



*“THE BIBLE: ACTS”

Biblical Text: Acts 1:1-8

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The key to understanding the Book of Acts is to remember Jesus’ words in Acts 1:8: **“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*¹ Everything else is the story of the Church fulfilling that purpose.

But the story remains unfinished - **that’s what I love about the Book of Acts!** Acts 1:8 is not only the main idea of the book, it also is a vision for a Church where every heart is captivated by following Jesus as Lord and sharing his hope with others!

So let’s *open our Bibles. If you need one, we have some in the lobby for free. Last week we looked at the good news that *“Jesus is Lord”* in the first four books of the New Testament, the *Gospels. And that story continues in the Book of Acts today.

This is now the fifth week in our series about the Bible. *Bible readings for this coming week, and the previous weeks, are available in the lobby, office, or online.

*At the start of Acts, we see that *Luke begins in a very familiar way. Remember his first volume, the Gospel of Luke, is addressed to Theophilus (*“One who loves God”*) - Luke 1:3: **“I decided ... to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus...”*²

The first words of Acts, from our text today, are these: **“In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning...”*³ So right away we get it, that this book is the continuation of the story of the message of Jesus. That’s why it is called the *Acts of the Apostles, and why it is in the Bible.

The passage Pastor Karen (Seth) read for you this morning ends with Jesus promising his Spirit to empower the disciples, again that key verse, Acts 1:8: *“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and *... you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth...”*⁴

And it all unfolds from there. *As the angel instructs them, the disciples gather in the Upper Room, pray and wait, and the promised power of the Holy Spirit comes! It fills the house and the believers, and the rest, is the history of the Church. That’s why some commentators have called the Book of Acts, the **“Acts of the Holy Spirit.”*

¹ Ibid. Acts 1:8, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*. Copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Ibid. Luke 1:3, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

³ Ibid. Acts 1:1, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

⁴ Ibid. Acts 1:8, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

The early chapters of Acts covers the birth of the Church and their life together – *“They devoted themselves to the Apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”* (Acts 2:42) We still do these same four things today.

Acts is about the early Christians, and especially two of its leaders, Peter and Paul. Some have called the Book of Acts, **“The Acts of Peter and Paul.”* It is it is completely unfair to reduce their story to a few verses - *but I’m doing it anyway!*

*Peter, the rock on whom Jesus said he would build his Church, was the first one to preach after the Spirit fell on Pentecost. And the first and last verses of his sermon in Acts 2:14 and 26 tell us his message: **“Men of Judea, and Jerusalem, listen to what I am saying ... God has made Jesus, whom you killed, to be both Lord and Christ!”*⁵

Later, he gives pivotal leadership as the Church is expanding to the Gentile when he says to the other leaders: **“God gave (the Gentiles) the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, so who am I to hinder God?”*⁶ (Acts 11:17)

That’s a good thing for us, or there would be no shrimp scampi or bacon and eggs! But it’s OK because you and I are also Gentiles. Peter’s vision is why we are here.⁷

*Not long before Peter’s speech, we meet Paul, then called Saul: **“Meanwhile Saul was still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord...”*⁸ (Acts 9:1) And he meets Jesus, which changed his life forever: **“He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’”*⁹ (Acts 9:4) And after being tended and dsicipleled by Ananias **“...immediately (Paul) began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, ‘He is the Son of God.’”*¹⁰ (Acts 9:25)

Paul became the great missionary evangelist, planting Churches, writing *letters of instruction and encouragement, which make up about 2/3 of the New Testament. In fact, it was in a Church he founded, *at Antioch, that we get our name, **Christian**.

Without him, we might be dancing the *Hora* and singing *Hava Nagila* on Sundays.

The final words of Acts are about Paul under house arrest in Rome - Acts 28:30-31: **“He lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God *and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.”*¹¹ Tradition is that he was martyred for his faith.¹²

⁵ The opening and closing lines of Peter’s Pentecost sermon from Acts 2:14-26, condensed and paraphrased by the author.

⁶ Op. Cit. Acts 1:8, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

⁷ This information is from Max Anders’ book, *30 Days to Understanding the Bible*. Copyright © 2011, Thomas Nelson Press.

⁸ Ibid. Acts 1:8, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

⁹ Ibid. Acts 1:8, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

¹⁰ Ibid. Acts 1:8, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

¹¹ Ibid. Acts 28: 30-31, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

*There much we can learn from the Book of Acts about how to be the Church today. Here's one of them that is so important, but that most Christians may not know.

There is New Testament word, * *Oikos* - oy'-kos, that means "extended family."

Well, this word "oikos" is used 117 times in the New Testament, 16 in the Book of Acts, to describe the "extended family" that is a part of all our lives. So in the Book of Acts the gift of salvation and baptism impacted and included not only the adults, but also all members of the extended family, including children and family friends.¹³

We see this in Acts 16 at Philippi, when Lydia and her whole household came to faith and were baptized. **"The Lord opened Lydia's heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. And she and her whole household were baptized..."*¹⁴ (Acts 16:14-15)

So much for children's baptism, according to some, not being in the Bible!

But we also see it when *Paul's jailer says, in the midst of an earthquake, *"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* **Paul and Silas answered him, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.'"*¹⁵ (Acts 16: 29-31)

*Why is this important? First of all, on Children's Sabbath, we ought to remember that children always were an important part of the ministry of Jesus and his Church. Remember how Jesus said, in Luke 18:16: **"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."*¹⁶ There is that!

Second, and more important, in the New Testament, especially in Acts, whenever God's Spirit changed a life, it changed a family, a household, and impacted a whole circle of relationships in the "extended family." It became "the how" that the Church grew. And it still should be today! Let me tell you what I mean.

You and I have one job. Jesus said, in our text today, Acts 1:8, **"You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth..."*

I **hope** you and I get a chance to make an impact on those whom we chance to meet in the larger culture, or at work. Maybe we will - it's sometimes hard to know how.

But here's the deal - I **know you and I will have an impact on those you see and know every day.** You are incredibly important in their lives. **Start with them.**

Start with your household, your family, your "extended family," your circle of friends, your **"oikos!"** Do everything you can to help them become followers of Jesus Christ!

¹² Op. Cit. Max Anders, *30 Days to Understanding the Bible*.

¹³ James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Copyright © 2009 and earlier, Hendrickson Publishing.

¹⁴ Ibid. paraphrased and condensed from the *New Revised Standard Version* by the author.

¹⁵ Op. Cit. paraphrased and condensed from the *New Revised Standard Version* by the author.

¹⁶ Luke 18:16, Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission.