Jesus**

Acts 9:1-31

Sometimes people will experience a dramatic change in their lives. One of the strongest leaders of the early church was a man named Paul. He traveled all around the known world, from Syria to Spain. He started churches and wrote letters to them to tell them more about God and how to work through problems.

Paul’s life was dramatically changed when he met Jesus. He grew up as a Greek speaking Jew, was a member of the Pharisee party, and was a Roman citizen. We have already met Paul – called Saul – at Stephen’s death.

**Terms**

Synagogue – building where Jews met for worship and teaching

Way of the Lord – an early name for Christianity

Persecute – systematically cause trouble or harm

Baptized – to be dipped in water; a public sign of believing and trusting Jesus

**Questions**

1. Why is Saul traveling to Damascus?
2. What does Saul see and hear on the road to Damascus? What does Jesus tell him?
3. How was Saul persecuting Jesus?
4. How does Saul enter Damascus? How might this be different than planned?
5. What does his physical blindness mean? How does it symbolize his relationship with God?
6. What did God ask Ananias to do?
7. How does Ananias feel about this? How does God respond?
8. What does God have in the future for Saul?
9. How do you think Saul feels when he can see again? How is his physical sight symbolic of his spiritual sight?
10. What immediate changes do you see in Saul?
11. What does he preach? What’s the reaction to his preaching?
12. How has Saul become like Stephen? Why is he hated by unbelieving Jews?
13. How do the believers protect Saul?
14. Why isn’t Saul accepted by the other believers in Jerusalem? What does Barnabas do?
15. How does Saul’s conversion affect the believers?
16. What could have caused the change in Saul? What might he have felt or thought?

**God Treats Everyone on the Same Basis**

Acts 10

Cultural differences are important to understand, since they have the potential to create barriers between people. The first believers were all Jews. There were wide cultural barriers between Jews and Gentiles. Jews would not associate with Gentiles if they could help it.

**Terms**

Vision – seeing something in your mind that may not physically be there

Proclaiming – preaching or teaching

Baptized – being dipped in water; a sign of belief and trust in Jesus

**Questions**

1. What do you learn about Cornelius at the beginning of chapter 10? Describe his relationship to God and others.
2. What frightens Cornelius? How is he encouraged?
3. What does the angel command?
4. What is Peter doing when he has his vision?
5. Describe the vision. Why does he react to the command the way he does?
6. What concept does the voice try to help Peter understand?
7. How is Peter prepared for Cornelius’ men?
8. What does Peter want to know from them? Why?
9. Who goes to Caesarea with Peter? Why do you think he took other believers with him?
10. What indicated Cornelius’ interest and sincerity?
11. What does Peter say he has learned from his vision? What else does he want to know?
12. How does Cornelius’ explanation show that Peter’s vision came from God? Why is that important?
13. What are the major points of Peter’s speech? What does he emphasize?
14. How is Peter’s speech interrupted? How is that a sign? What does it mean?

This chapter is an example of what God did for a man who was truly seeking him. Peter learned the lesson that the good news about Jesus is meant for all people.

**Proclaiming the Message to the Gentiles**

Acts 11:1-26

Peter had learned that God’s grace and salvation is for everyone, but not all the leaders in Jerusalem felt the same. They still were prejudiced against Gentiles and believed God favored the Jews. They believed Gentiles were outside God’s care and concern.

**Terms**

Circumcision – physical operation perform on Jewish boys showing they were under God’s law

Baptism – to be dipped in water as a sign of belief and trust in Jesus

Repent – to turn away from sins and wrongdoing and turn to God

Faith – belief and trust

**Questions**

1. Why was Peter criticized after returning from his visit with Cornelius? Who criticized him?
2. What did the Jews want Gentiles to do to become followers of Jesus?
3. How does Peter respond to these ideas?
4. What does the coming of the Holy Spirit on Gentiles mean?
5. How do others react to Peter’s answers?
6. How does what started with Peter and Cornelius continue in Antioch?
7. What does the church in Jerusalem do when they hear the news from Antioch? Why?
8. How does Barnabas live up to his nickname again? Why do you think he brings Saul to Antioch?
9. What new name is given to the believers in Antioch? Why might that be?