

# THE ACTS

## OF THE APOSTLES

**THE INFECTIOUS NEWS** first appeared in Jerusalem, then spread quickly from person to person and from city to city. It faced opposition everywhere it went. But the world was ill-equipped to fight it. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the followers of Christ relayed the Good News about Jesus everywhere. In less than 35 years, the gospel had reached cities from Jerusalem to Rome.

Luke wrote the Book of Acts to show the fulfillment of Jesus' words, "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (see Matt. 16:18). Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He commanded His followers to make disciples of all nations (see Luke 24:46–49). Luke begins Acts with a reiteration of that commission and a description of how it would be carried out (1:8). This commission not only ties the Book of Acts to the Gospel of Luke, but it also provides an outline for the book: the witness in Jerusalem and Judea (1:1—6:7); the witness in Judea and Samaria (6:8—9:31); and the witness to the ends of the earth (9:32—28:31).

The Book of Acts begins in Jerusalem with the disciples huddled in a room on the Day of Pentecost. Then the Holy Spirit came upon them and authorized them to be His witnesses. The rest of Acts describes the ripple effect of that great event. Jesus' followers first witnessed to the Jews in Jerusalem, with Peter at the center of the movement. Then persecution broke out (7:60), scattering believers into Samaria and the rest of the known world. Saul of Tarsus, once a leader of the persecution, became a leader of the persecuted. In chapter 11, the focus of the Book of Acts moves from Peter's ministry to the Jews to Saul's ministry to the Gentiles. Under his more familiar name Paul, this converted persecutor established churches in Asia Minor and Europe. The Book of Acts records three of Paul's missionary journeys, as well as his voyage to Rome to face his trial. The book ends abruptly with Paul under house arrest in Rome. The ending is fitting, because the entire Book of Acts is itself just a prologue. Jesus has not finished His work on earth. The narrative begun by Luke in this book will not end until Jesus Christ returns in glory (see 1:11; 1 Cor. 15:28).

**AUTHOR** The Book of Acts begins with a reference to the author's "former account" written to a man named Theophilus (1:1), a clear reference to the Gospel of Luke (see Luke 1:3). Even though the author does not mention himself by name in either the Gospel or Acts, early tradition identifies Luke as the author of both volumes. As early as the second century, ancient authors, such as Irenaeus (c. A.D. 180) indicate this.

Called "the beloved physician" by Paul (see Col. 4:14), Luke was a doctor Paul met in Troas (see 16:8–11). He cared for Paul during the illnesses he suffered on his missionary endeavors. Paul's references to Luke in 2 Timothy 4:11 and Philemon 24 portray Luke as Paul's faithful traveling companion. After the two met in Troas, Luke included himself with the missionary team recorded in Acts (see 16:10, the beginning of the so-called "we" sections in the book). Luke's faithful friendship to Paul continued until Paul's death in Rome, for Luke was one of the few people who did not desert him (see 2 Tim. 4:11).

**DATE** The Book of Acts does not record Paul's death. Instead it ends abruptly during Paul's residence in Rome (see 28:30). Paul's house arrest in Rome occurred around A.D. 61, marking the earliest possible date for the book's completion. Acts makes no reference to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 or to Nero's persecution of Christians following the fire of Rome in A.D. 64. Surely Luke would have mentioned these significant events if they had occurred when he wrote. Moreover, the many references to Paul's vindication before Roman officials would not make sense if Nero had already started his vehement persecution of Christians. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that Acts was written between A.D. 61 and 64.

**PURPOSE** The Book of Acts provides a condensed history of the early church, an eyewitness account of the miraculous spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome. The book details how the Holy Spirit authorized our spiritual forebears to carry out Jesus' mandate to be His witnesses throughout the world. The accounts in Acts include stirring examples for us to follow, but the recurring theme of the Book of Acts is that our spiritual ancestors were empowered by the Holy Spirit. That same power is available to us. God has not left us at the mercy of our own weaknesses; He has sent the Holy Spirit to help us follow their example (see Eph. 5:17, 18), and to be Jesus' witnesses in all of the earth.

**THEOLOGY** The Book of Acts is a historical narrative, but at the same time it has profound theo-

logical significance. A believer's faith rests upon the facts of history: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. These historical events were recorded by Luke in his Gospel in order to evoke belief. If the historical fact of Christ's resurrection is not true, then a believer's faith has no foundation. As Paul states, "If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:17). The Book of Acts reassures believers that their faith in Christ rests on fact. The extraordinary growth of the early church was based directly on the resurrected Christ. His command and empowerment of the disciples through the Holy Spirit is the only reasonable explanation for the incredible and rapid spread of the gospel in the first century. The early Christians were not testifying about a dead Christ, but a living Christ whom they had seen with their own eyes (1:1–5; Luke 24:36–53; 2 Pet. 1:16). The same is true for us today. Jesus lives and continues to work through the church.

### CHRIST IN THE SCRIPTURES

Although Jesus ascends into heaven in chapter 1, He figures significantly in the rest of the Book of Acts. The resurrected Christ is the central theme of the sermons, defenses, and the life of the church through the entire book.

### TIMELINE

#### A.D. 14–37

Tiberius Caesar is Roman emperor

#### C. A.D. 30–35

Pentecost; the early church in Jerusalem

#### C. A.D. 35–47

The church grows in Judea and Samaria

#### A.D. 37–41

Caligula is Roman emperor

#### A.D. 37–44

Herod Agrippa I rules in Judea

#### A.D. 41–54

Claudius is Roman emperor

#### C. A.D. 44

James the son of Zebedee is martyred

#### C. A.D. 47–49

Paul's first missionary journey

#### C. A.D. 50–53

Paul's second missionary journey

#### A.D. 52–60

Felix is procurator of Judea

#### C. A.D. 53–57

Paul's third missionary journey

#### A.D. 54–68

Nero is Roman emperor

#### A.D. 60–62

Festus is procurator of Judea

#### C. A.D. 60–62

Paul is imprisoned in Rome



Harbor of Attalia near Perga, where Paul stopped on his first missionary journey  
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Luke intended Acts to be an apologetic that logically attests to Jesus' divinity. And he accomplished his purpose. Notice his references to the eyewitness accounts of Jesus' resurrection, the firsthand testimonies of Jesus' followers (including a converted critic of Christianity by the name of Saul), and the evidence of the Holy

Spirit's supernatural power. No wonder Luke quotes Peter as saying, "To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins" (10:43). "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (4:12).

## ACTS OUTLINE

- I. The apostles' witness in Jerusalem 1:1—6:7
  - A. The acts of the Holy Spirit 1:1—2:6
  - B. The birth of the church 2:1—4:7
  - C. The healing of a lame man 3:1—26
  - D. Salvation in no one else 4:1—37
  - E. The arrest of Peter and John 5:1—42
  - F. Leadership for the infant church 6:1—7
- II. The early church's witness to all Judea and Samaria 6:8—9:31
  - A. Stephen's defense and martyrdom 6:8—7:60
  - B. The church scattered 8:1—40
  - C. Saul's conversion 9:1—31
- III. The witness to the end of the earth 9:32—28:31
  - A. Extension of truth to Gentiles 9:32—11:30
  - B. Peter's miraculous escape from prison 12:1—25
  - C. Paul's first missionary trip 13:1—14:28
  - D. The Jerusalem conference concerning Gentiles in the church 15:1—35
  - E. Paul's second missionary trip 15:36—18:22
  - F. Paul's third missionary trip 18:23—21:26
  - G. Paul's trip to Rome 21:27—28:31

## PROLOGUE

**1** The former account I made, O <sup>a</sup>Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, <sup>2a</sup>until the day in which <sup>1</sup>He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit <sup>b</sup>had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, <sup>3a</sup>to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many <sup>1</sup>infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT PROMISED

<sup>4a</sup>And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” *He said*, “you have <sup>b</sup>heard from Me; <sup>5a</sup>for John truly baptized with water, <sup>b</sup>but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” <sup>6</sup>Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him,

<sup>11<sup>a</sup></sup> Luke 1:3 <sup>1:2<sup>a</sup></sup> Mark 16:19; Acts 1:9, 11, 22 <sup>b</sup> Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15; John 20:21; Acts 10:42 <sup>1</sup> He ascended into heaven. <sup>1:3<sup>a</sup></sup> Matt. 28:17; Mark 16:12, 14; Luke 24:34, 36; John 20:19, 26; 21: 11, 14; 1 Cor. 15:5–7 <sup>1</sup> *unmistakable* <sup>1:4<sup>a</sup></sup> Luke 24:49 <sup>b</sup> [John 14:16, 17, 26; 15:26]; Acts 2:33 <sup>1:5<sup>a</sup></sup> Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:16 <sup>b</sup> [Joel 2:28] <sup>1:7<sup>a</sup></sup> 1 Thess. 5:1 <sup>b</sup> Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:32 <sup>1:8<sup>a</sup></sup> [Acts 2:1, 4] <sup>b</sup> Luke 24:49 <sup>c</sup> Luke 24:48; John 15:27 <sup>d</sup> Acts 8:1, 5, 14 <sup>e</sup> Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15; Rom. 10:18; Col. 1:23; [Rev. 14:6] <sup>1</sup> *NU My witnesses*  
<sup>1:9<sup>a</sup></sup> Luke 24:50, 51 <sup>b</sup> Ps. 68:18; 110:1; Mark 16:19; Luke 23:43; John 20:17; Acts 1:2; [Heb. 4:14; 9:24; 1 Pet. 3:22]  
<sup>1:10<sup>a</sup></sup> Matt. 28:3; Mark 16:5; Luke 24:4; John 20:12; Acts 10:3, 30 <sup>1:11<sup>a</sup></sup> Dan. 7:13; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27; [John 14:3]; 2 Thess. 1:10; Rev. 1:7

**1:1** Luke addressed his Gospel to the “most excellent *Theophilus*” (see Luke 1:3), using a title that indicates Theophilus was a person of high rank. The formal title is dropped here.

**1:2, 3** *Taken up* refers to Christ’s ascension, the end of His earthly ministry. These verses look back to Luke 24:51 and ahead to vv. 9, 22. **the apostles . . . to whom He also presented Himself alive:** The resurrected Jesus presented Himself “not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God” (10:41). In the **forty days** between Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, there are recorded some 10 or 11 appearances of Jesus to believers confirming His resurrection from the dead. On the last of these appearances, Jesus gathered His apostles together and commanded them not to leave Jerusalem (v. 4). **Many infallible proofs** serve as the basis for the believer’s confidence in the resurrection of our Lord. The Greek word translated *infallible proofs* speaks of “convincing, decisive proof.” Christian belief is not built on speculation or myth but on the sovereign acts and words of God incarnate in the time-space universe. **The kingdom of God** was the central topic of discussion between Christ and His apostles during the 40 days between Jesus’ resurrection and ascension. The goal of history is not the Cross, but the crown—the time when King Jesus reveals Himself in all His majesty and reigns in glory (see Is. 11; Dan. 7:13, 14; 1 Cor. 15:24–28; Rev. 20:4–6).

**1:4** As predicted by John the Baptist (see Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33) and reiterated by Jesus Himself, **the Promise of the Father** was the promise of baptism in the Holy Spirit. There are seven references in Scripture to baptism in the Spirit. Five are prophetic (see v. 5; Matt.

3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33); one is historical (11:15, 16), referring to the Day of Pentecost; and one is doctrinal (see 1 Cor. 12:13), explaining the meaning of baptism in the Spirit.

**1:5** *shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit:* The passive tense of the verb indicates that baptism does not depend upon our efforts to obtain the promise, but upon the Lord’s will. The simple future tense demonstrates that there is no uncertainty or doubt in the promise. The Greek word for *baptized* means “to immerse” or “to dip.” It also connotes being identified with someone or something. Spirit baptism means we have been placed in spiritual union with one another in the body of Jesus Christ, the church (see 1 Cor. 12:12, 13).

**1:6** *Therefore:* Christ’s statement that the Spirit was about to be given evidently triggered concern among the disciples about the establishment of the kingdom. Connecting the coming of the Spirit and the coming of the kingdom was consistent with OT thought (see 3:21; Is. 32:15–20; 44:3–5; Ezek. 39:28, 29; Joel 2:28–31; Zech. 12:8–10). **At this time** expresses the anxiety of the apostles as they anticipated the kingdom rule that Christ had spoken of in the preceding days and weeks (v. 3). The popular expectation and hope was that Christ would establish His kingdom immediately.

**1:7** *It is not for you to know:* Jesus did not correct His disciples’ views concerning the restoration of the kingdom to Israel (v. 6). Instead He corrected their views concerning the timing of the event. This was the same erroneous thinking that He had sought to correct with His parable in Luke 19:11–27, the parable of the minas. **times or seasons:** These words speak to the issue of timing differently. *Times* refers

saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” <sup>7</sup>And He said to them, <sup>a</sup>“It is not for you to <sup>b</sup>know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. <sup>8a</sup>But you shall receive power <sup>b</sup>when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and <sup>c</sup>you shall be <sup>1</sup>witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and <sup>d</sup>Samaria, and to the <sup>e</sup>end of the earth.”

## JESUS ASCENDS TO HEAVEN

MARK 16:19, 20; LUKE 24:50–53

<sup>9a</sup>Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, <sup>b</sup>He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup>And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them <sup>a</sup>in white apparel, <sup>11</sup>who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, <sup>a</sup>will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”

to chronology or the duration of time—“how long.” *Seasons* refers to the epochs or “events” that occur within time. The disciples were not to know how long it would be before Christ set up His kingdom, nor were they to know what events would transpire before the establishment of it. Peter points out that even the OT prophets did not know the timing between the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow (1 Pet. 1:11).

**1:8** Instead of being concerned about the date of Christ’s return, the disciples’ job was to carry His message throughout the world. **you shall receive power:** This does not refer to personal power for godly living, as demonstrated in the lives of OT saints (see Abraham in Gen. 22; Joseph in Gen. 39; Moses in Ex. 14; Daniel in Dan. 6). This was power for a new task—namely, to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. **Be witnesses** is Christ’s command to His disciples to tell others about Him regardless of the consequences. Church tradition tells us that all but one of the 11 apostles who heard this promise became martyrs. (John died in exile.) God empowered His disciples to be faithful witnesses even when they faced the most vehement opposition.

**1:9–11** Jesus promised that He would not leave nor forsake us, but would be with us always, even to the end of the age (see Matt. 28:20; John 14:18). He fulfilled this promise in the form of the Holy Spirit, who dwells within believers (see John 16:4–7). **taken up . . . cloud received Him . . . He went up:** These three statements portray the gradual, majestic departure of Jesus from the earth. **will so come:** The Second Coming of Christ and the establishment of His kingdom (vv. 6, 7) will occur the same way Jesus ascended: physically, visibly, and in the clouds.

## THE UPPER ROOM PRAYER MEETING

<sup>12a</sup>Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. <sup>13</sup>And when they had entered, they went up <sup>a</sup>into the upper room where they were staying: <sup>b</sup>Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James *the son* of Alphaeus and <sup>c</sup>Simon the Zealot; and <sup>d</sup>Judas *the son* of James. <sup>14a</sup>These all continued with one <sup>a</sup>accord in prayer <sup>2</sup>and supplication, with <sup>b</sup>the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with <sup>c</sup>His brothers.

## MATTHIAS CHOSEN

CF. PS. 109:8; MATT. 27:7, 8

<sup>15</sup>And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the <sup>a</sup>disciples (altogether the number <sup>a</sup>of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said, <sup>16</sup>“Men *and* brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, <sup>a</sup>which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, <sup>b</sup>who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; <sup>17</sup>for <sup>a</sup>he was numbered with us and obtained a part in <sup>b</sup>this ministry.”

<sup>18a</sup>(Now this man purchased a field with <sup>b</sup>the <sup>a</sup>wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst

open in the middle and all his <sup>2</sup>entrails gushed out. <sup>19</sup>And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.)

<sup>20</sup>“For it is written in the Book of Psalms:

“Let his dwelling place be <sup>a</sup>desolate,  
And let no one live in it’;

and,

<sup>b</sup>‘Let another take his <sup>2</sup>office.’

<sup>21</sup>“Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, <sup>22</sup>beginning from the baptism of John to that day when <sup>a</sup>He was taken up from us, one of these must <sup>b</sup>become a witness with us of His resurrection.”

<sup>23</sup>And they proposed two: Joseph called <sup>a</sup>Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. <sup>24</sup>And they prayed and said, “You, O Lord, <sup>a</sup>who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen <sup>25a</sup>to take part in this ministry and apostleship from

1:12<sup>a</sup> Luke 24:52 1:13<sup>a</sup> Mark 14:15; Luke 22:12; Acts 9:37, 39; 20:8 <sup>b</sup>Matt. 10:2–4 <sup>c</sup>Luke 6:15 <sup>d</sup>Jude 1 1:14<sup>a</sup> Acts 2:1, 46 <sup>b</sup>Luke 23:49, 55 <sup>c</sup>Matt. 13:55 <sup>1</sup>purpose or mind <sup>2</sup>NU omits and supplication 1:15<sup>a</sup> Luke 22:32; Rev. 3:4 <sup>1</sup>NU brethren 1:16<sup>a</sup> Ps. 41:9 ★ <sup>b</sup>Matt. 26:47; Mark 14:43; Luke 22:47; John 18:3 1:17<sup>a</sup> Matt. 10:4 <sup>b</sup>Acts 1:25 1:18<sup>a</sup> Matt. 27:3–10 <sup>b</sup>Matt. 18:7; 26:14, 15, 24; Mark 14:21; Luke 22:22; John 17:12 <sup>1</sup>reward of unrighteousness <sup>2</sup>intestines 1:20<sup>a</sup> Ps. 69:25 <sup>b</sup>Ps. 109:8 ★ <sup>1</sup>deserted <sup>2</sup>Gr. episkopen, position of overseer 1:22<sup>a</sup> Acts 1:9 <sup>b</sup>Acts 1:8; 2:32 1:23<sup>a</sup> Acts 15:22 1:24<sup>a</sup> 1 Sam. 16:7; Jer. 17:10; Acts 1:2 1:25<sup>a</sup> Acts 1:17

1:12 A **Sabbath day's journey** was the distance permitted by Jewish custom for travel on a Sabbath day (see Ex. 16:29; Num. 35:5; Josh. 3:4), about a half mile. Anyone who traveled farther than this would be regarded as breaking the fourth commandment.

1:13 **The upper room** could have been the room where Jesus spent the last Passover with His disciples, or the room in which He appeared to them after His resurrection (recorded in Luke 24). It is possible that the same room was the site of both events. This room may have belonged to Mary, the mother of John Mark. Her house is mentioned in 12:12 as a meeting place of disciples. Jesus' followers **were staying** in this upper room, waiting in Jerusalem as the Lord had directed, until they received the power Jesus had promised (v. 5).

1:14 **with one accord**: This phrase, which is found 11 times in the Book of Acts, is made up of two words that mean “same” and “mind.” The phrase speaks of people sharing the same mind or thinking like-mindedly. It does not refer to people who all think and feel the same way about everything, but to people who set aside personal feelings and commit themselves to one task—in this case witnessing to others about the

Lord Jesus Christ (see Rom. 15:5, 6). Jesus said the world would know that He was sent from the heavenly Father when people saw the love between believers (see John 17:21). The unity among the believers described in Acts was a demonstration of this love. **Mary the mother of Jesus** receives special recognition in the group. While on the Cross, Jesus had requested that John care for His mother (see John 19:25–27).

1:15, 16 From the earliest days of the apostles' calling, **Peter** assumed a position of leadership. Though he often made mistakes, he was never bashful about dealing with problems. It was inevitable that the matter of Judas Iscariot be dealt with. In the upper room a **hundred and twenty** people gathered. No doubt the majority of them were among those who saw the risen Christ (see 1 Cor. 15:6). Though Christ spent most of His time with the Twelve, there were many other disciples who traveled with Jesus (see John 6:66). **Holy Spirit spoke . . . mouth of David**: Peter equated the speech of David with the voice of the Holy Spirit. This is an example of the biblical doctrine of inspiration, which asserts that the words of Scripture are equally the words of God and the words of men, with no error (see 2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 1:11; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21).

1:18, 19 **purchased a field**: The field that was obtained with the money Judas received for betraying Jesus was actually purchased by the priests after Judas hanged himself (see Matt. 27:6–8). Since the money legally belonged to Judas, the priests purchased the field in his name. **burst open . . . entrails gushed out**: Apparently the noose Judas used to hang himself broke and his body fell, rupturing in the middle. This is why the place was called the **Field of Blood**.

1:20–22 Peter applied **Psalms 69 and 109** to the apostles' situation. Psalm 69:25 speaks of the removal of the psalmist's enemy. Psalm 109:8 mentions the replacement of an enemy by someone else. Peter, enlightened by the teaching of Jesus (see 1:3; Luke 24:44–46), regarded these scriptural references as ultimately speaking of Judas the traitor. It was the defection of Judas, not his death, that caused Peter to ask the disciples to choose another to replace him. When James was later killed (12:2), no replacement was chosen for him. Peter specified two qualifications for the appointed apostle. First, he had to have accompanied the disciples from the beginning of Jesus' ministry, His **baptism**. The replacement had to be someone who had seen what the apostles had seen and heard what they had heard, an eyewitness to the miracles and teachings of Jesus. Second, he had to be an eyewitness of Jesus' **resurrection**.

1:24–26 **cast their lots**: It was customary for the Jews to determine the will of God on certain questions by this method. The names of Matthias and Justus, probably written on stones, were put in a jar that was shaken until one of the names

**TOGETHER** ▶ (Gk. *epi to auto*) (1:15; 2:1, 44; 1 Cor. 11:20; 14:23) Strong's #1909; 847

This Greek idiom means “toward the same thing” or “in the same place”; it conveys the idea of united purpose or collective unity. In the early church it acquired a special meaning, indicating the union of the Christian body. All the members of the church not only gathered together regularly, they shared all things in common and were committed to each other and Christ with united fervor.

which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.”<sup>26</sup> And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

### COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

**2** When <sup>a</sup>the Day of Pentecost had fully come, <sup>b</sup>they were all <sup>1</sup>with one accord in one place. <sup>2</sup>And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and <sup>a</sup>it filled the whole house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup>Then there appeared to them <sup>1</sup>divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them. <sup>4</sup>And <sup>a</sup>they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began <sup>b</sup>to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

### THE CROWD'S RESPONSE

<sup>5</sup>And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, <sup>a</sup>devout men, from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup>And when this sound occurred, the <sup>a</sup>multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. <sup>7</sup>Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, “Look, are not all these who speak <sup>a</sup>Gaileans? <sup>8</sup>And how is it that we hear, each in our own <sup>1</sup>language in which we were born? <sup>9</sup>Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and <sup>a</sup>Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup>Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining



### Bible Times & Culture Notes SABBATH DAY'S JOURNEY

“A Sabbath day’s journey” (1:12) referred to the distance a Jew could travel on the Sabbath without breaking the law. This distance was usually reckoned to be about “two thousand cubits” (about a thousand yards) because of the distance between the ark of the covenant and the rest of the Israelite camp in the wilderness (Josh. 3:4). The idea was that every person within the camp or city would be close enough to the center of worship to take part in the services without having to travel such a great distance that the Sabbath became a harried and busy day. This law, although noble in intent, was soon abused by a strict legalism. In the NT, Jesus often clashed with the Pharisees because of their blind legalism over observance of the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1–9).

Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proseytes, <sup>11</sup>Cretans and <sup>1</sup>Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.” <sup>12</sup>So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “Whatever could this mean?”

<sup>13</sup>Others mocking said, “They are full of new wine.”

### PETER'S SERMON

JOEL 2:28–32

<sup>14</sup>But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you,

<sup>2:1</sup> Lev. 23:15; Deut. 16:9; Acts 20:16; 1 Cor. 16:8 <sup>b</sup> Acts 1:14 <sup>1</sup> NU together <sup>2:2</sup> Acts 4:31 <sup>2:3</sup> Or tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each <sup>2:4</sup> Matt. 3:11; 5:6; 10:20; Luke 3:16; John 14:16; 16:7–15; Acts 1:5 <sup>b</sup> Mark 16:17; Acts 10:46; 19:6; [1 Cor. 12:10, 28, 30; 13:1] <sup>2:5</sup> Luke 2:25; Acts 8:2 <sup>2:6</sup> Acts 4:32 <sup>2:7</sup> Matt. 26:73; Acts 1:11 <sup>2:8</sup> dialect <sup>2:9</sup> 1 Pet. 1:1 <sup>2:11</sup> Arabians

fell out. The name that fell out of the vessel would be the one that God had chosen to take the place of Judas. The fall of the lot was determined not by chance but by God’s sovereignty.

**2:1 Pentecost** was one of the three major Jewish festivals; the other two are the Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles. From the Greek word for “fifty,” Pentecost was so named because it fell on the fiftieth day after the Sabbath of the Passover. Pentecost was also known as “the Feast of Weeks,” “the Firstfruits of the Wheat Harvest,” and “the Day of Firstfruits.” During this harvest celebration, the Jews brought to God the firstfruits of their harvest in thanksgiving, expecting that God would give the rest of the harvest as His blessing. This particular Day of Pentecost was the day of firstfruits of Christ’s church, the beginning of the great harvest of souls who would come to know Christ and be joined together through the work of the Holy Spirit. **they were all . . . in one place:** The place may have been part of the temple. It is difficult to imagine how the large crowd mentioned in v. 5 could have observed the activities in the upper room or congregated in the narrow streets outside the house where the disciples were meeting.

**2:2 A sound like a rushing mighty wind** was needed to attract the multitudes to the small gathering of apostles who were sitting, the normal position for listening to someone speak, rather than standing for prayer.

**2:3 there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire:** After the great crowd-gathering sound of v. 2 came the visual manifestation of God. Fire often indicated the presence of God. God initially appeared to Moses in a burning bush that was not consumed (see Ex. 3). God guided the children of Israel with a pillar of fire by night (see Ex. 13:21, 22), and He descended before them in fire on Mt. Sinai (see Ex. 19:18). God sent fire to consume Elijah’s offering on Mt. Carmel (see 1 Kin. 18:38, 39), and He used a vision of fire to warn Ezekiel of His coming judgment (see Ezek. 1:26, 27).

**2:4** The word translated **tongues** here is the normal Greek word for known languages. Speaking in “tongues” or diverse languages underscored the universal outreach of the church. These witnesses were speaking foreign dialects to the people who had gathered for Pentecost from other nations. The Day of Pentecost, as one of the three major Jewish celebrations, was a pilgrimage event. People who lived outside Israel traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate the festival. They came from Arabia, Crete, Asia, and even as far away as Rome. Many of these people stayed in Jerusalem for the entire 50-day celebration. **Spirit gave them utterance:** Note that the text does not say that the Spirit spoke through the apostles, but that the Spirit gave them the ability to speak in languages that they had not previously known.

**2:5–11 men, from every nation under heaven:** People from all over the known

world were in Jerusalem. Most of them probably knew Greek, but they also spoke the various languages of the Mediterranean world. **everyone heard them speak in his own language:** The visitors to Jerusalem probably expected the apostles to use Aramaic or Greek, but instead they heard their own dialect. The visitors were astonished because they knew this was most unlikely unless the speakers had come from their land. This was a sign from heaven, a supernatural event. **the wonderful works of God:** It appears that the “speaking in tongues” did not consist of proclaiming the gospel. Rather, the apostles were praising God’s mighty works (see 10:46; 1 Cor. 14:16).

**2:12, 13** A contrast is made between two groups of people, the Hellenists and the Hebrews (6:1). Both groups heard the apostles speaking in tongues. Verse 12 speaks of the reaction of the Hellenists, who were from various parts of the world: they understood the dialects in which the apostles spoke and consequently viewed the event as miraculous. On the other hand, those mentioned in v. 13 were Judeans and did not understand the foreign languages the apostles were speaking. They concluded the apostles were drunk and speaking gibberish.

**2:14 Peter,** the first disciple to recognize the truth about Jesus (see Matt. 16:13–19), was also the first to bear witness of Him. Peter preached his sermon to **men of Judea** who had judged the whole episode as being the effect of too much wine (vv. 13, 15).