



"REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found and I ate them,
and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

"RIDING THROUGH"

THE BOOK OF ACTS - LESSON 1

First Day

Welcome to our study this year as we "Ride Through" the Book of Acts! We will begin by looking at a brief history, author, and the purpose of the book. Use a highlighter as you read, marking any key points, new thoughts, or interesting facts. Always pray before you begin. We pray that you enjoy this exciting ride through the first 30 years of the church as God used ordinary people to do extraordinary things!

The study of the Book of Acts promises to be an exciting one. Acts might very well be considered the most important book of the New Testament, for without it, we would have no record of the work of the early church. In the Gospels, we see the life of Jesus Christ as He walked on earth. In the Book of Acts, we see how the ministry of Jesus Christ continued in the early church, through the power of the Holy Spirit, through ordinary men and women. Acts 1:1 says that Acts is a record of "all that Jesus began both to do and teach." Acts is considered a book that has no end, because Jesus is still doing, and teaching! He's alive and continues to work in us and through us by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are presently living in "the Book of Acts."

This book is most commonly referred to as the "Acts of the Apostles." It also has been called "The Acts of the Holy Spirit," "The Acts of God," or the "Continuing Work of Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit." The word "**the**" is not in the Greek text and therefore does not imply that this book is an exhaustive account of all the acts done in the early church. The word Acts in the Greek is "**Praxeis**," and it is commonly used in Greek literature to summarize accomplishments of outstanding men.

The Book of Acts is written by Luke and is a sequel to his Gospel. In the Gospel of Luke, he leaves his readers with the picture of Jesus ascending into Heaven, and the disciples worshipping and praising God in the temple. The reader is compelled to say ... "**But then what?**" Luke answers that question for us in Acts. He proceeds to tell us the exciting story of the coming of the Holy Spirit, who is the Promise of the Father, and the exciting birth of the early church.

How did Luke get his information, you might ask. It's interesting to note that in chapter 16 of Acts, many of the pronouns change from "they" to "we." Luke was an eyewitness to many of the events (16:10-17, 20:5-21:18, 27:1-28:16). Luke probably also had opportunities to interview many key witnesses in Jerusalem, being as close to Paul as he was. Perhaps he spent some time in prison with Paul, learning of all the glorious things that God had done. Paul possibly had written documents, various church documents, and records to glean from.

As a doctor (Colossians 4:14), Luke was very detailed and descriptive in his writings. He used many medical terms when describing things. One example would be in Luke 18:25, when Luke says that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God. Luke uses the term "belones" for needle, which refers to the point of a spear or a surgical needle. In Matthew's (19:24) and Mark's account (10:25), they use the word "Rhaphidos," which means a household needle. When Luke describes Jesus' prayer time in the Garden of Gethsemane, he says that Jesus' sweat became like "great drops of blood" (Luke 22:44). He uses the term "thromboi," which is a thick clot of blood, commonly used in medical works, but found only here in the New Testament.

Luke is thought to be the only Gentile writer of the New Testament. He was a loyal companion and friend to Paul. His writings are very similar to Paul's in style.

The Book of Acts is a book of beginnings. It records the beginning of the early church, the first elders and deacons, the first missions movement, the first Gentile Christians, and the first use of spiritual gifts. It is also a book of transitions: from the Gospels to the epistles, from Judaism to Christianity, from law to grace, and from salvation for the Jew alone, to the Jew and Gentile alike!

Acts was written in approximately 65 AD and covers about a 30-year span of time, beginning at Christ's ascension, and the birth of the church at Pentecost, and ending with Paul's arrival in Rome. Acts 1:8 is the key verse in this book and serves as a good outline for us as we study. Chapters 1-7 describe how the church was established in Jerusalem. They were witnesses in their own city for two years. The church then scattered to Judea and Samaria in chapters 8-12. For 13 years the Gospel was taken to their Gentile neighbors. God used persecution (8:1b) to move the believers out of Jerusalem.

In chapter 13, we see the Gospel move out to the uttermost parts of the earth. This fulfilled the Great Commission given to the disciples by Jesus in Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:8. This lasted for about 15 years, ending with Paul awaiting his

meeting with Ceasar in Rome. Because of the geography that is covered, Charles Swindoll calls Acts a travelogue, or a travel diary. Recording the expansion of Christianity is thought to be Luke's main reason for writing.

This brief introduction ends our lesson for today. No writing, just lots of reading. It's important to understand who wrote the book, when it was written, and why it was written. Tomorrow we will look at who the book was written to.

As you study this book, remember to first pray and ask the Holy Spirit to open your mind and heart and give you understanding. Then read as if you were a detective. Look for details. Ask yourself ... **Who is writing? Why did he say that? To whom is he talking? What was the culture like?**

To get the most out of your Bible study, at the beginning of each day, also ask yourself these three simple questions; **What does the text say?** (What are the facts?) **What does the text mean? What does it mean to me?** These questions will help you learn how to apply what you read to your own life and glean all you can from the Scripture. Remember, understanding what the text means is imperative to understanding how it applies to you. And learning how to apply the Bible to our own lives is the goal of any study.

Memory Verse of the Week: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Acts 1:8

See you ladies tomorrow! Get ready for a great time together in the Word of God! And remember, each day look for a **"Reason to Rejoice!"**

Second Day

Review your memory verse.

1. Read Acts chapter 1. Highlight any key words or phrases that you find. Then reread verses 1-3. Ask yourself those three important questions ... **What does the text say? What does it mean? What does it mean to me?**

(Key words are words that are repeated or emphasized.**)**

2. Who is Luke writing to? (Acts 1:1)
3. To whom did Luke address his Gospel? (Luke 1:1-3)

We don't exactly know who this man, Theophilus, was. His name means "friend of God" or "lover of God." Luke 1:3 refers to him as "most excellent Theophilus," possibly indicating a man in some sort of position in the Roman Government. Maybe Luke led this man to the Lord. Some argue that Luke is writing to any "lover of God" and that Theophilus was some type of code name for Christians. We see no evidence that Theophilus was not a real person, although we can still apply all of Luke's writings to ourselves.

Whoever he is, wouldn't it be wonderful to be called a lover of God?
Reflect on your own life ... could that name be applied to you?

4. In Acts 1:1, Luke tells us who the main or central character in this book is. Who is it?
5. What did Jesus do before He taught, according to verse 1?

Jesus was a great example of "practicing what He preached." He was always **"doing"** before He told others what to do.

6. Read James 1:22 and Philippians 4:9. Are you "doing" or just telling others what they should do? Can you call yourself a **"doer"** of God's Word or are you a **"hearer"** only?
7. Acts 1:2 refers to the day that Jesus was "taken up." Read Acts 1:9-11, Luke 24:50-51, and Mark 16:19. Describe the ascension of Christ. How must have the disciples felt as they watched?
8. Which commandments was Luke referring to in Acts 1:2? Read Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:15.

9. According to Acts 1:3, how many days did Jesus present Himself alive?

The Greek word for "seen" is "ophthalmia," where we get our word ophthalmologist. It means to be stared at or scrutinized. Jesus was definitely being stared at! Wouldn't you be amazed at seeing a man who had been killed, buried, and was now walking around?

10. To whom did He appear? Read 1 Corinthians 15:5-8, Mark 16:9-18, and John 20:11-29.

11. According to John 20:25, how did Thomas respond? Is that a common response to the Gospel today? Did you respond like that when you first heard the Gospel? **Do you ever doubt His promises for you when you read His Word?**

Jesus responds to Thomas by saying, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:29)

12. To close our lesson today, read 1 Peter 1:3-9. How do these verses relate to the words of Jesus in John 20:29? How do these verses give you hope? Is there a more exciting "**Reason to Rejoice**"?

Third Day

Review this week's memory verse. Isn't it exciting?

Today we will be looking at the Promise of the Father, the gift of the Holy Spirit. We also will be looking at what is called the "Great Commission." Our prayer is that you understand and experience the power that is available to you, through the Holy Spirit, to be witnesses for Jesus Christ.

1. Read Acts 1:1-8.
2. When and why did Jesus give His disciples the "**Promise of the Father**"?
Read His farewell discourse in the Upper Room in John 14:12-21.
3. Why was it better for the disciples for Jesus to "go away"? Read John 16:7-15.

In Acts 1:4-5, Jesus refers to John's baptism with water. John baptized people as a symbol of their desire to identify themselves with the Messiah's ministry and purpose. As the Messiah, though, Jesus promised an altogether different baptism; a baptism not with water, but with a person, the Holy Spirit. (Swindoll, The Birth of An Exciting Vision) Read Luke 3:16 and John 1:33.

4. What does Jesus promise them in Acts 1:8?

The word "**power**" comes from the word "dunamis," meaning dynamic! Nobel discovered the greatest explosive in the world. The Greek word for explosive power is dunamis, so he named his invention dynamite. The power of the Holy Spirit can turn the world upside down! (Acts 17:6)

5. What did Jesus say the Holy Spirit would give them power to do?

The word "**witness**" is used 29 times in the Book of Acts. A witness tells what he has seen and heard. A witness tells what they know, not what they think.

6. Was the Promise of the Father only for these 12 disciples? Read Acts 2:38-39.

Acts 1:8 describes the experience of being baptized with the Holy Spirit. This is a topic which stirs much confusion and debate. Many scholars believe that you are baptized by the Holy Spirit at the time of your regeneration. We at Calvary believe that the Bible teaches the baptism of the Holy Spirit is separate and distinct from regeneration, though sometimes they may occur simultaneously.

The Bible uses three Greek prepositions to describe our relationship with the Holy Spirit. In John 14, Jesus is comforting His disciples with the promise that the Holy Spirit will be coming to abide with them forever. In verse 17, He says the Holy Spirit dwells "**with**" us and will be "**in**" us. "**With**" is the Greek preposition "**para**." The Holy Spirit will come with, or alongside of us, convicting us of sin, and drawing us to Christ.

The moment we accept Christ as our Savior, the Holy Spirit comes "**in**" us and begins to dwell within us. The Greek preposition for "**in**" is "**en**." You went from "**para**" to "**en**" at your conversion.

The third preposition is found in Acts 1:8. It is the word "**epi**," which means "**upon**." The Holy Spirit can come upon or over you. This "**epi**" experience with the Holy Spirit empowers the believer for service. It empowers them to boldly proclaim Jesus Christ. It is an outflowing of the *dunamis*, or the power of the Holy Spirit working through your life. You can have the Holy Spirit "**with**" you, and "**in**" you, but it's another thing to have Him upon you and flowing out of your life.

Jesus gave the disciples the Great Commission, which was to be witnesses for Him in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. They needed the Holy Spirit to be able to fulfill this. Spreading the Gospel and building His church is not done by programs, but by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Keep in mind that the disciples in Acts 1 were already born again and had received the indwelling of the Spirit in John 20:19-22.)

Have you been baptized with the Holy Spirit? Is your life overflowing with His power? If not, simply ask (Luke 11:11-13) and receive Him by faith (Galatians 3:2). You can't earn this gift or work for it. It isn't a reward. It is God's gift to us, to be received by faith. You can pray and ask right now, or ask your group leader to pray with you.

7. Your "**Jerusalem**" (verse 8) may be your neighborhood, your city, or your family. Are you being a witness for Jesus to those close to you? Are you telling them what you know to be true? If not, what's holding you back?

8. Is there anything that you're trying to accomplish in your life by depending on your own strength and knowledge, rather than the power of the Holy Spirit? (Read Zechariah 4:6.) What is the danger of that?

9. Is there anything that God cannot do? Is there anyone that God cannot save? Read Luke 1:37 and Jeremiah 32:17. Can you trust Him to accomplish that "thing" today?

"When we rely on organization, we get what organization can do. When we rely on education, we get what education can do. When we rely on eloquence, we get what eloquence can do. But when we rely on the Holy Spirit, we get what God can do!" A.C. Dixon

10. Have you ever prayed about short-term missions? Everyone is not called to go to the uttermost parts of the earth, but we all should pray and be open to what God wants to do in our life. Too often we just say "no" and don't even ask God what His will is for our life. Maybe He would have you be a prayer warrior for those who do go, or watch their children, or help them financially. Can you pray and ask God how you can be a part of fulfilling the Great Commission?

That's it for today. Meditate on God's power and what He can accomplish through open and willing vessels.

Fourth Day

Do you know your memory verse? Let's try it!

1. Read Acts 1:9-14.
2. In verse 10, notice that they had their eyes turned steadfastly toward Heaven. Where are your eyes turned today? Are you focusing on Christ, or on a certain situation?

3. How can focusing on Jesus, and what's in store for us in Heaven, help us keep everything in perspective?
4. Whom do you think the two men are in Acts 1:10?
5. How will Jesus come in the same manner? (Acts 1:11) Read Matthew 24:30, 26:64, and Revelation 1:7.
6. Jesus had told the disciples to wait for the Promise of the Father and tarry in Jerusalem (Luke 24:49). They obviously obeyed Him. What did they do while they were waiting? Read Acts 1:14.

The disciples were called to wait. God had a plan. Although waiting is usually very difficult, it can be a good thing, especially if the Lord has told you to do it!

7. Has God told you to "wait" in response to any of your prayers lately? Can you share about it with your group?
8. What can be some of the results of impatience when we pray? Have you ever rushed ahead of the Lord? What happened?
9. Read the following Scriptures on waiting and rewrite them in your own words:
 - a. Proverbs 8:34-35
 - b. Psalm 62:1
 - c. Psalm 27:14

10. What are we ultimately waiting for? Read Philippians 3:20 and Hebrews 9:28.
11. The disciples were praying while they waited. We are called to do the same. Are you?
12. What does it mean to pray in "one accord"? (Acts 1:14) (Can't you pray in a Honda?)
13. Define supplication.

We are called to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17), pray always (Luke 18:1), pray steadfastly (Romans 12:12), pray in faith (John 5:15), and give ourselves to prayer (Psalm 109:4).

14. Using a few adjectives, how would you describe your prayer life?

"Prayer is a shield to the soul, a sacrifice to God, and a scourge to Satan."
John Bunyan

This ends our lesson for today. Are you ready to make some changes in your prayer life? I am. Can you name a **"Reason to Rejoice"** today?

Fifth Day

Write out your verse by memory.

The disciples now decide to choose a new man to replace Judas Iscariot. Some argue that the disciples jumped the gun and that Paul should have been named the 12th apostle. But Paul himself didn't believe that he should be named as one of the twelve (1 Corinthians 15:8-9). Others argue that they were out of God's will because Matthias was never heard from again. This is true, but none of the original 12,

except for Peter and John, were ever mentioned again in the book of Acts either, after Acts 1:13.

1. Read Acts 1:12-26.
2. Why did there need to be 12 apostles? Read Matthew 19:28 and Luke 22:28-30.
3. What qualifications did the new apostle have to meet? Read Acts 1:21-22.
4. Whom did they choose?

The disciples used an Old Testament method of determining God's will. Charles Ryrie explains the process ... "They prayed not for the Lord to choose but for the choice which the Lord had already made to be made known to them. The two names were put on lots, placed in an urn, and then the one which first fell from the urn was taken to be the Lord's choice."

This was a reliable way for them to determine God's choice at the time. **Proverbs 16:33** says that "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord." After the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they no longer had to use this method, for now the Holy Spirit could lead and guide them.

5. How do you make decisions? Do you roll the dice, so to speak? Do you ask everyone's opinion or do you seek the Lord and allow Him to direct your steps?
6. Are you making a decision right now on some issue? Have you waited on the Lord, prayed, and asked Him to show you His will?

The story of Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:16-20, Matthew 26:14-16, 27:3-10) illustrates how it is possible for wolves to be among God's sheep. Wolves are those who claim to be Christians, but are not. They may look like us, act like us, and talk like us, but they are phonies. They can do much damage to God's flock. It's kind of a scary thought that Judas could have walked with Jesus for three years, yet the others had no idea of the state of his heart. It is also easy for us to be deceived.

7. Wolves are not easy to spot. What are some things to look for? Read Matthew 7:15-20 and John 10:12.

8. Did Judas repent? Read Matthew 27:3-5 and Acts 1:25.

9. Read Acts 1:24. How could they bear witness to what the Lord said to Samuel in 1 Samuel 16:7?

One of the most exciting things in the Book of Acts is seeing God use ordinary men and women to accomplish great and mighty things. He used a bunch of "common folk" like us. Max Lucado called the apostles "Joe Pot Roast" guys; common men who simply were willing to take a step when Jesus said, "Follow Me." If God could use them, then there's hope for you and me. The Spirit of God changes hearts and lives. We see Peter and John become changed men. He can change us too.

10. To end today's lesson, meditate on this question ... How have you been changed by God's power?

We leave the disciples awaiting the gift of the Father. Can you sense their excitement? Look back on the whole chapter. **What did it mean to you?** What one point really ministered to you or perhaps even changed your life? If you can't think of anything, read the chapter again. The Holy Spirit wants to speak to you in every verse of the Bible.

There are so many "**Reasons to Rejoice**" this week. When I consider that the Holy Spirit Himself, the Living God, is living inside of me, I almost can't stand it. Can you???