

Two Year Bible Trek

Week 87

Acts 1-8

Key Concepts: The key concept in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles is that the Holy Spirit works through the Apostles to create a renewed community of faith based on the reality of Jesus of Nazareth as the long awaited savior of Israel and the world.

Central Concepts: The central concepts in this opening portion of Acts are witness, Spirit and community. The disciples are to be witnesses to what has taken place in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. In the Greek, the word for witness is also the word for martyr. We will watch as the two meanings are woven together. The second concept is that of Spirit. We are to understand that what happens in and through the disciples is not the work of human beings but is the work of the Spirit of God. Finally we have community. This opening section of the book establishes a new vision for the manner in which the followers of Jesus Christ are to live.

Brief Summary: As we open, note that the same individual who wrote Luke appears to have written Acts. The writer again addresses Theophilus and implies that this text is a continuation of the Lucan story. As we read we will also notice that at times the narrative moves between first and third person; meaning that some of the story is a first-hand account, while other portions are not.

Preparation (1:1-1:26) The disciples are given a mission. This mission is to tell people about Jesus in "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth." This mission is given to them directly by Jesus before he ascends into heaven. Following Jesus' ascension the disciples and the women with them select a replacement for Judas (Matthias). They need to have a full contingent of twelve disciples/apostles with which to start this new endeavor.

Pentecost (2:1-2:47) Once the band of Jesus's followers is complete they wait for the giving of the Holy Spirit. The disciples are all together on the Jewish festival of Pentecost, during which Jews from all over the world come to Jerusalem. Suddenly, the Spirit, like a wind rushes into the room and appearing as flames, rests on each of them. The followers then begin to speak in a variety of languages. They leave the room and move out into the streets telling the story of Jesus in the languages of all of those gathered in Jerusalem. Peter uses this opportunity to explain, in a good rabbinic fashion complete with scriptural references, who Jesus was, why he came, why he died and was raised and that salvation is offered in Jesus' name. Three thousand people are converted and the church is born. This new church then enters into a communal life style.

Witnesses (3:1-4:37) Following the creation of the Church (the Greek word for church is *ekklesia* which means a people called out for a purpose) the Spirit begins to manifest itself in and through the church members. The two primary manifestations of the Spirit are "signs and wonders" meaning that people are healed, and the Apostles have the courage to preach the good news in the face of opposition. The signs and wonders consist of miraculous healings similar to those done by Jesus. The courage to preach the good news (to be witnesses) is seen in Peter and John refusing to cease preaching when told to do so by the authorities, the beating of the Apostle's by the authorities in an effort to get them all to stop (which they do not), and finally the stoning of Stephen, a Jesus' follower, for his preaching and his declaration that heaven had been opened and he could see God. One of the central characters in this stoning death is one Saul of Tarsus, whom we will eventually come to know as the Apostle Paul.

1. How do you see your church as being similar/dissimilar to the church in Acts?
2. When have you been a witness to and for Jesus?
3. Have you ever experienced the Spirit at work in you? If so how?