

Session #2: Acts Chapter 1

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Over the course of my life I have grown to appreciate storms and bad weather. Don't get me wrong, I am not crazy about the destructiveness of storm but there is an element that storms make sense to me. I remember one summer when my daughter was about ten we camped on one of the small islands in Lake Erie, just north of Ohio. One day of this family vacation the weather, during the day, was hot and very muggy. So, muggy you could almost cut it with a knife. As the day progressed you could look up at the sky and know something was coming. The way the clouds were forming, the color of the sky, the wind beginning to whip up... all the elements were there, and sure enough just as we finished our dinner we just had enough time to clean and pack all the cooking supplies into the car and dive into our tent before the torrential downpour of rain came. Now my daughter, then 7 years old, was not such a big fan of storms but we entertained ourselves in a number of ways. Have you ever done the thing of counting the seconds between when you see the lightening and then the clap of thunder? Well, at one point the two occurred simultaneously. When the storm was over (It only lasted about a half hour.) we crawled out of the tent to survey and clean up the damage.



It is that image I want to use to put the book of the first chapters of the Acts of the Apostles into context. In this analogy of a storm, Old Testament is the elements of wind, clouds and other essentials come together, preparing for a storm. The Old Testament is written to not only begin the story of faith but to show all that God did to prepare the world, prepare humanity for the coming of His Son, Jesus. The gospels tells the story of the life and teaching of Christ who is Himself the storm that swept into our lives, blowing things about, changing things forever and here only for a short moment. The resurrection was the lightening and 40 seconds later, or in our case 40 days later, with a clap of thunder the Ascension of Christ which is followed later by the descent of the Holy Spirit. The story of Acts is the story of the Apostles and us coming out of the tent. At first they/we look about wondering just what to do and where to begin. But through the power of the Holy Spirit the work beings as everyone puts back into place the pieces of our lives. But our lives will never be the same because the lay of the land has changed, we have changed. Just like we have to figure what to do first and then next, the Apostles and Disciples had no written plan. This book, the Acts of the Apostles is the work of those holy men and women as they sought to put the pieces of their lives and the life of the Church into place.

Oh, and just so you know; that storm that passed as we lay in our tent and listened to? It turned out that it was actually a tornado that was passing through Lake Erie and skipped over the island where we camped.

Promise of the Spirit 1:1-5

We see in these first verses an overlap with the Gospel of Luke which creates a connection with the gospel. St. Luke will once again address “Theophilus” and later a repeat of the witness of Jesus’ ascension into heaven. This allows us to know that it was Jesus that continued to teach the Apostles. We can imagine that in that Upper Room Jesus answered all their questions and helped them to make the connections between what He had taught and what the disciples experienced. By the way, St. Luke is the only New Testament author to begin his work with a prologue which was in the style of secular writing in the 1st Century

1:1 first book

St. Luke is refereeing to his first work—the Gospel of Luke. St. Luke was concerned that the truth about who Christ was and what Christ did, who the early Church was and what the early Church did be understood in fact and not the “fiction” that often develops through the imaginations and inaccurate reporting of some. St. Luke wanted to preserve the true historical memory. And it was important he did so because Jesus Christ is our first and foremost revelation of faith, of God and our relationship with God. *“The most intimate truth which this revelation gives us about God and the salvation of man shines forth in Christ, who is himself both the mediator and the sum total of Revelation” Dei Verbum Second Vatican Council*

Theophilus

As we discussed in our last study of the Gospel of Luke, who Theophilus is scholars have no idea. The name literally means “Beloved of God” or “friend of God” so while these documents may have been written to one individual, there is also the reality that St. Luke was speaking to the whole Christian Community, as was meant for one particular person. There are several theories as to who this individual was or what St. Luke meant: Some scholars have suggested that Theophilus may be a code name to protect the identity of who Luke is writing to. And, because Luke uses the description “most excellent” in his Gospel (1:3), Luke may have been writing to someone of great importance. Scholars note that these words of respect were often used as a title during that period of Roman officials, so Theophilus may have been a high ranking official in the Roman government or military. Most scholars believe that “Theophilus” as a man was probably St. Luke’s benefactor or patron who supported him during the years he traveled researching and writing the texts of the Gospel and Acts. But as I said, there are those who believe that St. Luke choose such a name because in truth he was addressing every believer. That this document was not written for just one person but for all who seek to know and deepen their belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and the work of the Church. So with that in mind this document is written for and to you/me and everyone who opens their hearts to read it.

1:3 many proofs

While the proofs listed below still must be accepted by us in faith, we have:

1. The empty tomb on Easter morning (John 20:1-18, Luke 24:1-8)

Session #2: Acts Chapter 1

2. Jesus presented Himself to the Apostles and Disciples after death (Luke 24:13-31, John 20:19-20)
3. Jesus invited eyewitnesses to touch and examine His risen body (Luke 24:36-43, John 20:26-29)
4. Jesus presented Himself alive after His resurrection to 500 people (1 Corinthians 15:6)
5. Jesus appearance to Paul of Tarsus leading to his conversion (Acts 9:1-19)

Through each of these experiences Jesus showed Himself to be real, alive and in their presence.

appearing to them forty days

The number forty appears very often in the bible

and each is very important. We have:

- Noah and the flood—Gen. 7
- Moses on Mt. Sinai—Exodus 34
- Israel in the desert—Deut. 8
- 12 men spied in the Promised land—Numbers 14
- Elijah fasted—1 Kings 19
- Nineveh 40 days to repent—Jonah 3
- Jesus in the wilderness—Matthew 7

The number forty is understood as the time it takes to be tested or to be prepared for something holy, something of God. This is the time, Liturgically speaking, between Ash Wednesday and the Triduum (Holy Thursday, Good Friday & Holy Saturday), and Easter Sunday to Ascension Thursday.

Speaking about the Kingdom of God

While there are many themes in the work of St.

Luke one of the most important is the understanding of and calling into faith the Kingdom of God.

We talk here not only of the gift of heaven but the building of that Kingdom here on earth: a place of peace, mercy, love, justice and God's presence. One could say that the idea of the Kingdom of God is the centerpiece of St. Luke's writing. In the Acts we will see that it is only through the power of God's Holy Spirit that the Kingdom can be built.

1:4 but to wait

Let us note one other thing. The apostles were told to wait for the coming of the Spirit. We would gain more power and courage and peace if we learned to wait. In the business of life, we need to learn to be still. "Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength" (Isaiah 40:31). Amid life's surging activity, there must be time to receive.

The New Daily

Study Bible: The Acts of the Apostles by William Barclay

the promise of the Father

The gift given by God of the Holy Spirit provided at

Pentecost to the Apostles through Jesus.

1:5 baptized with the Holy Spirit

Some scholars describe the book of Acts as the *Gospel of the Holy Spirit*. What does it mean to be "baptized in the Holy Spirit". As Catholics most of us were baptized as infants and raised in faith through the gift of faith given through our parents, grandparents and family. We believe because they believed. As we grow into an adult faith at some point we must CHOOSE for ourselves to stand up in faith and conviction saying "Jesus is MY Lord and Savior" and believe that to be true in our own lives. For some it is a profound moment, earthshattering such as St. Paul being thrown from his high horse. For most this moment comes and goes as a quiet whisper. So at baptism we receive the Holy Spirit nurtured through our families but as we become adults we must continually renew this gift by the way we live our lives and the choices we make

The Ascension of Jesus 1:6-12

1:6 Lord, are you...going to restore

How far this relationship between Jesus and His Apostles has come! They have gone from strangers to them truly understanding that Jesus is Lord. He is the Messiah, the Son of God. This question of when Jesus intends to restore the Kingdom of God implies that they now completely believe in Jesus for who He is. And it is a natural question given that Jesus didn't establish His kingdom here on earth before His death. But now in this resurrection period the Apostles suspect now is the time. Judaism in general expected a military/political Messiah – one who would bring the Israelites back into power and position here on earth. The Apostles now realize that while God's Kingdom is very real, it carries with it a more spiritual nature but they still don't realize the building of the Kingdom of God here on earth will fall on theirs and our shoulders.

1:7 It is not for you to know

Jesus is repeating something He said before His death, that the time of His second coming is not for us to know (Mark 13:32, Luke 12:40).

1:8 you will receive power

The word power used in the original Greek is *dunamis* which translates to dynamite. The power of the Holy Spirit is not meant to be some subtle thing but to explode into the world, into our world and change things. Also, it is interesting to note that the words **power...Spirit...come upon** also appear at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke as the Angel Gabriel is talking with Mary. Scholars believe that in this parallel St. Luke is proclaiming that the same Spirit that brought the Son of God into the world is the same Spirit that brings forth the Church.

you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem

Like Emerald city was for Dorothy, Jerusalem for St. Luke was the city of destiny. It was the city where Jesus came into His glory and it will be the place where the Church begins its vocation and purpose. And what is it that they are witnessing – the truth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that he lived, died and rose from the dead. The Greek word used for witnesses can also be translated martyr. All true disciples are meant to witness to Christ with their words and with THEIR LIVES. All too often people assume that to "witness" to faith means we must convince people to believe by the eloquence of our speech and understanding and while there is an element of that in evangelization it is much, much more. St. Francis in sending his men out to evangelize told them to *Preach the Gospel, and if necessary use words*. People are far more challenged by the lives of love, mercy and compassion we live than by simply talking about it.

to the ends of the earth

But once the Apostles and disciples begin their work, their ministry and mission is not to stay in Jerusalem. God's intention is that all nations be united under Him. In this case for St. Luke, when Paul makes it to Rome at the end of Acts the Gospel will be the sign that the Church has been successful in spreading the Gospel message to the end of the known world.

1:9 he was lifted up.

This is actually St. Luke's second telling of the Ascension of our Lord (Luke 24:50-51). In comparing the two accounts we find some dissimilar elements such as: in Luke's gospel the Ascension happens on Easter Sunday. Here it is forty days later. In the gospel St.

Session #2: Acts Chapter 1

Luke is portraying Jesus as the great High Priest who *lifted up his hands and blessed them* (24:50) but not so in Acts. Why the differences? One commentary suggested (Collegeville) there are four reasons:

1. To connect this moment in Acts with the Transfiguration (Luke 9:18-36) with one big difference. At the Transfiguration the Apostles could not pray but their growth in faith since then gives them the maturity to now be able to pray
2. To connect the Ascension of Jesus with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to occur later in Acts
3. To connect this moment with another great moment in scripture. That of the great prophet Elijah who was carried into heaven in a chariot (2 Kings 2:9-11)
4. To connect this moment with the end of time when Jesus will return in a similar fashion. The traditional site of the Ascension of Jesus is located on Mt. Olivet. It is important to realize that Jesus' physical departure from the world does not mean His actual presence has been removed. Jesus will continue and still continues to live and work through the members of His Holy Church.

and a cloud hide Him from sight In scripture a cloud represents the presence of God. Remember in Exodus is was a pillar of cloud that lead the Israelites in the dessert and Moses on Mount Sinai was hidden by the clouds. Later in Isaiah clouds represent the Holy Spirit.

1:10 two men in dressed in white Angels!

1:11 in the same way Just as Jesus left, He will return at the end of all ages. What we are left with in the Ascension here in Acts is two things. First that Jesus is coming back, that there will be an end of all time. The second is that God has a continuing plan for all salvation and you and I are a part of that plan. Just as the Apostles and disciples have a mission so do you and I – *to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free...* (Luke 4:18) to all those we encounter in our lives.

1:12 Sabbath day's journey Within Orthodox Jewish teaching there is to be absolutely no work done on the Sabbath day. Even walking extensively can be considered a sin. The reality is that one must walk to their place of prayer and worship (since they can't have the animals work or today drive a car on the Sabbath). So the Rabbi's figured out one could walk the limit of 2000 cubits (about ¾ of a mile) and still be honoring the commandment. This teaching is based on Exodus 16:29 and Numbers 35:5. So the Apostles traveled approximately ¾th of a mile from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem.

The First Community in Jerusalem 1:13-14

As we look at these next few verses it is important to remember that while twelve men were selected by Christ to be His first ordained ministers of the Church, there were many others who followed Christ from the beginning, many of whom were women. Of these women most likely primary among them was Mary, the Mother of God as well as Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna and Mary the mother of James. It was most likely these women who saw to the basic needs of food, cooking and mending as well as preaching one on one with the women of the villages and cities they

went to. It was the women who *provided for them out of their resources* (Luke 8:3) and were the first to experience the resurrection of our Lord.

1:13 the upper room This is the room that Jesus brought the Apostles and disciples to so as to celebrate the Last Supper. It is here that they all remained after the death and resurrection of Jesus. And here they have stayed not sure what to do next. This room is believed to belong to one of the women (see 1:14) who supported Jesus' mission and ministry, and now the Apostles through her means. Her name was Mary of Jerusalem, a wealthy widow and a kinswoman of Barnabas and the mother of John Mark, the author of the Gospel of St. Mark.

Peter and John... For a further introduction or identification of the Apostles see HANDOUT. In all the lists we find in the New Testament of the Apostles (Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:16-19, Luke 6:13-14 and here) Peter's name always comes first. This is fitting as the rock on which the Church as been built, the first pope.

1:14 devoted themselves to prayer Prayer is an essential expression and experience of the Church. In prayer we are seeking to be one with God. Daily prayer should be the devotion of every believer.

together with the women If your image is that it was only twelve men that followed Jesus, were taught by Jesus, gave their hearts and lives to Jesus you would be sorely mistaken. Women were there from the very beginning and remain to the very end. They helped in the cleaning, preparing and serving of meals, and in many cases witnessed to the women of each community. (Luke 8:2-3, Matthew 15:40-41). Most likely the women included, besides Mary the Mother of God; Mary of Magdala, Joanne (wife of Chuza the chief steward of Herod), Susanna (Jesus healed all three women of demons – Luke 8:2-3), Mary and Martha of Bethany, Salome the mother of the Apostles James and John, Mary of Cleopas as well as other women of lesser importance. By the way this is the last place in scripture that we will find anything written about Mary the Mother of God. From here she disappears from the pages but hopefully not from our lives. And what is she doing in this moment? Praying—interceding on behalf of this community, on behalf of the Church.

his brethren In some bibles we read "brothers". There are two acceptable scholarly explanations of the use of this word. This is NOT proof that Jesus as siblings through Mary. It could be that Joseph was married before and these "brothers" are step-brothers. Most acceptable is to understand that there was no word for cousins in the time of Christ. These brethren were probably Jesus' cousins.

Matthias is Chosen 1:15-26

1:15 Peter stood up Peter stand in his authority as the leader of this fledgling community/Church. He has assumed the responsibility that Jesus bestowed upon him during Jesus' life.

about one hundred twenty persons Again, it was more than just the 12 men who followed Jesus, were devoted to Jesus. St. Luke tells us that in total there were 120 persons. This group was the core of the early church. It truth the number could be more but in recognizing the

Session #2: Acts Chapter 1

number 12 represents the original 12 tribes of Israel, 120 creates an understanding of growth and fulfillment. Just as the 12 sons of Jacob/Israel became 12 tribes the 12 Apostles become more as they disciple and bring about the new Church. It is also interesting to note that the number needed to start a new community was 120. Typically men but here the community is completed by both men and women.

1:16 which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand the Apostles are getting it. They now understand that all that is written in the Old Testament has been done so through the power of God, through God's Holy Spirit. These words are not the words of men but of God.

1:18 wages of his iniquity Here St. Luke is giving us a different rendition of the end of Judas Iscariot's life. According to this version (which differs from St. Matthew's account 27:1-10) Judas used the 30 pieces of silver to buy a piece of property on which he died from a very serious fall which caused his disembowelment. Ironic, isn't it that Judas abandoned Jesus and a community that detached themselves from material possessions. Judas betrays God in Jesus Christ and uses the money to increase his possessions which in the end kills him. There is not enough information to know which account is accurate or if both don't hold some truth (because in Matthew the priests used the money of betrayal to purchase a burial place for foreigners 27:7). Both accounts name this place the *Field of Blood* (Acts 1:19, Matthew 27:8) One way of bringing harmony to the two accounts comes from an ancient tradition or belief that Judas hung himself from one of the outer towers of the Temple. He remained there until his body rot and fell to the ground upon which his body burst upon the rocks.

1:20 for it is written What follows are two separate quotes from the Psalms. First is Psalm 69:25 and the second (*His office let another take*) comes from Psalm 109:8. Both psalms speak of the enemies of Israel being cursed and Israel's distress or suffering over the wickedness of others. Scholars believe these passages are meant to relate to when King David's son, Absalom attempted to take the crown from his father David. The coup failed just as Judas' attempt to destroy Jesus failed. (2nd Samuel 11 & 12) St. Peter is giving a messianic spin to these verses offering that the suffering of the writer prefigures the suffering of Christ. With psalm 109:8 it also gives justification or support to the idea of taking another as one of the 12 Apostles.

1:21 one of the men who accompanied us Peter is speaking wisely here asking that the one to be chosen must be a man who has been with Jesus from the beginning. This way they will have witnessed and experienced the full scope of Jesus' mission and ministry, death and resurrection. There were only two men who had been with Jesus from the baptism by John the Baptist through to his ascension -- Joseph called Barabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias.

1:22 come with us as witness The number of the original group of Apostles was 12. Peter is explaining that it is important to keep that number of Apostles. Why? The reason goes back to the reason that Jesus chose 12 men. The number of Apostles represents the number of tribes of Israel in the Old Testament. 12 tribes – 12 men. Scholars suggest that for St. Luke this moment of selecting a twelfth man symbolizes the re-formation of God's chosen people.



1:26 cast lots for them

This may seem like a strange way to us to make a decision but casting lots was an ancient biblical tradition for discerning the will of God (Leviticus 16:7-8, 1 Chronicles 24:31, 25:8, Psalm 22:18... for a total of 70 times in the Old Testament). Although we read we read in the New Testament (Matthew 27:35) the soldiers at the cross use “lots” to decide who received Jesus’ outer garment. The lots were either a set of stones or

sticks with markings on them that were thrown into a specific area and then interpreted. The priests of the Temple and now Peter and the early community understood it as the expressed will of God (Proverbs 16:33). The casting of lots was the means by which the Levitical priests of the Temple assigned duties.

the lot fell on Matthias

Interesting that we have not heard of Matthias before this moment in the Gospels and never hear of Matthias again throughout St. Luke’s Acts of the Apostles. For Luke what matters here is the reestablishment of the number 12 which speaks to the Lord’s desire to re-establish His Church here on earth. What became of Matthias then? Well popular belief is that after preaching and teaching in Judea, Matthias help to create the Christian Church in the Cappadocia region of what is present day Turkey. He was stoned to death in Colchis (a city in Georgia along the black sea). His feast day, by the Roman Church Calendar is May 14

Reflection Questions:

1. What does the expression to be “baptized in the Holy Spirit” mean to you?
2. Why do you think it was important that the one chosen to replace Judas be someone who witness and experienced the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus?
3. Think of the last time you devoted yourself in prayer to a cause or concern. What was the purpose or reason? What was the eventual outcome? Did the intervention of Mary play any part in your prayer? Could she have/should she have?

Catechism of the Catholic Church

The empty tomb: READ 640

The appearances of the Risen One: READ 641-644

“He Ascended into Heaven and is Seated at the Right Hand of the Father”: READ 659

Christ’s Return in Glory: READ 668-682

Jewish understanding of Jesus as Messiah: READ 439

Prayer in the Christian Life: 2558-65

Apostolic Succession: READ: 77, 860

Bibliography:

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- [The New Daily Study Bible: The Acts of the Apostles](#) by William Barclay
- [The Navarre Bible: Acts of the Apostles](#)
- [New Collegeville Bible Commentary: The Acts of the Apostles](#) by Dennis Hamm
- [Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: Acts of the Apostles](#) by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch
- Agape Bible Study: Gospel of Luke by Michal Hunt. Agapebiblestudy.com
- [Acts: The Spread of the Kingdom](#) by Jeff Cavins and Sarah Christmyer