

Bi134 Acts

Lesson Bi134-2 Jesus Promises the Spirit

When someone makes a promise to give you something, how do you feel? Do you doubt that you will ever receive that gift? How long are you willing to wait for it? Your answers probably depend on whether or not you believe you can trust the person making the promise. The disciples did trust Jesus. After his resurrection, Jesus spent 40 days teaching his disciples about the kingdom of God. One day he met with them and gave them a strong command. He ordered them to stay in Jerusalem until God had given them the gift of the Holy Spirit. “John baptized with water,” he said, “but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5). They didn’t really understand, but they trusted.

Finally the day came when Christ was to leave them and return to heaven. He led them a kilometer out of the city to the Mount of Olives. There he told them what would happen when they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. He said that the Holy Spirit would come upon them, and at that moment, they would receive power from God. They would be given supernatural ability to be powerful witnesses for Him. Their witness would begin in Jerusalem where they were. It would then expand into all of Judea and Samaria, and eventually it would reach the ends of the earth.

Then, an amazing thing occurred. As the disciples watched, Jesus’ feet lifted off the ground and began he began to ascend. He went higher and higher until a cloud hid him from their sight. Awestruck, they stood staring into the sky. Suddenly two angels stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” one angel said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

The disciples obeyed Jesus’ command and went back to the upstairs room in Jerusalem where they were staying. There, they all joined together in constant prayer. With them was Mary, the mother of Jesus, his brothers, and some women—about 120 people in all.

From this amazing story we learn five important lessons. These lessons help us to understand the rest of the book of Acts. They will also help us in fulfilling the ministries that Christ has given us.

The first lesson we learn is about the *nature* of the book of Acts itself. We learn that Acts is about the church fulfilling God’s mission and about the necessity of our being empowered by the Holy Spirit to participate in that mission. Remember Jesus’ last command and his last promise to his disciples. His last command was, “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised.” His last promise was, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

In this promise, Jesus reminded his disciples of their mission; they were to be his witnesses. As you move through Acts you will discover that the book is primarily about

witnessing. Beginning on the Day of Pentecost, and continuing to the end of the book, you will hear the disciples telling people about Jesus. In fact, the words ‘witness’ or ‘testify’ are used more than 30 times in Acts.

The second lesson we learn from the opening verses of Acts is about our *participation* in Jesus’ mission to redeem the nations. When Jesus said, “*You* are to be my witnesses,” he was not just talking to his 11 apostles. He was talking to everyone who would choose to follow him until he comes again. This statement is the final time Jesus issued what is known as his “Great Commission.” This commission is recorded five times in Scripture, once in each of the four gospels and once in Acts. In Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus said, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” In Mark 16:15, he commanded, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.” In Luke 24:47-49, Jesus told his disciples that “repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations.” In John 20:21, he commissioned them, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And now in Acts 1:8 Jesus issues a final command, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Above all else, as disciples of Jesus, we have been called to be his witnesses.

The third lesson we learn from the beginning verses of Acts is about the *extent* of our witness. It is to extend “to the ends of the earth.” This reminds us that God is concerned about every person in every place in the world. We must, therefore, commit ourselves to proclaim the good news about Jesus to all people.

While not every Christian can personally go to the ends of the earth, every follower of Jesus can pray for lost people everywhere. And we can all give our money to help others go. Someone has said that we should “think globally, and act locally.” In other words, we should never forget that all over the world people are lost and in need of a Savior. Then, we should do whatever we can to see that they hear the gospel. We can also reach out to people in nearby villages and communities by planting churches there.

In Acts 1:8, Jesus also tells us *how* we will be able to carry out our task of reaching the lost with the gospel. We can do it only in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses.”

This pattern of receiving power, then becoming witnesses for Christ, is a pattern that is repeated throughout the book of Acts. Every time the Spirit comes upon and fills faithful followers of Jesus they become inspired, effective witnesses—and the kingdom of God advances. As we move through this study of the book of Acts, we will discover seven “key outpourings” of the Holy Spirit that dramatically make this point. Each outpouring emphasizes the “empowering results in witness” pattern.

During the 40 days between his resurrection and his ascension, Jesus repeatedly told his disciples to “Go!” But now he tells them to “Stay!” In other words, they must “go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15), but first, they must “stay” in Jerusalem and “wait for the gift [his] Father promised” (v. 4). What important lesson do we learn

from this? We learn that before we can effectively obey the first command—to go and preach the gospel, we will need to obey the second command—to be baptized in the Holy Spirit.

The last lesson concerns **how long** we are to witness. Jesus has left us with a humanly impossible task, the evangelization of all nations before he comes again. It is a job beyond our ability. Therefore, we must have supernatural help. We, like those first disciples of Jesus must wait until we “have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).

As the disciples looked on, Jesus was taken up into heaven. The angels appeared and challenged them, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus ... will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (v. 11). Remember, Jesus had just commanded the disciples to return to Jerusalem and wait to receive power from on high. They were to quickly obey. They had no time to waste staring into heaven. Since this same Jesus will come back, there is urgency about our mission to reach the lost. We must go quickly to the harvest fields.

This lesson is **important** because it discusses the significance of Jesus’ last words to his disciples. It gives five lessons to be learned from his very specific instructions.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that God’s promise to send the Holy Spirit is for us today, not just the 120 in the upper room.

Review: In the beginning verses of Acts we learned some important lessons about the nature of the book of Acts and about what we should do as committed followers of Jesus.

1. What two things did we learn about the **nature** of Acts?
 - A. [Pause] If you said that the book of Acts is about fulfilling God’s mission and the necessity of our being empowered by the Holy Spirit to participate in that mission, you were correct.
2. What did we learn about who is to **participate** in God’s missions to reach the lost?
 - A. [Pause] If you answered that every Christian is to participate in God’s mission to reach the lost, you are correct.
3. What did we learn about the **extent** of our witness?
 - A. [Pause] If you answered that we are to be Christ’s witnesses at home and to the ends of the earth, you are correct.
4. What did we learn about **how long** we are to continue to witness?
 - A. [Pause] If you said that we are to continue to witness until Jesus returns, you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to re-listen to it two or three times until you can teach it to someone else. Then, find someone and tell the story and share with them the five lessons you learned from the story:

1. The nature of the book of Acts
2. Our participation in Christ’s mission
3. The extent of our witness
4. How we will be able to carry out our task
5. How long we are to witness