The Infectious News first appeared in Jerusalem, then spread quickly from person to person and from city to city. It faced opposition everywhere it went. But the world was ill-equipped to fight it. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the followers of Christ relayed the Good News about Jesus everywhere. In less than 35 years, the gospel had reached cities from Jerusalem to Rome.

Luke wrote the Book of Acts to show the fulfillment of Jesus’ words, “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (see Matt. 16:18). Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He commanded His followers to make disciples of all nations (see Luke 24:46–49). Luke begins Acts with a reiteration of that commission and a description of how it would be carried out (1:8). This commission not only ties the Book of Acts to the Gospel of Luke, but it also provides an outline for the book: the witness in Jerusalem and Judea (1:1—6:7); the witness in Judea and Samaria (6:8—9:31); and the witness to the ends of the earth (9:32—28:31).

The Book of Acts begins in Jerusalem with the disciples huddled in a room on the Day of Pentecost. Then the Holy Spirit came upon them and authorized them to be His witnesses. The rest of Acts describes the ripple effect of that great event. Jesus’ followers first witnessed to the Jews in Jerusalem, with Peter at the center of the movement. Then persecution broke out (7:60), scattering believers into Samaria and the rest of the known world. Saul of Tarsus, once a leader of the persecution, became a leader of the persecuted. In chapter 11, the focus of the Book of Acts moves from Peter’s ministry to the Jews to Saul’s ministry to the Gentiles. Under his more familiar name Paul, this converted persecutor established churches in Asia Minor and Europe. The Book of Acts records three of Paul’s missionary journeys, as well as his voyage to Rome to face his trial. The book ends abruptly with Paul under house arrest in Rome. The ending is fitting, because the entire Book of Acts is itself just a prologue. Jesus has not finished His work on earth. The narrative begun by Luke in this book will not end until Jesus Christ returns in glory (see 1:11; 1 Cor. 15:28).
INTRODUCTION TO ACTS

AUTHOR  The Book of Acts begins with a reference to the author’s “former account” written to a man named Theophilus (1:1), a clear reference to the Gospel of Luke (see Luke 1:3). Even though the author does not mention himself by name in either the Gospel or Acts, early tradition identifies Luke as the author of both volumes. As early as the second century, ancient authors, such as Irenaeus (c. A.D. 180) indicate this.

Called “the beloved physician” by Paul (see Col. 4:14), Luke was a doctor Paul met in Troas (see 16:8–11). He cared for Paul during the illnesses he suffered on his missionary endeavors. Paul’s references to Luke in 2 Timothy 4:11 and Philemon 24 portray Luke as Paul’s faithful traveling companion. After the two met in Troas, Luke included himself with the missionary team recorded in Acts (see 16:10, the beginning of the so-called “we” sections in the book). Luke’s faithful friendship to Paul continued until Paul’s death in Rome, for Luke was one of the few people who did not desert him (see 2 Tim. 4:11).

DATE  The Book of Acts does not record Paul’s death. Instead it ends abruptly during Paul’s residence in Rome (see 28:30). Paul’s house arrest in Rome occurred around A.D. 61, marking the earliest possible date for the book’s completion. Acts makes no reference to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 or to Nero’s persecution of Christians following the fire of Rome in A.D. 64. Surely Luke would have mentioned these significant events if they had occurred when he wrote. Moreover, the many references to Paul’s vindication before Roman officials would not make sense if Nero had already started his vehement persecution of Christians. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that Acts was written between A.D. 61 and 64.

PURPOSE  The Book of Acts provides a condensed history of the early church, an eyewitness account of the miraculous spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome. The book details how the Holy Spirit authorized our spiritual forebears to carry out Jesus’ mandate to be His witnesses throughout the world. The accounts in Acts include stirring examples for us to follow, but the recurring theme of the Book of Acts is that our spiritual ancestors were empowered by the Holy Spirit. That same power is available to us. God has not left us at the mercy of our own weaknesses; He has sent the Holy Spirit to help us follow their example (see Eph. 5:17, 18), and to be Jesus’ witnesses in all of the earth.

THEOLOGY  The Book of Acts is a historical narrative, but at the same time it has profound theological significance. A believer’s faith rests upon the facts of history: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. These historical events were recorded by Luke in his Gospel in order to evoke belief. If the historical fact of Christ’s resurrection is not true, then a believer’s faith has no foundation. As Paul states, “If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (1 Cor. 15:17). The Book of Acts reassures believers that their faith in Christ rests on fact. The extraordinary growth of the early church was based directly on the resurrected Christ. His command and empowerment of the disciples through the Holy Spirit is the only reasonable explanation for the incredible and rapid spread of the gospel in the first century. The early Christians were not testifying about a dead Christ, but a living Christ whom they had seen with their own eyes (1:1–5; Luke 24:36–53; 2 Pet. 1:16). The same is true for us today. Jesus lives and continues to work through the church.

CHRIST IN THE SCRIPTURES  Although Jesus ascends into heaven in chapter 1, He figures significantly in the rest of the Book of Acts. The resurrected Christ is the central theme of the sermons, defenses, and the life of the church through the entire book.

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Luke intended Acts to be an apologetic that logically attests to Jesus’ divinity. And he accomplished his purpose. Notice his references to the eyewitness accounts of Jesus’ resurrection, the firsthand testimonies of Jesus’ followers (including a converted critic of Christianity by the name of Saul), and the evidence of the Holy Spirit’s supernatural power. No wonder Luke quotes Peter as saying, “To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins” (10:43). “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (4:12).

**ACTS OUTLINE**

I. The apostles’ witness in Jerusalem 1:1—6:7  
   A. The acts of the Holy Spirit 1:1—26  
   B. The birth of the church 2:1—47  
   C. The healing of a lame man 3:1—26  
   D. Salvation in no one else 4:1—37  
   E. The arrest of Peter and John 5:1—42  
   F. Leadership for the infant church 6:1—7  

II. The early church’s witness to all Judea and Samaria 6:8—9:31  
   A. Stephen’s defense and martyrdom 6:8—7:60  
   B. The church scattered 8:1—40  

III. The witness to the end of the earth 9:32—28:31  
   A. Extension of truth to Gentiles 9:32—11:30  
   B. Peter’s miraculous escape from prison 12:1—25  
   C. Paul’s first missionary trip 13:1—14:28  
   D. The Jerusalem conference concerning Gentiles in the church 15:1—35  
   E. Paul’s second missionary trip 15:36—18:22  
   F. Paul’s third missionary trip 18:23—21:26  
   G. Paul’s trip to Rome 21:27—28:31
PROLOGUE

1 The former account I made, O "Theophilus, of all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2until the day in which He was taken up, after He had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, 3to whom He also presented Himself alive after He suffered by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. 4“That the apostles whom He had chosen, 5commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, 6but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me. 7For John truly baptized with water, 8but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." 9Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, 10saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" 11And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority, 12but 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."

JESUS ASCENDS TO HEAVEN

MARK 16:19, 20; LUKE 24:50–53

9: Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, 10He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 11And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, 12who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”

11 Luke addressed His gospel to the “most excellent Theophilus” (see Luke 1:3), using a title that indicates Theophilus was a person of high rank. The formal title is dropped here.

1:2, 3 Taken up refers to Christ’s ascension, the end of His earthly ministry. These verses look back to Luke 24:50 and ahead to vv. 15, 22. the apostles … to whom He also presented Himself alive: The resurrected Jesus presented Himself “not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God” (10:4). In the forty days between Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, there are recorded some 5 to 11 appearances of Jesus to believers confirming His resurrection from the dead. On the last of these appearances, Jesus gathered His apostles together and commanded them not to leave Jerusalem (v. 4). Many infallible proofs serve as the basis for the believer’s confidence in the resurrection of our Lord. The Greek word translated infallible proofs speaks of “convincing, decisive proof.” Christian belief is not built on speculation or myth but on the sovereign acts and words of God Incarnate in the time-space universe. The kingdom of God was the central topic of discussion between Christ and His apostles during the 40 days between Jesus’ resurrection and ascension. The goal of history is not the Cross, but the crown—the time when King Jesus reveals Himself in all His majesty and reigns in glory (see Is. 11; Dan. 7:13, 14; 1 Cor. 15:24–28; Rev. 20:4–6).

1:4 As predicted by John the Baptist (see Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33) and reiterated by Jesus Himself, the Promise of the Father was the promise of baptism in the Holy Spirit. There are seven references in Scripture to baptism in the Spirit. Five are proleptic (see v. 5; Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; John 2:1–10; Acts 1:11); one is historical (11:15, 16), referring to the Day of Pentecost; and one is doctrinal (see 1 Cor. 12:13), explaining the meaning of baptism in the Spirit.

1:5 shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit: The passive tense of the verb indicates that baptism does not depend upon our efforts to obtain the promise, but upon the Lord’s will. The simple future tense demonstrates that there is no uncertainty or doubt in the promise. The Greek word for baptized means “to immerse” or “to dip.” It also connotes being identified with someone or something. Spirit baptism means we have been placed in spiritual union with one another in the body of Jesus Christ, the church (see 1 Cor. 12:12, 13).

1:6 Therefore: Christ’s statement that the Spirit was about to be given evidently triggered concern among the disciples about the establishment of the kingdom. Connecting the coming of the Spirit and the coming of the kingdom was consistent with OT thought (see 3:21; Is. 32:15–20; 44:3–5; Ezek. 39:28; 29; Joel 2:28–31; Zech. 12:8–10). At this time expresses the anxiety of the apostles as they anticipated the kingdom rule that Christ had spoken of in the preceding days and weeks (v. 3). The popular expectation and hope was that Christ would establish His kingdom immediately.

1:7 It is not for you to know: Jesus did not correct His disciples’ views concerning the restoration of the kingdom to Israel (v. 6). Instead He corrected their views concerning the timing of the event. This was the same erroneous thinking that He had sought to correct with His parable in Luke 19:11–27, the parable of the minas. times or seasons: These words speak to the issue of timing differently. Times refers to chronology or the duration of time—“how long.” Seasons refers to the epochs or “events” that occur within time. The disciples were not to know how long it would be before Christ set up His kingdom, nor were they to know what events would transpire before the establishment of it. Peter points out that even the OT prophets did not know the timing between the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow (1 Pet. 1:11).

1:8 Instead of being concerned about the date of Christ’s return, the disciples’ job was to carry His message throughout the world, you shall receive power: This does not refer to personal power for godly living, as demonstrated in the lives of OT saints (see Abraham in Gen. 22; Joseph in Gen. 39; Moses in Ex. 14; Daniel in Dan. 6). This power was to leave Jerusalem and in the clouds. Be witnesses is Christ’s command to His disciples to tell others about Him regardless of the consequences. Church tradition tells us that all but one of the 11 apostles who heard this promise became martyrs. (John died in exile.) God empowered His disciples to be faithful witnesses even when they faced the most vehement opposition. 1:9–11 Jesus promised that He would not leave nor forsake us, but would be with us always, even to the end of the age (see Mark 16:20; John 16:38). He fulfilled this promise in the form of the Holy Spirit, who dwells within believers (see John 16:4–7). taken up … cloud received Him: He went up: These three statements portray the gradual, majestic departure of Jesus from the earth. will so come: The Second Coming of Christ and the establishment of His kingdom (vv. 6, 7) will occur the same way Jesus ascended: physically, visibly, and in the clouds.
Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey. And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

15 And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said, “Men and brothers, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, as it is written in the prophets, that one of whom must become a witness with us of His resurrection.”

16 Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.

17 And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed and said, “You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship from the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, to which John to that day when he was numbered with us.”

18 (Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out.

19 And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.)

20 For it is written in the Book of Psalms:

a Let his dwelling place be desolate, And let no one live in it;

and,

b Let another take his office.

21 Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, it was the custom of Peter to choose one of the disciples to take part in this ministry and apostleship from the beginning of Jesus’ ministry.

THE UPPER ROOM PRAYER MEETING

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MATTATHIAS CHOSSEN

CF. PS. 109:8; MATT. 27:7, 8

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which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.” 26 And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

When 2 the Day of Pentecost had fully come, 3 they were all 4 with one accord in one place. 2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and 5 it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

THE CROWD’S RESPONSE

5 And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, 6 devout men, from every nation under heaven. 6 And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. 7 Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, “Look, are not all these who speak 8 Galileans? 9 And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and 10 Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.” 12 So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “Whatever could this mean?” 13 Others mocking said, “They are full of new wine.”

PETER’S SERMON

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, that in the last days God has fulfilled what his servant David said long ago: 2:11 of the Messiah: 2:12...”

ACTS 2:24 – 26

Bible Times & Culture Notes

SABBATH DAY’S JOURNEY

“A Sabbath day’s journey” (1:12) referred to the distance a Jew could travel on the Sabbath without breaking the law. This distance was usually reckoned to be about “two thousand cubits” (about a thousand yards) because of the distance between the ark of the covenant and the rest of the Israelite camp in the wilderness (Josh. 3:4). The idea was that every person within the camp or city would be close enough to the center of worship to take part in the services without having to travel such a great distance that the Sabbath became a harried and busy day. This law, although noble in intent, was soon abused by a strict legalism. In the NT, Jesus often clashed with the Pharisees because of their blind legalism over observance of the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1–9).