

## **Bi134 Acts**

### ***Bi134-45 The Message of Acts***

The story is told of an old Salvation Army soldier who stood at the graveside of General William Booth, who with his wife Catherine founded the movement. As he pondered the powerful influence of their lives and ministry, he prayed, “Oh, Lord! Do it again!”

We have now come to the end of our study of the Book of Acts. In this study, we have learned many things. Most importantly, we have learned about God’s mission. We have seen how the New Testament church went about fulfilling that mission in the power of the Holy Spirit. As we think about their wonderful deeds, we are inspired to pray, “Oh, Lord! Do it again!” Hopefully, we have applied these lessons to our own lives and ministries. We do seek to personally experience the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, just as the first Christians did in theirs. As we conclude our study, we ask a final question: “What is the message of Acts for the church today?”

To answer that question, we must first answer another question: “Why did Luke write the Book of Acts in the first place?” As you may remember, in our very first lesson we learned that Luke wrote the Book of Acts with a clear purpose in mind. He wrote to call the church back to its Pentecostal and missionary roots. In Acts 1:8, Jesus promised, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” This final promise of Jesus is the key to understanding the entire book of Acts.

Luke wrote Acts about 30 years after the Day of Pentecost. He was thus writing to a second generation of Christians. These believers lived far away from Jerusalem, and they were likely suffering persecution. Because of this, they had lost much of their spiritual fervor and missionary zeal. In Luke’s mind, these struggling disciples urgently needed to hear the story of the church’s powerful beginning and irresistible missionary advance.

He further wrote to tell his readers about the baptism in the Holy Spirit. He wanted them to know that they could experience the same empowering as did Jesus and the early Christians. If they would do this, like those first disciples, they too could become a powerful missionary force in their world. What’s more, this could happen even in the midst of persecution.

This, then, is the message of Acts: Any church—or any disciple—can powerfully participate in Christ’s mission to take the gospel to the lost. They must only commit themselves fully to Christ’s mission and be powerfully filled with the Holy Spirit.

Luke further wrote Acts as the manual for missions strategy. In its pages we discover the “New Testament Strategy of the Spirit” used by the Early Church. It was a strategy handed down to them by Christ. It transformed a small group of disillusioned disciples in Jerusalem into a global missions force. Just as some stools have three legs; this missions strategy has three parts. And, just as such a stool cannot stand if any leg is removed; this strategy will not work if any part is removed.

The first leg of the New Testament strategy of the Spirit is empowering. Jesus commanded his disciples to “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15). But first, he said, “stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). The disciples obeyed Christ’s command, and on the Day of Pentecost, they received the promised power.

Today, we must do the same. If we expect to succeed in the work, we cannot ignore this first crucial element of Jesus’ missions strategy. Like Jesus and those first Christians, we must “receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on [us]” (Acts 1:8). This empowering is not only for church leaders; it is for *every* follower of Christ. The Bible says that on the Day of Pentecost, “they were *all* filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4). Every believer must be empowered by the Holy Spirit because every believer has been commissioned as Christ’s witness.

The second leg of the New Testament Strategy of the Spirit is witness. Jesus told his disciples, “You will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The Book of Acts is the story of how the early church fulfilled that mandate. In Acts, their witness included two elements, a clear presentation of the gospel and a demonstration of kingdom power. Today, our witness must include the same two elements. We must boldly proclaim Christ to all, and we must trust him to confirm his word with signs following.

Finally, the New Testament Strategy of the Spirit includes mobilization. This is what we see happening in the Book of Acts. In Ephesus, Paul had prayed with the 12 disciples to be empowered by the Spirit. After he had trained them in the lecture hall of Tyrannus, he sent them out to evangelize Asia Minor (Acts 19). Paul was simply following the example set by Jesus. Jesus trained his disciples, and he commanded them to wait in Jerusalem to be empowered by the Spirit. Finally, he sent them out to preach the good news and plant Spirit-empowered missionary churches. We must do the same. If we will follow the New Testament Strategy of the Spirit, we, like the early church, will be successful in caring out the missionary mandate.

Today the church faces a great challenge. Thousands of tribes and millions of people still wait to hear the true gospel for the first time. Some of those people may even live near you. Christ has commissioned us to take the good news to them. But, how can we accomplish such an enormous task? The answer is that we can do it in Christ’s strength. We can follow the example of the early disciples in Acts. They were convinced that, in the Spirit’s power, they could do anything Christ had commanded.

The Book of Acts thus teaches us that the hope of reaching the nations does not lie in any humanly devised means. It lies, rather, in our determination to remain committed to his mandate, and our insistence that every believer be empowered by the Holy Spirit. We therefore must herald the message of Jesus everywhere: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on 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).

This lesson is **important** because in it we have learned the central message of the Book of Acts and we have applied that message to our own lives and ministries.

The **main truth** we learn from this lesson is that to accomplish the mission of God we must fully commit ourselves to that mission and we must be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Let's **review** some important truths we have learned from this lesson.

1. Why did Luke write the Book of Acts?
  - A. [PAUSE] If you answered that Luke wrote the Book of Acts to call the church back to its Pentecostal and missionary roots, you answered correctly.
2. What is the central message of the Book of Acts?
  - A. [PAUSE] If you answered, "The central message of the Book of Acts is that if any church—or any disciple—wants to powerfully participate in Christ's mission to take the gospel to the lost, they must commit themselves fully to Christ's mission, and they must be powerfully filled with the Holy Spirit, you are correct.
3. What are the three legs of the "New Testament Strategy of the Spirit" used by Jesus and the church in the book of Acts?
  - A. [PAUSE] If you answered, "The three legs of the New Testament Strategy of the Spirit are empowering, witness, and mobilization," you are right.
4. How must we respond to the message of the Book of Acts?
  - A. [PAUSE] If you answered that we must follow the example of Jesus and the early church and be empowered by the Holy Spirit, and then go out and do God's work, you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it two or three more times or until you can clearly share the message of the Book of Acts and the New Testament Strategy of the Spirit with others. Then, you should gather the leaders of your church together and discuss ways you can implement the strategy of the Spirit into the evangelistic missions program of your church.