

## The Acts of the Apostles 1-2

### Jesus Ascends to Heaven (1:1-11)

“In Luke’s view the resurrection appearances were not merely visions from heaven, but happenings on earth. Thus, the ascension serves the function of making clear to the disciples (and in this case to Theophilus) that Jesus’ life on earth had a definite closure, *after the resurrection appearances*.” (Ben Witherington. *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, p. 109.)

1. What is the command in verses 4-5?
2. What is the disciples’ question in verse 6, and does Jesus answer it?

“Jesus’ answer to the question about restoring the reign to Israel denies that Jesus’ followers can know the time and probably corrects their supposition that the restoration may come immediately, but it does not deny the legitimacy of their concern with the restoration of the national life of the Jewish people.” (Robert C. Tannehill. *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, p. 2:15.)

3. In what way will the disciples gain power, and what are they to do with it, according to verse 8?

In verses 9-11 Jesus ascended in a cloud, visible to all in glory, and He will return the same way (Dan. 7:13; Matt. 24:30; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 24:50-51; Rev. 1:7), and to the same place, the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4).

### **A Replacement for Judas Is Chosen (1:12-26)**

In verse 12 the phrase “a Sabbath day’s journey” refers to the distance the rabbis allowed a person to travel on the Sabbath without breaking the Sabbath law. This distance was 2,000 cubits (a cubit was about 18 inches), about a half a mile (tractate Sotah 5:3 of the Mishnah).

1. What is the significance of verses 13-15?

In verse 18 Luke’s account of Judas’ death differs with Matthew’s, which tells that Judas hung himself (Matt. 27:5). Both accounts can easily be harmonized in that Judas could have hung himself and then fallen from the branch breaking, or that when he was taken down, he fell and his intestines spilled out.

The quotations in verse 20 come from Ps. 69:25 and 109:8.

2. Why does Luke go into so much detail concerning Judas in verses 16-20?
3. Why did Peter feel it was necessary to replace Judas as a disciple?
4. What are the criteria for choosing a new disciple, according to verses 21-22?
5. What is the significance of them narrowing it down to two candidates in verse 23?
6. How do they choose between the two in verses 24-26?

### **The Holy Spirit and the Day of Pentecost (2:1-13)**

The day of Pentecost (or the Feast of Harvest) was an annual spring feast when the Jews presented the first-fruits of their wheat harvest to God (Ex. 34:22a). They celebrated it at the end of seven weeks following the Feast of Passover. The Jews also celebrated Pentecost as the anniversary of the giving of the Mosaic Law (Ex. 19:1). Paul regarded the Spirit's indwelling presence as God's replacement for the external guidance that the Mosaic Law had provided believers under the old covenant (Gal. 3:3, 23-29)

#### 1. How did the Holy Spirit come in verses 1-3?

In verse 3 the reference to fire, as well as wind, symbolized the presence of God (Gen. 15:17; Ex. 3:2-6; 13:21-22; 19:18; 24:17; 40:38; Mal. 3:2-5). The coming of the Holy Spirit in the form of fire connects this event to the visual presence of God in the Shekinah glory – at the crossing of the Red Sea, resting above the tabernacle, and, later, resting above the temple. Likewise, it is the same fire baptism of which John the Baptist spoke (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16).

#### 2. What was the result of the Holy Spirit's coming in verse 4?

“...by [Luke's] stress on Pentecost as the day when the miracle took place, he is also suggesting (1) that the Spirit's coming is in continuity with God's purposes in giving the law and yet (2) that the Spirit's coming signals the essential difference between the Jewish faith and commitment to Jesus, for whereas the former is Torah centered and Torah directed, the latter is Christ centered and Spirit directed—all of which sounds very much like Paul.” (Richard N. Longenecker. “The Acts of the Apostles.” In *John-Acts*, vol. 9 of *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 269.)

#### 3. What is speaking in tongues, according to the context?

Notice that this is a reversal of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9), where God confused the languages of the human race as a judgment for their rebellion; now, through the Spirit, He overcomes those barriers in order to tell of the Savior, Jesus Christ.

#### 4. What is the reaction of the crowd in verses 12-13?

### **Peter's Address on the Day of Pentecost (2:14-47)**

The quotation in verses 17-21 is from Joel 2:28-32.

1. What is Peter's explanation for what is happening?
2. Why does Peter quote Joel 2:31?
3. What points does Peter make in verses 22-24?

All would have known Jesus' miraculous deeds, for His deeds were not even contested by the religious leaders and the Talmud; they were simply credited to the powers of darkness (Mark 3:20-30; *b. Hul.* 2.22-23).

4. Why does Peter quote Ps. 16:8-11 in verses 25-28?
5. What is Peter's point in verses 29-34?
6. What is the significance of the quotation of Ps. 110:1 in verses 34-35?
7. What is the contrast between the Jewish nation and God in verse 36?

“This title of ‘Lord’ was a more important title than Messiah, for it pictured Jesus' total authority and His ability and right to serve as an equal with God the Father.” (Darrell L. Bock. “A Theology of Luke-Acts.” In *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 104.)

“The Pentecost speech is primarily the disclosure to its audience of God's surprising reversal of their intentions, for their rejection has ironically resulted in Jesus' exaltation as Messiah, Spirit-giver, and source of repentance and forgiveness.” (Tannehill. *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, p. 2:37.)

8. What is the crowd's response, and what does Peter tell them in verses 37-41?

In verse 41 the number of 3,000 converts is not out of the realm of possibility. “In the first place, the population of Jerusalem at feast time was quite large, perhaps even as high as 180,000 to 200,000, and interestingly enough careful estimates have shown that the temple precincts could even accommodate such a huge crowd. In the second place if there was even close to such numbers in the temple area, 3,000 would have been a distinct minority of the crowd. In the third place, there was ample water supply in Jerusalem, especially at the pools (Bethesda, Siloam), for a large number of baptisms.” (Ben Witherington. *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, p. 156.)

“The period between the death of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. was a transitional period. The tearing of the temple veil when Jesus died (Matt. 27:51) symbolized the termination of the old Mosaic order and the beginning of a new order. The new order began when Jesus Christ died. However it took nearly four decades for God's people to make the transition in their thinking and practice. The Book of Acts documents many of those transitions.” (Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Acts*, p. 58.)

9. What did the early believers devote themselves to, according to verse 42?

10. Who performed the miracles in verse 43?

11. What was the atmosphere of the early believers, according to verses 44-47?

“Luke does not gild the lily, or simply present an idealistic picture of the halcyon days of yore. His positive summary statements (cf. Acts 2:43-47; 4:32-37; 9:31) must not be taken in isolation from the narratives they connect.” (Ben Witherington. *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, p. 127.)

## Bibliography

- Bock, Darrell L. "A Theology of Luke-Acts." In *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 87-166. Edited by Roy B. Zuck. Chicago: Moody Press, 1994.
- Bruce, F. F. *Commentary on The Book of Acts*. New International Commentary on the New Testament series. Reprint ed. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984.
- Constable, Thomas L. *Notes on Acts*. Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 2001.
- Fitzmyer, Joseph A. *The Acts of the Apostles*. The Anchor Bible series. New York: Doubleday, 1998.
- Longenecker, Richard N. "The Acts of the Apostles." In *John-Acts*. Vol. 9 of *Expositor's Bible Commentary*. 12 vols. Edited by Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981.
- Marshall, I. Howard. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries series. Reprint ed. Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, and Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984.
- Tannehill, Robert C. *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*. Vol. 2: *The Acts of the Apostles*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.
- Toussaint, Stanley D. "Acts." In *Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, pp. 349-432. Edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck. Wheaton: Scripture Press Publications, Victor Books, 1983.
- Witherington, Ben. *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998.