

The Plan from the Beginning
Daily Bible Reading Plan
Class Notes for Week 44: Acts Chapters 1-8

I. **The Helper Comes (Acts 1)**

- The author of Acts is generally accepted to be Luke based upon Acts 1:1 and Luke 1:3. Luke is also mentioned in other epistles as Paul's companion during his journeys.
- Acts tells us that Jesus was seen for 40 days after His resurrection.
- Jesus, just before His departure from this world, promises that the Holy Spirit will come on the disciples "with power". Why? So that they can be witnesses for Him.
- While the disciples sit in awe of Jesus' ascent, two men come and give the promise that Jesus will return again someday in the same manner.
- The disciples leave the Mount of Olives and travel to Jerusalem (a Sabbath's Day journey is about 3/5 of a mile). They gather with other followers, including Jesus' mother and brothers, with the total eventually at 120 people. They pray together with "one accord": These words in Greek mean "with one mind", from the word *homothymadon*, a word made up of two roots meaning "in unison" and "to rush along". The word occurs 10 times in Acts and signifies the unified passion of Jesus' dedicated followers. Does it signify the attitude of this congregation?
- During that time, Peter proposes that the "office" (in Greek "overseer") left vacant by the traitor Judas, be filled. He invokes Psalms 109:8 to describe the situation. A condition of eligibility is given in 1:21-23; this will not be a newcomer or rookie. Two men are proposed (Joseph Bar-Sabas and Matthias), and after a prayer for God's guidance, lots are cast to determine the replacement. Matthias emerges as the choice.

II. **What shall we do? (Acts 2)**

- The feast day known as "Pentecost" arrives. Pentecost is not the Hebrew or Jewish term for this commanded feast day (remember, our author was likely a Gentile), rather it is a translation of the Greek word "*pentekoste*" that means "fiftieth day". This term does, however, accurately describe the occurrence. Beginning on the second day after the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (this feast begins with Pesakh, or Passover), seven weeks are counted off and then the next day is Shavu'ot (see Leviticus 23:5-16; Deuteronomy 16:1-12). This is a Hebrew term that means "weeks". It is tradition in Rabbinic Judaism that this is the day that the Lord delivered the Torah to the Israelites from Sinai. This is an interesting parallel to what is about to happen.
- The Holy Spirit does indeed come upon the disciples, just as Jesus promised. They are given the gift of speaking in different languages. The often misunderstood gift of tongues discussed in the Bible simply means the miraculous gift to speak in a language foreign to you and one in which you had little to no education. It had a purpose, just like it does here, and is not some alien babble.
- Contrary to popular teaching, not everyone who heard this speech in their own language was visiting Jerusalem just for Pentecost. See verse 2:5-the word "dwelling" means "to house permanently". To have people of many nations living in Jerusalem, in addition to visitors (2:10), would not be strange, as Jerusalem was a crossroads of the ancient Near Eastern world.
- Peter delivers the first Gospel sermon at this time. His outline is fairly simple:
 - Audience is addressed (men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem)
 - Hebrew scripture is quoted (Joel 2:28-32) to explain that these heralds are not drunk, but prophesied.
 - Peter attests as to whom Jesus was, His death, and His subsequent resurrection.
 - Uses more Hebrew scripture to show Jesus' work was foretold (Psalms 16:8-11).
 - He bears witness to Jesus' resurrection, explains where Christ is now, and that the current event is the product of the Holy Spirit.
 - Continuing the theme about David from Psalms, Peter explains that David spoke (perhaps unknowingly) of Jesus (Psalm 110:1).
 - Verse 36 lays out the bottom line; verse 37 gives the response of the guilty and 28-39 provide the invitation to a solution that provides justification for the guilty.
 - The sermon continues (wish we had the rest) and about 3,000 souls respond and were added to the Church.
- Upon their conversion, we see that the new Christians continue steadfastly in: revealed doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread (?), and prayers. They also engage in communal living in "one accord" (same word as above), with two great characteristics: gladness and simplicity (sincerity) of heart. It seems that the result of this is that more souls are added to Christ's Body (2:47).

III. Peter and John are Troublemakers! (Acts 3, 4, & 5)

- Peter and John begin their work in Jerusalem. They are agents in the healing of a man lame for 40 years that was sitting at a gate to the Temple. Although the people marvel at the miracle, this act stirs up some leaders against Peter and John. The two apostles use the attention from the people as an opportunity to preach about Jesus.
- The Sadducees do not appreciate the teachings they hear about resurrection. They have Peter and John taken into custody. Despite this interference, many people believe the message (4:4). The number of men came to be about 5,000. It is uncertain if this total includes some or all of the people from 2:41.
- Peter and John appear before the same council and characters as Jesus had just a couple of months before. The Sanhedrin are in a dilemma, as they cannot rebuke or revile the two men publicly on account of the plain evidence of the healed man. The “educated” men of the council are amazed and the boldness of the “lay” men before them. The leaders can do little but try to intimidate Peter and John not to speak of Jesus anymore. They reply to this rebuke in 4:19 & 20.
- When the two disciples are released, return to the others and report what happened, they have a prayer (4:24-30) requesting more boldness in the face of the current and anticipated opposition.
- In 4:36 & 37, Barnabus is introduced to the narrative, selling what he had and giving the money to the church.
- The tragedy of Ananias and Sapphira occurs in 5:1-11. It seems that this sad story does polarize the believers.
- Many miracles and wonders are performed by the apostles and the preaching continues (again in one accord- 5:12). The church continued to grow as a result (5:14).
- The Jewish leaders are becoming increasingly incensed with what is going on and have the apostles imprisoned. They are miraculously released by an angel and follow the heavenly liberator’s command to return to preaching. They are retrieved by the guard and brought back before the council. 5:28 demonstrates the true worry of these hypocrites.
- Peter and the other apostles reply in the same manner as before. They will obey God rather than men (5:29-32).
- Having the apostles excused, the highly respected Pharisee teacher named Gamaliel addresses the council. He gives them simple and wise advice in 5:35-39.
- Agreeing with the wise rabbi’s logic, they release the apostles (after beating them). The apostles, rather than being defeated, rejoice at the privilege of suffering for Christ.

IV. The First Martyr (Acts 6:8-8:3)

- We are introduced to Stephen when he is selected to be one of seven workers to help out in the early church (some say they are the first deacons, but the term is not used here). They are to help ensure that the widows are taken care of. This helped ensure the apostles could continue spreading the Word, and according to 6:7, it was an effective strategy.
- Stephen is unfairly accused of blasphemy and brought before the council. After a lengthy discourse (Stephen gives the “Cliff’s Notes” history of Israel in 7:2-53), he speaks plainly to the council about their rejection of Christ and failure to keep the Law. As a result, Stephen is stoned to death. As he dies, he asks God to forgive the men killing him.
- The future apostle Paul (currently “Saul”) is there, watching after the coats of those who stone Stephen and approving the action. This action began a great persecution of the Church, led by Saul himself.

V. Once a Sinner, Always a Sinner? (Acts 8:9-25)

- Simon is a magician/sorcerer (Gk. word has same origin as the Magi who visited Jesus) and highly respected man in Samaria. It is even said by the people that his wondrous “powers” come from God (8:10).
- Simon hears the message of the gospel brought by Philip and is baptized, along with many others.
- When the apostles in Jerusalem hear of the success in Samaria, Peter and John are sent to them. Upon the laying on of Peter and John’s hands, some of the Christians there receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This measure of the spirit is above the measure granted to all Christians at baptism, and different from the measure granted the apostles.
- Simon sees this and desires the same gift. He even offers the apostles money. Simon is heavily judged for this by Peter and by us today. Perhaps we should consider Simon being a product of his former environment and business, not being yet very mature.
- Thankfully, it seems that Simon does follow Peter’s instruction and repents of this sinful desire. He requests the prayers of the apostles for mercy from God.