

Empowered

The Amazing Church of Jesus Christ

Week 1

The Early Church in Jerusalem

Acts 1:1 – 2:47

Teacher Notes

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*Bible versions used throughout the Empowered teacher notes are
NASB, ESV, NLT, and CEB.*

✂ Introduction to Week One

- Luke wrote the Book of Acts for Theophilus, whose name means “lover of God.” He was probably wealthy and possibly Luke’s patron.
- Luke’s Gospel only detailed what Jesus BEGAN to do and teach. Now comes the second installment. He called it the Acts of the Apostles. What will God do in the sequel?!

ILLUSTRATION: Have you ever taken a packet of seeds and planted them? If you have ever planted green beans, they look like dried-up little nothings in the packet, and then something wonderful and delicious and nourishing springs forth!

⇒ **In the Gospel of Luke, we see the seeds planted. The Book of Acts lets us see those seeds blossom—into lives changed. They are empowered! And all these empowered lives living in love and hope make up His amazing church.**

- Though Acts is a story describing the acts of the apostles, we are meant to see the **power** behind them—the work of the Holy Spirit.
 - ~ In fact, some would call the book “the Acts of the Holy Spirit” or “the Acts of the Ascended Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.”
- ▲ **QUOTE:** Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*— “God is fundamentally outgoing and life giving. The Holy Spirit always brings life.”
- Consider where we see the Holy Spirit at work in scripture –
 1. **Genesis 1:2** The Holy Spirit was “*moving over the surface of the waters*” in creation bringing life to what has been created.
 2. **Luke 1:35**—The Holy Spirit came upon the virgin Mary and the power of the Most High overshadowed her and Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born.
 3. **Romans 8:9-11**—Jesus came to live the perfect life we could not and conquered death on our behalf. When He died on the cross and was laid in the tomb, He was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- ⇒ **This brings us to the book of Acts—it is bursting with LIFE!**
 - ~ By the power of the Holy Spirit, the Amazing Church of Jesus Christ was born.
- In Acts, God tells us that we were not just saved from God’s wrath and death. But we are saved to an amazing everlasting life that begins the day we believe in Jesus. We are saved to missions and what God is doing in the world.

ILLUSTRATION: Katherine Wolf is a woman whose story and life will confront you with the wonder of the Holy Spirit's power. At age twenty-six, a new wife and new mom, Katherine suffered a massive brain stem stroke from the rupturing of an AVM, a rare congenital defect she didn't even know she had. Her survival is a miracle. You can read her story at hopeheals.com. She lives with paralysis, eating difficulties, pain, and other medical issues. She's a mom to two young boys and maintains a busy speaking schedule—most recently at Mercedes Benz stadium in front of sixty-five thousand college students. Katherine cannot stop talking about the reason she “suffers strong” and she shares constantly a profound message—“... *in the midst of sorrow and aching loss, that when you know Jesus, you can lose good things, but you can never lose the best things.*” Katherine Wolf got a second chance at her earthly life and uses it to point others to Christ. And the book of Acts explains how this can be.

⇒ **It is through being EMPOWERED by the Spirit of God! It is confidently acting on that belief that we have the potential to change the world around us!**

▲ **QUOTE:** Albert Barnes, 19th century Presbyterian scholar, summed up how God moved—“*The Book of Acts is a record of the early triumphs of Christianity within the space of 30 years after the death of Christ and the Gospel had been carried to all parts of the civilized and to no small portion of the uncivilized world...All this would be accomplished by the instrumentality of Jews, of fisherman, Nazarenes. They had neither wealth, armies, or allies. With the exception of Paul, they were men without learning. Taught only by the Holy Spirit, armed only with the power of God, victorious only because Christ was their Captain. And the world acknowledged the presence of the messengers of the most-high God. Its success never has been and never can be explained by any other supposition than that God attended it.*”

⇒ **Acts is a story with no earthly explanation. It could not be fiction because our world today is indelibly marked by its characters.**

Study One:

Acts 1:1-14 Wait for the Promise

- Acts 1 begins with the resurrected Jesus still on earth.
- ✚ Acts 1:3 “*To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of things regarding the kingdom of God.*”
- Luke tells us Jesus spent forty days preparing the apostles for what God the Father had for them.
 - ~ Jesus gave commands and offered proofs of His resurrection.
 - ~ He spoke about what He had saved them to—their new life and purpose.

ILLUSTRATION:

- ~ In a court of law, we have many rules of evidence that help us regulate the finding of truth—rules regarding physical evidence, circumstantial evidence, examining motives, corroborating eyewitness testimony. When these rules are applied properly you can have confidence in the truth.
 - ~ Jesus provided all of this and more. Just some examples –
 1. He offered physical evidence of His scars and ate in His resurrected body.
 2. He spent time with the people He knew before His death, providing them with opportunities to question Him, to address their doubts like Thomas.
 3. He appeared to over five hundred eyewitnesses who would live for decades after He ascended and would be available to corroborate testimony.
- ⇒ **Jesus laid the foundation for a people armed with the truth—based on incontrovertible**

▲ **QUOTE:** Timothy Keller said— *“Christianity is not primarily relevant, practical, or helpful. No, primarily, it is true.”*

APPLICATION: This evidence that Jesus provided should matter to people, to us as believers. It is something we can and should stake our lives on.

- Jesus then told them to stay in Jerusalem— *“Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, ‘Which,’ He said, ‘you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’”* (Acts 1:4-5)

→ **NOTE:** They had heard this promise of the Holy Spirit at Jesus’ baptism three years prior, but He had also promised the Holy Spirit hundreds of years before through the prophet Ezekiel.

“Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” (Ezekiel 36:26)

- They came together on Mt. Olivet and asked Jesus, *“... ‘Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority;’ ...”* (Acts 1:6, 7a)

→ **NOTE:** They seem to view themselves almost as bystanders to what God will do. But here lies the awe and wonder of Acts!! In fact, here’s the theme of the whole book—we will NOT idly stand by while God rescues and restores the world!

- Jesus continued, *“... but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”* (Acts 1:8)

TEACHING TIP: The Greek word for “power” is “dunamis” from which we get our word “dynamite.”

⇒ **God Himself would be the power believers needed to be Christ's witnesses.**

~ There is implicit joy in this announcement. You can hear Jesus' excitement.

QUOTE: Lesslie Newbigen, the British missiologist, said—"*... [we] tend to make mission a burden rather than a joy—to make it part of the Law rather than part of the Gospel. If one looks at the New Testament evidence, one gets another impression. Mission begins with a kind of explosion of joy...A radioactive fallout which is not lethal but life giving.*"

⇒ **Perhaps nothing conveys more clearly the absolute dignity God bestows on such undeserving humanity in that He not only rescues believers from death and the penalty of their sin but empowers them to walk with joy and purpose.**

- With that 'bombshell' of grace, Jesus ascended into heaven to take His rightful place on the throne of all creation—with all things in subjection to Him. (Ephesians 1:20b-22)
- Acts relates that, as Jesus ascended, a cloud surrounded Him. This cloud is reminiscent of the Shekinah glory, the presence of God. Jesus is God.
- Jesus' ascension means:
 1. Now, He can be with you and me always.
 2. Jesus is ruling and reigning on the throne—all within His loving control.
 - * He is never absent even though we may perceive it that way. It is the reason we can confidently say, He is working all things together for the good of those who love Him. (Romans 8:28)
 3. He is mediating for us.
- The disciples returned to Jerusalem and gathered in an upper room. Luke tells us that women and Jesus' mother and brothers joined them, making the party 120 people. Luke tells us— "*These all **with one mind** were continually devoting themselves to prayer...*" (Acts 1:14a)
- These men who had fought over who would be first in the kingdom, are now building each other up, building God's kingdom and not their own little kingdoms.
 - ~ These people that had expectations of each other in the past—now have expectancies.
 - ~ They were not busy pooling their own resources and identifying their individual strengths, and making plans, and setting up hierarchies, and devising ways to get political power. All the things we tend to do when tasked with a HUGE mission.
 - ~ Instead, they prayed, seeking God for direction, believing His promises—together, as one. In faith, they waited for His power to guide them.

TEACHING TIP: Men and women together in prayer would never have happened in the temple and synagogues.

⇒ **The Gospel of Jesus removes all barriers between us.**

QUOTE: Frederick Dale Bruner—*"Prayer is simply faith breathing."* (Matthew: A Commentary, Volume 2: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28)

⇒ This underscores the importance of unity and prayer we will see throughout the book of Acts.

Study Two:

Acts 1:15-25 Appointing the Twelfth Apostle

- Peter stated that they needed to choose a replacement for Judas.
 - ~ Judas sold his soul for what he could not keep.
 - The Old Testament is integral to the faith of these New Testament Christians.
 - Peter noted the Old Testament was Spirit-breathed and must be fulfilled. He quoted Psalm 69:25 and 109:8—
 - ✠ Psalm 69:25 *“May their camp be desolated; May there be none living in their tents.”*
 - ✠ Psalm 109:8 *“May his days be few; Let another take his office.”*
 - They agreed and cast lots on two men. In Acts 1:21-22 Peter stated what was required to be an apostle— *“Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us—beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.”*
- ⇒ **Matthias was chosen.**

TEACHING TIP: Some take issue with the differences between the way Matthew described what happened to Judas and the way Luke described what happened. While Matthew’s account emphasized his hopeless suicide, Luke emphasized his divine punishment.

Study Three:

Acts 2:1-13 The Day of Pentecost

- Chapter 2 of Acts begins with Pentecost.
 - Pentecost is known as the Feast of Weeks in the Old Testament.
 - ~ It occurred fifty days after Passover. Forty of those days Christ had been on earth preparing His followers.
 - ~ At this feast, the Jews brought the first of their fruits to the temple to commemorate God’s trustworthiness for future provision in recognition of His faithfulness in their rescue at Passover.
- ⇒ **At this point we are fifty days post-crucifixion in the story—and they were still waiting.**
- ✠ Acts 2:1-4 *“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing*

themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.”

TEACHING TIP: Unlike in the Old Testament, when people failed to take certain precautions, they would die in the presence of God because His Light was too great for our darkness—here, people lived. **They were now in Christ Jesus.**

- This was clearly no natural phenomenon—Luke used the words “like” and “as” in this passage to signal something extraordinary had happened that defied human description.
 - ~ The wind and fire symbolized the very presence of God.
- And then the people exploded with languages—other languages.

TEACHING TIP: Regarding the subject of ‘tongues.’ Acts is a narrative. It is telling us what happened in a point in time in history. So, we can’t immediately assume that we will experience the same things these disciples and apostles experienced. When reading a narrative, we look to other Scriptures to see if these things are commands or promises or the like. Luke wrote of tongues here in Acts 2 and Acts 19; and Paul addressed speaking in tongues in 1 Corinthians 14. Here in Acts 2 the tongues were clearly spoken languages at the time.

QUOTE: N.T. Wright in *Acts for Everyone Part 1*— *“God is dramatically signaling that his promises to Abraham are being fulfilled, and the whole human race is going to be addressed with the good news of what happened in and through Jesus.”*

- These believers had just received the dynamite power and presence of the Holy Spirit of Christ and they were speaking in foreign languages. (The curse at the tower of Babel had been reversed.)
 - ~ What a beautiful picture of experiencing the reality of God.
 - ~ In this moment, God is the weightiest, most important, beautiful person in their lives, and they burst out in praise in the most supernatural of ways.
 - ~ They could not help but proclaim. God had brought the world to Jerusalem, and they were hearing the Gospel in their own tongue.
- They were so exuberant and rowdy that the thousands of people on the streets of Jerusalem for Pentecost gathered to gawk. The onlookers thought they were drunk.

TEACHING TIP: Paul would later write— *“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.”* (Ephesians 5:18)

Study Four:

Acts 2:14-36 Peter’s First Sermon

- Peter stood up in the midst of this joyful chaos and began to preach the best sermon of his life. Peter the former doubter, braggart, and betrayer, was a new creation who had received power to be Christ’s witness.

- Just as Jesus had done over and over, Peter started with the prophets tracing the promises of God. His point—God is faithful. God is true.

“For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes: wherefore also by Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.” (2 Corinthians 1:20)

⇒ **God’s Word is not about you and what you must do. It is about God and Who He is and what He has done.**

- He quoted a passage from the prophet Joel describing a time to come when God would pour out His Spirit on His servants and they would prophesy and in that day everyone who called upon the name of the Lord would be saved.
- Then Peter proclaimed the Gospel—call on the name of Jesus to be saved. He gave the basics—
 1. **Jesus Incarnation**—attested by the mighty works of God He did before these very people. Jesus Himself did this when preaching to the doubters.
 - ~ An example: *“If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father.”* (John 10:37-38)
 2. **Jesus’ Crucifixion**—the blame for which Peter placed squarely on this crowd. Our sins put Jesus on the cross. He died the death that we deserved.
 3. **Jesus’ Resurrection**—Peter knew his primarily Jewish audience, so he pointed them to David and Psalm 16.
 - ~ Peter reminded them of David’s words, *“For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.”* (Psalm 16:10)
 - ~ He told them that David was looking ahead to his promised descendant—the Christ who would not see decay.
 - ~ Peter argued that David could not have been talking about himself since his bones were in a tomb as he spoke. BUT ... Jesus was raised from the dead!
- Peter concluded his sermon with a clear statement regarding man’s accountability—in how these listeners had responded to Jesus, the Christ. His words were crystal clear:

✠ Acts 2:36 *“Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ — this Jesus whom you crucified.”*

- The next verse recorded a total shift in the hearts of those hearing Peter’s words.
 - ~ Acts 2:37 stated that they were *“pierced to the heart.”*
 - ~ Their hearts were no longer hard stone, but flesh that melted at the realization that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had remained faithful to them and provided for Himself a Lamb through Jesus, and that they had killed Him.
 - ~ They asked, *“Brethren, what shall we do?”*

TEACHING TIP: How one responds to the Gospel message is personal and life changing. The choice to believe it or reject it must be made. The choice has eternal consequences.

- Peter responded— *“Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.”* (Acts 2:38-39)

TEACHING TIP: Baptism is a sign of the covenant of grace, the New Covenant. It is just like circumcision was a sign of the Old Covenant that God made with Abraham. It is grace—you don’t have to be baptized to be saved. But it is an act of obedience in response to receiving that grace through faith.

- ⇒ **An outward sign of an inward heart change.**
- ⇒ **A new heart ... a new mindset ... a new spirit ... a new life—empowered by the Holy Spirit.**

→ **NOTE:** Imagine this scene as the grace and goodness of God washed over their understanding. His love truly knows no bounds!

⇒ **God is so very profound.**

~ **In Exodus:**

- * God heard the cry of His people and rescued them from slavery.
- * He brought them out of Egypt and to the foot of a mountain.
- * Their leader Moses went up that mountain and the Law came down.
- * God had promised that they would become a great nation that would bless the whole world.
- * With the Law, He set them apart—He to be their God and they to be His people.
- * But the people failed miserably. They proved that could not keep God’s Law.
- * Their hearts were hard. So hard that they gave credit for their rescue to a golden calf made by their very own hands! The result—three thousand were pierced with the sword and cut down that day.

~ **Here in Acts:**

- * God has sent His Son to conquer death—to redeem them with His very own blood.
- * They have gathered at the foot of a mountain and received grace and truth.
- * God’s Son fulfilled the Law for them.
- * Jesus, their leader, ascended into heaven and power came down. His people would be His witnesses.
- * They gave credit to God’s glorious Son.
- * And three thousand were pierced with the sword of the Spirit, cut to the heart, and restored to God’s family.

⇒ **Now they were new people in a new family.**

Study Five:

Acts 2:37-47 A Spirit of Unity

- The faith of those three thousand immediately bore fruit.
 - ~ It is interesting to note that in the Book of Exodus three thousand people were cut down for worshiping a golden calf.
- At the end of Acts 2 we are perhaps given a heavenly glimpse because these new converts *devoted* themselves to:
 - ~ God’s Word
 - ~ Fellowship
 - ~ Breaking bread together (a diverse group)
 - ~ Sharing their possessions, viewing them as all belonging to God

TEACHING TIP: When interpreting a narrative, don’t make the mistake of trying to come away with directives. This is no political ideology. It is so much more profound. These new believers were acting like a family—in right relationship with their heavenly Father and their brothers and sisters in Christ.

- ▲ **QUOTE:** William Tyndale stated— *“Where the Spirit is there is always summer there are always good fruits, that is to say, good works.”*
- ⇒ **This new family of God was now forever known as the church. It was blooming and growing. And through the church, God continues His amazing story.**

✧ FINAL THOUGHTS

- ✦ **When you believe in Jesus you receive the Holy Spirit and ...**
 - ⚙ You are now a part of something greater than yourself—the church.
 - ⚙ You are now on a mission—participating in God’s strategy for a lost and dying world.
- ✦ **When you receive the Holy Spirit and He comes upon you, you will receive power to be His witness in your homes, in your communities, in other communities and countries, and even to the remotest part of the earth!**