

The Book of Acts

Lesson 3

Major Themes

Lesson Guide



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HOW TO USE THIS LESSON GUIDE

This lesson guide is designed for use in conjunction with the associated video. If you do not have access to the video, the lesson guide will also work with the audio and/or manuscript versions of the lesson. Additionally, the video and lesson guide are intended to be used in a learning community, but they also can be used for individual study if necessary.

- **Before you watch the lesson**
 - **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.
 - **Schedule viewing** — The Notes section of the lesson guide has been divided into segments that correspond to the video. Using the time codes found in parentheses beside each major division, determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may also want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
 - **Take notes** — The Notes section of the lesson guide contains a basic outline of the lesson, including the time codes for the beginning of each segment and key notes to guide you through the information. Many of the main ideas are already summarized, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.
 - **Record comments and questions** — As you watch the video, you may have comments and/or questions on what you are learning. Use the margins to record your comments and questions so that you can share these with the group following the viewing session.
 - **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.
- **After you watch the lesson**
 - **Complete Review Questions** — Review Questions are based on the basic content of the lesson. You should answer Review Questions in the space provided. These questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
 - **Answer/discuss Application Questions** — Application Questions are questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

Preparation

- Read the book of Acts

Notes

I. Introduction (0:18)

Luke addressed three major concepts as he communicated the spread of the gospel in the days of the early church.

II. Holy Spirit (1:55)

Acts describes the Holy Spirit as the one whose power enables the spread of the gospel and the kingdom, and as the one who empowers his people for godly living.

A. Before Pentecost (3:03)

Jesus spent forty days between his resurrection and ascension teaching his apostles (1:3).

Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit would soon come to them in power.

1. Timing (4:15)

When Jesus announced the coming baptism of the Spirit, the apostles asked if Jesus was about to restore the kingdom to Israel (1:4-8).

The Old Testament prophets predicted that because of Israel and Judah's great sins, God would exile them from the Promised Land and subject them to the tyranny of foreign rulers.

Jews believed that God would later send the Messiah to restore his people:

- forgive their sins
- return them to the Land
- rule over them as king, turning the Promised Land into the center of God's kingdom on earth.

The apostles hoped Jesus would fulfill the Old Testament predictions before he ascended into heaven.

Jesus taught that God would fulfill Old Testament prophecy through the spread of the gospel throughout the world and by Christ's glorious return.

The Old Testament prophets predicted that when judgment was over, God would pour out his Spirit as never before (Isaiah 44:3-4).

- Before the Messiah came Israel would live in "this age" of sin, corruption and death.
- When the Messiah came, he would usher in "the age to come."

Jesus explained the transition to the glorious kingdom of God would come in stages.

- Inauguration — during Jesus' earthly ministry
- Continuation — during Christ's reign in heaven
- Consummation — when Jesus returned in the future

2. Purpose (10:46)

The Spirit would be poured out to give the apostles power to be Christ's godly and faithful witnesses (1:8).

- power — In the Old Testament, God's Spirit brought God's will to pass in the world at large and in individual people's lives (Judges 14–15).
- witnesses — The Spirit of God gave his people power to speak boldly and effectively on God's behalf (Micah 3:8).

The Spirit would act in the apostles as he had in the Old Testament — giving power to authenticate the truth of their message and words to speak to those who opposed them.

B. Day of Pentecost (14:06)

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church took place on the day of Pentecost while the apostles “were all together in one place” (2:1-4).

1. Significance (14:57)

Pentecost was one of the feasts and festivals instituted in the Scriptures to commemorate God’s great acts of redemption — 50 days after Passover.

The Passover celebration reminded the Jews of the way God had freed them from slavery (Exodus 12; Leviticus 23).

Pentecost commemorated God’s provision for Israel in bringing her into the Promised Land.

These two festivals commemorated God’s deliverance from slavery into the land of promise.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was significant for the early church:

- reminded them of the hope announced in Jeremiah 31:31

- Jesus' sacrifice on the cross occurred over Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7); the coming of the Spirit was the firstfruits of the harvest of eternal salvation
- the church had received the writing of God's law on the heart (Romans 8:23)

2. Tongues (20:34)

Luke recorded that God's Spirit was poured out on the church on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4).

Some Christians argue that the gift of tongues was a miracle of hearing.

More likely, the miracle was one of speaking human languages that they had never learned:

- Luke wrote that the Holy Spirit enabled the speakers.
- The Greek word for *tongues* (*glōssa*) usually refers to ordinary human languages.

Peter referred to Joel 2:28-32 to explain what was happening at Pentecost:

- believed the events of Pentecost were part of the last days
- indicated the Spirit's coming was to occur before the great and glorious day of the Lord

“the day of the Lord” – Day of God's judgment and blessing when God finally and utterly defeats all his enemies and blesses all his faithful people

The Spirit came at Pentecost as a wonder of the last days, a time of the glorious divine intervention, establishing the final stages of the kingdom of God.

Pentecost was a great once-for-all-time event through which God brought the last days.

We should always expect the Holy Spirit to be present in the lives of believers, but we should not expect precisely the same kind of manifestation of the Spirit as at Pentecost.

3. Results (29:11)

The Holy Spirit gave power to the apostles and used this power to bless the spread of the gospel of the kingdom (e.g. Peter: Luke 9:33).

The power of the Holy Spirit transformed Peter and enabled him to preach a dynamic and successful gospel message on the day of Pentecost (Acts 4:13).

The Holy Spirit empowered Peter and the other apostles to work miracles as a testimony to the truth of their proclamations (Acts 2:43).

God blessed the witness of the apostles (Acts 2:41-47)

- 3,000 people converted on Pentecost
- internal growth resulted from the empowerment of the Spirit

C. After Pentecost (34:04)

1. Samaria (34:20)

The Spirit's work in Samaria marked the first time the gospel was received by significant numbers of people that weren't Jewish (Acts 8:14-17).

Jesus commissioned the apostles to expand the kingdom of God “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Samaritan believers received the Spirit after their conversion, similar to Pentecost.

The Holy Spirit demonstrated that every major advancement of the kingdom was to take place under the apostles’ direction and approval.

Calling the apostles to witness this event ensured that no one would object to receiving the Samaritans as members of the same household of God.

2. Caesarea (39:49)

This episode marked first time Gentiles were converted to Christ in significant numbers:

- Peter's vision of the unclean animals (Acts 10:15)
- Cornelius' vision and call to bring Peter to Caesarea Acts 10:44-47)
- new believers began to speak in tongues (as at Pentecost)

It came as a surprise to the early church when Gentiles were converted to Christ without first being converted to Judaism.

The Holy Spirit demonstrated that their conversion was genuine, and that his plan to build his kingdom through the Gentiles had begun (Acts 11:15-18).

3. Ephesus (43:02)

Similar to Pentecost, after their baptisms, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied (Acts 19:1-6).

The recipients were repentant Jews who had received the witness of John the Baptist prior to John's revelation that Jesus was the Messiah:

- brought closure to the issue of the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus (Acts 1:5)
- indicated Jesus' work of bringing the Spirit had reached a new level

III. Apostles (46:32)

Before Christ ascended into heaven, he appointed the apostles to continue his ministry by extending his kingdom from Jerusalem to the very ends of the earth.

The Holy Spirit was given to the apostles so that they would become his witnesses throughout the world (Acts 1:8).

A. Unique (48:07)

1. Requirements (49:27)

Peter described the requirements for the office of apostle, all of which were unique to the apostles listed in Scripture (Acts 1:21-26):

- taught directly by Jesus

- witness of the resurrection

- appointed by God

Paul was chosen as an apostle after Jesus had ascended into heaven, but Scripture teaches that he met the requirements:

- taught by Jesus – Galatians 1:11-18
- witness of the resurrection – Acts 9:3-6
- appointed by God – Acts 9:15; 22:12-16; 26

Paul acknowledged that his apostleship was somewhat unusual (1 Corinthians 15:8-9).

2. Foundational Time (53:15)

Jesus appointed the apostles to the task of establishing his church:

- carried the gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth
- gained the first Christian converts from Judaism, Samaria, and Gentile paganism
- established the first churches and the patterns the church would follow
- unique work will never need to be completed again (Ephesians 2:19-20)

B. Authoritative (55:15)**1. Function (55:25)**

Apostolos (“one who is sent”) can refer to:

- messengers
- agents sent to accomplish missions
- ambassadors who were authorized to speak on behalf of those who sent them

Jesus commissioned missionaries as his surrogates (Luke 10:16).

Jesus delegated authority to his missionaries as his authorized agents (Luke 10:17-19).

The apostles were authoritative ambassadors who differed from other disciples in two significant ways:

- perpetually appointed to an office of the church
- authorized to speak to all matters related to the establishment and governance of Christ’s church (2 Peter 3:2)

2. Blessings (59:58)

God gave the apostles converts almost every time they preached the gospel.

The external, numerical growth of the church was evidence of God's approval and power (Acts 5:38-39).

3. Miracles (1:01:25)

One of the main functions of miracles is to prove that God's messengers speak the truth and bear God's delegated authority:

- Moses (Exodus)
- Elijah and Elisha (1, 2 Kings)

The apostles' miracles proved that their testimony concerning Christ was true:

- healed the sick (5:16)
- raised the dead (9:40)
- escaped from prison (12:10)
- afflicted the wicked (13:11)
- restored the lame (14:10)
- survived deadly experiences (27:44, 28:3)
- healed without physical contact (5:15, 19:11-12)

Miraculous works empowered by the Holy Spirit were marks of apostles, proof that they were testifying truthfully to Christ and his work (2 Corinthians 12:12; Acts 3:16).

4. Revelation (1:05:09)

The Holy Spirit guided the apostles to:

- expound on the gospel
- make decisions for the church as a whole
- shape structural elements that allowed the church to grow and mature (Acts 10, 16)

C. Varied (1:06:49)

1. Strategies (1:07:03)

- History – the apostles often made reference to historic events (Acts 26:26)
- Scripture – appealed to the Old Testament when witnessing to the Jews (Acts 3:22, 23:6)
- Nature – appealed to God's general revelation and common pagan outlooks when addressing Gentile audiences (Acts 17:24-27, 28)

- Personal Experience – Paul recounted his dramatic conversion to Jewish crowds (Acts 22) and to King Agrippa (Acts 26).
- Signs and Wonders – Wherever the Spirit empowered the apostles to work miracles, he did so to support their witness to Jesus Christ.
- Loyalty to Christ – They pointed their audiences to Christ, and they refused to stop even when persecuted or threatened (Acts 4; 5:27-29; 14).

2. Settings (1:15:28)

- Public Speeches — sermons, defense speeches, other types of orations that addressed a large group of people in a public setting
- Dialogue — debates which included counterarguments where the apostles were expected to defend the gospel (Acts 19)
- Households — often included many relatives, friends, and household servants (Acts 10, 16)
- Personal Evangelism — tailored their word to the knowledge and experience of the audience (Acts 25)

IV. Church (1:18:31)

A. Necessity (1:18:42)

A handful of men could not take the message of Christ to the whole world by themselves.

1. Physical Limitations (1:19:19)

The apostles could not be “living letters” to the entire world, so they delegated much of the responsibility to the church.

The apostles created a self-replicating model for authentic evangelism in every generation.

Holy Spirit worked through the church’s authentic testimony in life and word and converted many new believers (Acts 11:19-21).

2. Temporal Limitations (1:22:21)

James’ martyrdom (Acts 12) made it clear that at least some apostles would not survive until Jesus returned.

The apostles trained the church to evangelize and to carry on building the church after they died (Acts 20:25-28).

B. Preparation (1:23:48)**1. Teaching (1:23:58)**

Paul described the church as a building, built on Christ as the cornerstone and on the apostles and prophets as the foundation (Ephesians 2:19-20; 3:4-5).

Luke was careful to highlight the church's commitment to the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42).

The apostles authoritatively and reliably passed on the work and teachings of Jesus.

2. Officers (1:26:48)

Part of the apostles' solution to the problem of limitations was to raise up additional officers in the church.

Various Christian traditions have understood the government and offices of the early church in a variety of ways.

The apostles appointed additional church officers to ensure that the church would be able to carry out God's mission (Acts 6):

- The apostles created the office of deacon to ensure that the church would be able to meet the needs of the people (Acts 6:3-6).
- They appointed the elders to shepherd and lead local congregations when the apostles were absent (Acts 14:23) and lead alongside them when they were present (Acts 15:1-2).

The apostles called on the officers of the church to carry out God's mission of the messianic kingdom (Acts 15, 20, 21; Titus 1:5).

God intended the apostles to establish his church and train up others who would receive the leadership of the church from the apostles.

C. Hardships (1:35:15)

The apostles' work was fraught with difficulty, danger and persecution.

The apostles taught that the church would face hardship and persecution, but the goal of the kingdom was worth it, and they needed to remain faithful to Christ (Acts 14:21-22).

They wanted to prepare the churches to trust Christ in the face of hardships, depend on the Holy Spirit, and continue to pursue the mission of God.

V. Conclusion (1:39:04)

3. Summarize the Holy Spirit's work after Pentecost as he continued to empower gospel ministry throughout the book of Acts. Include a discussion of geography and ethnicity.

4. Why and how were the apostles unique?

7. Why is the church necessary?

8. Explain how the apostles prepared the church to continue the mission of spreading God's kingdom in terms teaching, officers and hardship.

Application Questions

1. How does the Holy Spirit empower people today to live transformed lives and to evangelize the world? In what ways have you experienced the empowerment of the Holy Spirit?
2. What is the gift of tongues? Why did God give this gift?
3. Why do we have to depend on the Spirit's power in order to be godly and effective witnesses to the gospel message?
4. In what way do the apostles still serve as the foundation of the church? Why can't there ever be another authoritative apostle? Why is this important?
5. Why are the authoritative judgments of the apostles binding on the church today? Give some examples of judgments the apostles' made, and explain how they obligate modern churches and individual Christians.
6. What strategies can you personally use as you witness to the gospel? How might you improve on your witness of the gospel?
7. How is your church carrying out the mission of expanding the kingdom of God? What can your church do to improve its efforts? In what ways can you personally help your church expand the kingdom of God?
8. What is the most significant insight you have learned from this study?

Glossary

apostle – Special New Testament office held by someone who had been taught by Jesus, had seen the risen Lord, and had been chosen for the office by the Lord himself; from a Greek word meaning "one who is sent"

apostolos – Greek word (transliteration) for "delegate," "messenger," or "one who is sent"

consummation – Third and final stage of inaugurated eschatology when Christ will return and fulfill God's ultimate purpose for all of history

continuation – Second or middle stage of inaugurated eschatology; the period of the kingdom of God after Christ's first advent but before the final victory

Cornelius – Captain of the Roman army from Caesarea who was converted to Christianity through Peter's ministry (Acts 10-11)

Day of the Lord – Technical expression (Hebrew: "yom Yahweh") referring to the ultimate defeat and judgment of God's enemies and to the great battle that will take place when God's people are restored to the land

Ephesus – City in Asia Minor; visited by Paul on his third missionary journey; place where John probably wrote the fourth gospel; said to have lost their "first love" in Revelation

Gamaliel – Respected rabbi, Pharisee, and member of the Sanhedrin who defended the apostles before the Jewish council; the apostle Paul's teacher before Paul's conversion

Gentile – Non-Jewish person

hall of Tyrannus – Lecture hall or school in Ephesus where new ideas were tested and where Paul preached the gospel for two years

inauguration – First stage in inaugurated eschatology; refers to Christ's first coming and the ministries of his apostles and prophets

James (apostle) – Son of Zebedee and brother of John; martyred under Herod Agrippa

James (brother of Jesus) – Jesus' half-brother; leader of the church in Jerusalem and author of the New Testament book of James

Jeremiah – Old Testament prophet from about 626-586 B.C., also called the "weeping prophet"; prophesied about the future of Judah and of the new covenant to come

Jerusalem Council – Meeting in Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15 where the apostles and church leaders addressed concerns in the early church; in particular, whether or not Gentiles were required to follow the Mosaic law to be saved

Joel – Old Testament prophet who ministered sometime during the deportations to Babylon; offered hope of restoration after the exile; spoke of a future outpouring of the Holy Spirit; quoted by Peter on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2

Matthias – Apostle chosen by the remaining 11 apostles to replace Judas Iscariot in Acts 1

Passover – Jewish festival remembering when God delivered Israel out of slavery in Egypt

Pentecost – Jewish festival, often called the "Feast of Weeks," that celebrated the early harvest; celebrated by Christians as the day the Holy Spirit was poured out on the early church

Peter – One of Jesus' twelve apostles; also called Simon; a leader in the early Christian church; preached on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2; according to church historians, Mark relied on Peter's accounts of Christ's life to write his gospel

ruach Elohim – Hebrew term (transliteration) referring to a powerful wind or force of energy from God; often translated "Spirit of God"

Samaria – Capital city of the ten northern tribes of Israel that fell to Assyria in 722 B.C.; also, central region of ancient Palestine located between Judea and Galilee

Samaritans – People of Samaria whose pagan ancestors had intermarried with Israelites living in the northern kingdom; practiced a syncretistic form of the Jewish religion; considered by the Jews to be unclean and despicable

the age to come – Phrase used by rabbis and leaders in Israel to describe the future age of righteousness, love, joy and peace that would follow the exile; time when all of God's purposes for history would be fulfilled

this age – Phrase used by rabbis and leaders in Israel to describe the present age of sin, suffering and death

tongues, gift of – The ability to pray or communicate a message in a language that is unknown to the one speaking it