

ACTS 1-7

the saving word

BIBLE STUDIES
TERM 1 2022
Gympie Presbyterian Church

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Welcome to Bible Study for 2022. This term we're studying the first section of the book of Acts—'part 2' of Luke's historical record of what Jesus *began* and what he continues to do (Acts 1:1). Acts retells the explosive growth of the Word of God along with the persecution and troubles the earliest Christians faced.

Through listening to Acts, we pray God will work in our hearts by his Spirit, empowering us to join in his mission to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus to 'the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8).

Witnessing to the Kingdom

Acts 1

What's your favourite biography (book or movie)? How did it end?

Read Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-3

- What is similar and what is different between how Luke and Acts begin?
- What do you think is significant about the word *began* in Acts 1:1?
- How are the 40 days between Christ's resurrection and ascension summarised? What does this tell us about Jesus' mission?

Acts is *part two* of Luke's historical record. Part one is the *orderly account* of what God has *accomplished* in the earthly ministry of Jesus. As we study Acts together, we're going to be seeing how Jesus continues his ministry of growing the Kingdom of God.

Read Acts 1:4-11

- As they gather on the Mount of Olives (v12) the disciples ask Jesus about the *kingdom of God*. What do the following passages from Luke's gospel teach us about the kingdom of God?

Luke 1:32-33	
Luke 4:40-44	
Luke 10:1-12	
Luke 13:18-21	
Luke 18:15-30	
Luke 23:32-43	

- How do you think the disciples might have expected Jesus to answer their question?
- What does Jesus' answer tell us about (a) what the kingdom of God is and (b) how it will be *restored*?

Acts 1:8 can be thought of as the ‘contents page’ or ‘outline’ of Acts. As we read this book together throughout 2022, it’s these key moments (Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, end of the earth) that are *headline moments* of what God did, and is doing, to bring about his kingdom.

Read Acts 1:12-26

- What does the process for selecting a new Apostle tell us about apostleship? Why do you think Apostles needed to be *eye-witnesses*?

Reflection

- From what we’ve read in Luke and Acts 1, what is Jesus *continuing* to do now?
- Acts 1:8 is both the outline of this book and a *commission* for the apostles. What does this commission mean to us? How could our church be more aligned with this mission?

The Word of God

At the end of each study, we’re going to reflect on the following four questions. The triune God reveals himself in the Scriptures, and so we want to finish each week reflecting on what has been revealed to us of God, and turning to him in prayer.

How does this passage reveal...

1. the plan of God the Father?
2. the rule of Jesus Christ?
3. the empowerment of the Holy Spirit?
4. the growth of the Word?¹

Close in prayer, praising God for these truths for us too!

¹ In Acts 6:7 (and other places) the numerical growth of Jesus’ followers is described as ‘the word of God growing’.

Witnessing to the Promise

Acts 2

Background

Read the following passages. What does God promise?

Isaiah 44:1-5	
Ezekiel 36:22-32	
Joel 2:28-32	
Luke 3:15-17	

The Old Testament prophets (John the Baptist is the final prophet of the old age) spoke about a coming time when God would pour out his Spirit. This time is called the *Day of the Lord* or the *Last Days*. It's the time of God's Messiah when God's king would be on the throne.

In the previous study, the disciples asked about the restoration of God's kingdom. In Acts 2 (these events occurred around 10 days after the events of chapter 1) what was promised becomes present!

Read Acts 2:1-36

- What promises has God fulfilled? (vv17, 23, 30-32, 33)
- What does the gift of the Spirit reveal about Jesus?

Read Acts 2:37-41

- How do people respond to Peter's message? How do you think what the crowd saw and heard that day led them to this response?
- What does Peter tell the people to do? How does this fit with his message and the promises we read earlier?

Read Acts 2:42-47

- What characterises the life of the Spirit-filled community?

Pentecost is a Jewish harvest feast (Leviticus 24:15-21). At the end of harvest, God's people celebrated his provision and blessing. On this Pentecost, God doesn't only bless his people with grain but with forgiveness, the pouring out of his Spirit, and a new community.

Acts 2 is often used in our disagreements over the role of the Holy Spirit and the gifts he gives. However, Luke's point isn't so much to raise this question but to show how God's promises have become present that the gospel of his kingdom might grow.

Reflection

- How do the events of this Pentecost fit with Jesus' command in Acts 1:8?

- As God's *Last Days* people, how does the gift of God's Spirit empower us for mission?

- In what ways does our church community look like the Pentecost church? Do you think this description is meant to be a model for all churches? How might we need to change to be more like the earliest church?

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Witnessing to Salvation

Acts 3:1-4:4

- If someone asks you 'what is the gospel' how would you answer?

Read Acts 3:1-10

- Who is credited with healing this man? (vv6, 9)
- How does the crowd respond to what they see? (v10)
- Look at Luke 5:24-26. What is the same and what is different between the miracle at the temple and Jesus' healing of a lame man?
- Read Isaiah 35:5-10, Micah 4:6-7 (and Luke 7:20-22). In the light of the scriptures, what is significant about a lame man walking and praising God?

Reads Acts 3:11-26

- What wrong understanding about this miracle does Peter correct? (v12) Who is the true cause of the miracle? (vv13, 16)
- Glance back at Acts 2. How does this message compare with Peter's Pentecost message? What facts of Jesus are included in both? What are unique to each one?
- To what response does Peter call the crowd?

Read Acts 4:1-4

- How did the religious leaders and the people in the crowd respond to Peter's teaching? How is this the same/different from the response at Pentecost?

Reflection

- What key things are part of Peter's gospel preaching? Why do you think they're essential for trusting in Jesus?

- What parts of Peter's message in Acts 2 & 3 do Christians often overlook or not emphasise? Why are they important truths?

- How would Peter answer the question 'what is Jesus doing now'? How does this comfort or encourage you?

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Threats to Witness

Acts 4:1-31

- Have you ever been asked, or felt pressure, to not say something about Jesus? What was the situation like and how did you respond?

In Acts 3, a man who'd been lame all his life is enabled to 'rise up and walk' in the name of Jesus. This miracle leads to Peter again witnessing to the salvation he'd seen fulfilled in Jesus.

Read Acts 4:1-12

- Remembering the events of Acts 3, how do the (a) people and (b) the religious/political rulers respond?
- What is the key question the rulers ask? How is this similar to what we read in Acts 3:6, 12, 16? Why do you think this question is worth repeating?
- How does Peter answer? Why do you think he alludes to Psalm 118:22 (you might like to read Psalm 118:22-24 and Luke 19:28; 20:17-18)?
- List all the reasons (including truths about Jesus) for Peter's bold response in this situation?

Read Acts 4:13-22

- Why are the rulers astonished? And what's their plan to deal with this situation?
- How do Peter and John respond to their ruling? How do you feel about this response?
- Why do you think Luke tells us of the no-longer-lame man's age at this point of the account?

Read Acts 4:23-31

- What's the instinctual response of the believers when they hear Peter and John's report? How else could they have responded? How do you think we might have responded?
- Read Psalm 2. How do these believers relate what's happened to God's plan?

- What do the believers ask God for? Why do you think they ask for this?
- How does God answer their prayer?

Reflection

- Threats can often make us feel discouraged or helpless. What truths about God can encourage us when we feel like the gospel and God's kingdom is under threat?
- "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him?" Where might we feel similar pressure? How can we find/develop the courage to respond like these believers?

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Witnessing Truth

Acts 4:32-5:11

What comes to your mind when you hear the words *church discipline*?

Read Deuteronomy 15:1-11

- What should life be like in the nation of Israel if God's people *fully obey* the LORD?

- How should God's people respond to poverty and need?

Read Acts 4:32-37

- What were the features of life in the early Christian community? (See also Acts 2:42-47)

- How does this compare to the community life hoped for in Deuteronomy 15?

Reflect

- Which parts of life of the Christian community in Acts 2 and 4 do you think are meant to be practiced by Christians in all times and places? Why do you think this?

- If Churches are meant to be communities like this, how do you think we're going? What could we do to be more like this early community?

The life of the earliest Christians in Acts 1-4 seems almost idyllic (threats notwithstanding!). However, this utopia is short-lived, as we see in chapter 5.

Read Acts 5:1-11

- How are Ananias and Sapphira like and unlike Joseph (Acts 4:36-37)?

- What is Ananias' and Sapphira's sin? How do the leaders of the church respond? And what happens to Ananias and Sapphira?

- How does this impact the church?

Things have started so well, but now sin has reared its ugly head. It's almost like Genesis 3 or Joshua 7 again. But despite the ongoing presence of sin, God continues to grow his kingdom.

Reflect

- Read 1 Corinthians 5:12-13. Why is church discipline necessary? How might church discipline go wrong?

‘Discipline is exercised by those appointed to rule in the Church for the glory of God, the purity of the Church and the spiritual good of the offender.’²

- Do you agree or disagree? Is there anything else you’d add? How can we ensure church discipline achieves these goals?

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² Presbyterian Church of Australia Code, Chapter 8, *Code of Discipline*, 1.02

Unbeaten Witness

Acts 5:12-42

- Have you ever been asked, or felt pressure, to not say something about Jesus? What was the situation like and how did you respond?

Read Acts 5:12-16

- How does Luke summarise the ministry of the Apostles? Where does their ministry centre? Why do you think this is?
- This sounds incredible. Looking back at Acts 1:8, how does this fit with the agenda given by Jesus?

Read Acts 5:17-32

- What desires motivate the decisions of the rulers of Israel? What motivates the apostles?
- What key gospel truths are proclaimed by Peter? How do these truths help him (and us) obey God rather than people?

Read Acts 5:33-42

- How does Gamaliel stop the apostles from being executed? What do you think about his reasoning?
- How do the apostles respond to being detained, tried, and beaten?

Reflection

- Suffering can often make us feel discouraged or helpless. What truths about God can encourage us when we suffer or feel God or the gospel is dishonoured?
- “We must obey God rather than human beings!” Where might we feel similar pressure? How can we find/develop the courage to respond like these believers?

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Witnessing to the Exalted Christ

Acts 6-7

- ‘Christians are normal people, we just believe in Jesus.’ Do you agree or disagree? What do you think motivates this way of talking about ourselves?

Following the suffering of the apostles at the hands of the Jewish religious and political leaders, there’s another episode of difficulty within the church. Troubles from outside and inside!

The difficulty arises because some widows consider themselves to be overlooked because of their culture/ethnicity. The Apostles take this disunity seriously and appoint seven men to ensure all were cared for fairly.

Although appointed to *wait on tables*, one of these *servers*, Stephen, comes under intense persecution because of his gracious and powerful witness to Jesus. In this study, we’re going to listen to Stephen’s defence in Acts 7.

Read Acts 6:8-15

- What was Stephen doing and what were the (false) accusations brought against him?

Read Acts 7:1-53

This passage is printed on the next two pages. As you read:

- note the key people/places/events mentioned by Stephen and underline or highlight
- Any promises made or fulfilled by God
- Things relating to the allegation against Stephen (so relating to Moses, the temple, or God’s honour)
- Events where we see the pattern of being ‘rejected by people but honoured by God’

- Why do you think Stephen mentions these people/places/events and not others?
- How does Stephen’s speech show that proclaiming Christ is not against God, Moses, or the temple (*this place*)?
- How does Stephen show the pattern of ‘rejected by people but honoured by God’ in Israel’s history?

Read Acts 7:54-60

- What gives Stephen courage and comfort as he faces the rage of the crowd?

- What similarities (and differences) do you see between Stephen's death and Jesus'?

Reflection

- God honours those who are rejected by people. How does this fit with the requirement of an elder that 'he must also have a good reputation with outsiders'? (1 Timothy 3:7 NIV)

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Acts 7:1-53 (NIV)

Then the high priest asked Stephen, "Are these charges true?"

To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran.

'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.'

So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Harran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. He gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot on. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child.

God spoke to him in this way: 'For four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,' God said, 'and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.'

Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.

Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt. So Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.

Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our ancestors could not find food. When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our forefathers on their first visit. On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph's family. After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our ancestors died. Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.

As the time drew near for God to fulfil his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had greatly increased. Then 'a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt.' He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our ancestors by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die.

At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for by his family. When he was placed outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his own people, the Israelites. He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defence and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. Moses thought that his own people would realise that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, 'Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?'

But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, 'Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.

After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to get a closer look, he

heard the Lord say: 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.

Then the Lord said to him, 'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.'

This is the same Moses they had rejected with the words, 'Who made you ruler and judge?' He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. He led them out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness.

This is the Moses who told the Israelites, 'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.' He was in the assembly in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living words to pass on to us.

But our ancestors refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. They told Aaron, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt—we don't know what has happened to him!' That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and revelled in what their own hands had made. But God turned away from them and gave them over to the worship of the sun, moon and stars. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets:

'Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the wilderness, people of Israel?

You have taken up the tabernacle of Molek and the star of your god Rephan, the idols you made to worship. Therefore I will send you into exile' beyond Babylon.

Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the covenant law with them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. After receiving the tabernacle, our ancestors under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, who enjoyed God's favour and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built a house for him.

However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says:

'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool.
What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord.

Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?'

You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him—you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it."