



ACTS 1-8
JESUS' WORD
SPREADS

SMALL GROUP STUDIES

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STUDY ONE

ACTS 1:1-11

TURNING THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

“He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority. But 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 1:7-8.

BACKGROUND

The Acts of the apostles is a historical and biblical narrative written by Luke. It concerns Jesus continued work through his disciples and the promised pouring out of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-32, Acts 2:17-21).

The book of Acts should not be seen as merely a follow on from the book of Luke but that it 'highlights the move from the OT to what the kingdom of God looks like now that Christ has come, died, risen and ascended to the right hand of the Father.'¹

Acts 1:1-11 sets the scene for the whole book and is Jesus last words to his disciples before his ascension. Acts 1:8 shows that God's plans are bigger than just the known world. This account shows the world as the Kingdom of God dawns upon it under the reign of Jesus.

During the coming weeks while we spend time in Acts 1-8 we pray that our confidence in the Word will grow and remind us that this is where the power lies. As Luke often does in his summary statements, he reminds us that the Word spreads and increases (Acts 6:7, 9:31, 12:24, 19:20). We are living in the same age as the first disciples, the time between the inauguration of God's Kingdom under Jesus rule and his coming to consummate that Kingdom.

1. Read Luke 1:4 and Acts 1:1-3. From these verses what reasons do you think Luke had for writing these accounts for his readers (one of whom was named, Theophilus)?

2. What convinced Luke to go to such lengths (Luke 1:1-4) to write these detailed accounts (Acts 1:3)?

¹ Thomspson, Alan J. 'The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus – Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan. Page 17.

3. What is the difference between the ministry of John and the ministry of Jesus?

4. What do you think is behind the question asked in verse 6?

5. In verse 8 what does Jesus mean when he says they 'will receive power'?

GOING DEEPER

6. In verse 3 we are told that Jesus gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. What makes these proofs convincing? What things can you think of that make the resurrection such good news? Why is the resurrection of Jesus so difficult for people to accept today?

7. How is it that we can take Jesus at his word when he up and leaves (ascension)? How is it that the disciples (and us) ought not to feel abandoned by Jesus?

8. Is the first coming of Christ as exciting as the promised second?

MAKING IT STICK

9. Are there times when you feel abandoned by Jesus? When were they? How does what we read in Acts help overcome this?

10. Are you looking forward to the return of Jesus? Why?

11. For the gospel (the witness to him) of Jesus to go to the ends of the earth we all need to be involved. What do you think it means to be Jesus 'witnesses'?

12. In verse 11 we are told that Jesus will come back the same way he was seen going into heaven. We do not, however, know when this will be. What will you be doing when he returns? *Are you ready?*

STUDY TWO

ACTS 2:1-41

WAITING FOR THE WORLD TO CHANGE

“One of the great liabilities of history is that all too many people fail to remain awake through great periods of social change. Every society has its protectors of status quo and its fraternities of the indifferent who are notorious for sleeping through revolutions. Today, our very survival depends on our ability to stay awake, to adjust to new ideas, to remain vigilant and to face the challenge of change”

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

“No matter what people tell you, words and ideas can change the world”

—Robin Williams

“I feel that the best companies are started not because the founder wanted a company but because the founder wanted to change the world... If you decide you want to found a company, you maybe start to develop your first idea. And hire lots of workers.

—Mark Zuckerberg

**LET US REMEMBER:
ONE BOOK, ONE PEN,
ONE CHILD, AND ONE
TEACHER CAN CHANGE
THE WORLD.**

—MALALA YOUSAFZAI

Education is
the most
powerful
weapon which
you can use to
change the
world.

—Nelson Mandela

Don't ever forget that a small group of thoughtful people can change the world, it's the only thing that ever has. —Aaron Sorkin

WHEN A NEWSPAPER POSED THE QUESTION, ‘WHAT’S WRONG WITH THE WORLD?’ THE CATHOLIC THINKER G. K. CHESTERTON REPUTEDLY WROTE A BRIEF LETTER IN RESPONSE:

‘DEAR SIRs:

I AM.

SINCERELY YOURS,

G. K. CHESTERTON.’

It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when my 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.”

— Jesus The Christ

Many famous people have coined sentences that describe what it takes to change the world. Many have had enormous influence in their time and even beyond. We need to ask the question though, what does it really take to change the world?

"The biblical faith is based on the promises of God in Israel's history and their fulfilment in Jesus Christ." Genesis 12 is the beginning of these promises. Many people in the bible did not see the promises of God to them fulfilled even though it happened later. God giving promises to people is always how it starts. Our Christian life is not dependant on the promises that we make but the promises that God makes to us in Jesus. In this study we see God's promises coming to fruition and the disciples are told to wait for this to come about. The fulfilment of God's promises will change the world.

1. In Acts 2:1-41, what Old Testament judgements (Genesis 11:1-9) are overcome and how? What Old Testament prophecies has Jesus fulfilled?

2. In Acts 2:5-12 those in the crowd ask three questions, what were they? How do some in the crowd answer these questions? How does Peter answer these questions in his speech?

3. What happened to the people when they heard Peter's speech? (verse 37)

4. What announcement does Peter make that would stun the crowd (verse 36)? What is significant about this for those listening? Is this significant today, why or why not?

GOING DEEPER

5. How can we save ourselves from this corrupt generation (verse 40)? Are current generations less corrupt than those in the time of Acts, if not why not, if so why?

6. What do you understand by what Peter says in verse 39b, 'for all whom the Lord has called'?

7. What do you think it means to be 'cut to the heart (verse 37)'? Can you think of other instances in the Bible where this has happened?

MAKING IT STICK

8. Peter tells those listening in verse 38 that they must repent and believe. By repenting have you turned lordship of your life over to Jesus? As Christians we then live a life of repentance are there things for which you ought to repent?

9. Once we repent and believe we are to trust and obey, this is how we show our love for Jesus (John 14:15-21). In what areas do you struggle to trust/believe and why? In what areas do you struggle to obey and why?

10. In what ways can we change the world now?

STUDY THREE

ACTS 2:42-47

THE CHURCH EVERYBODY WANTS

“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” Acts 2:42.

1. What two things did the new followers devote themselves to?

2. What is significant about the apostles' teaching?

3. In what ways did they enjoy fellowship?

4. Why do you think people were in awe in verse 43?

5. How often did they meet? Is this significant? Why or why not?

GOING DEEPER

6. Is where the people meet important (be careful not to read 21 century thinking into this passage)? What is happening when they meet? How is this different for us? How it is the same for us?

7. Read Acts 2:45-47. What do you think is happening here? What does this say about the community that is emerging?

8. Some people say that we need to be an Acts 2:42-47 church. Is there anything wrong with this statement? Should we try to transplant what we read here into our day and age? Why or why not?

MAKING IT STICK

9. How important is meeting together for you?

10. Our lives are busy. What good reasons do we have that makes it difficult for us to meet together with other believers? What would it cost to make sure you are meeting with other believers?

11. How does hearing the apostles teaching (scripture) affect you? In what ways can you live this teaching out? Do you find it difficult to live this teaching out? What do you lose, what do you gain by living it out?

STUDY FOUR ACTS 3

CAN SOMEBODY HELP ME?

“Let us, therefore, learn reverently to consider the works of God, that the wondering at them may make an entrance for doctrine. For when doctrine is cold and unprofitable with us, God doth justly punish our unthankfulness by this means, because we have despised the glory of his works. Again, because we are not so quick of sight, that we can see so much in the works of God alone, as is sufficient, let us learn to join therewithal the help of doctrine. To be brief, the one ought not to be separated from the other. Which thing experience doth sufficiently teach us. For hereby it came to pass that the world did so wickedly abuse miracles.” John Calvin.²

1. Where does this miracle take place and what time?
2. In verse 4 how did Peter and John respond to the beggars request for money? In what ways do you think this might be significant?
3. Where does the man go after he is healed? Is this significant? Why or why not?
4. Read verses 11-26. In what ways is this speech similar to Peter's speech in Acts 2:14-39 in reference to Jesus?

2 Calvin, John. Commentary on Acts 3:9 (http://www.ccel.org/study/Acts_3).

5. What response does Peter tell them to make?

GOING DEEPER

6. Peter pronounced the man's healing in the name of Jesus and then took his hand to help him up (Verses 6-7). What does this teach us about helping those in physical need? What does it teach us about helping those in spiritual need?

7. In verse 19 from what is Peter asking them to repent? The God of the bible is not merely another god among many so what do you think Peter means when he says repent and turn to God?

8. What relationships do you see between verses 19-20 and verse 26?

9. Which is more important, our physical healing or spiritual? Why or why not?

MAKING IT STICK

10. Do we take time to look at the vulnerable? What do we see? What do we offer?

11. God shows us his grace through his call to repent. How can we pass on this grace both physically and spiritually (both are important)?

12. How do you include repentance as part of your prayer life?

STUDY FIVE

ACTS 4:1-22

COURAGE UNDER FIRE

“I survived because the fire inside me burned brighter than the fire around me.”
–Joshua Graham

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:12.

1. Why did Peter and John get arrested?

2. What gave Peter the courage to speak so boldly?

3. Why is Jesus name where the power to heal and to save comes from?

4. What is the response from the Sanhedrin? Why do you think they are responding this way?

5. Why do you think Luke adds the detail of the man's age in verse 22?

GOING DEEPER

6. Peter moves from talking about healing in verse 10 to salvation in verse 12. Are these connected? If so, how? If not, why not?

7. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in these verses? What is the role of Jesus (the Son) in these verses? What is the role of God (the Father) in these verses?

8. In verse 19 the question is asked, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him?" In what ways had Peter and John listened to God? How can we test when we are listening to God in opposition to our leaders?

MAKING IT STICK

9. When do you struggle to find the courage to speak or act for God?

10. What stops us today from having courage in Jesus and his word?

11. (Read Acts 4:21) Do you have cause to praise God? What do you praise him for?

STUDY SIX

ACTS 4:23-35

A PRAYER WITH A VIEW

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.” Acts 4:31.

1. After Peter and John were released what did they do? How did the people respond?

2. Read verses 24-30. Is there a structure to their prayer? What kinds of things do they include in their prayer?

3. What do you notice about what is prayed?

4. What happened after they prayed (verse 31)?

5. What was their prayer evidence of as seen in verses 32-35?

GOING DEEPER

6. Whenever Old Testament is quoted in the New Testament the writer has in mind the whole context. Why do you think they quote Psalm 2 (Read Psalm 2)? How does Psalm 2 add to our understanding of Chapter 4?

7. What does this passage tell us about God?

8. In verse 28 what do you think it means that God decided beforehand should happen?

MAKING IT STICK

9. What kind of events or situations incite you to pray?

10. Do you find it difficult to speak boldly (to both believers and unbelievers)? If so, why?

11. What do you think it means to speak boldly?

STUDY SEVEN

ACTS 4:32-5:16

CONSPIRACY INSIDE AND OUT

“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.” Acts 4:32

“... make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your interests but each of you to the interests of the others.” Philippians 2:2-4.

1. In what ways were the believers caring for each other?

2. How were the people united?

3. What was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira? What do you think is at stake that judgement should be so swift and final?

4. In verse 8 what opportunity was Peter giving to Sapphira? Why did she not take the opportunity afforded her?

5. What were the responses of people to what was happening among the believers in Acts 5:12-16?

GOING DEEPER

6. What do you think "All the believers were one in heart and mind" (Acts 4:32) means? Compare Acts 4:32 with Phil 2:2-4.

7. We do not see events such as what happened with Ananias and Sapphira today (that I am aware of). Why is this story, therefore, important for us? What kind of response do you think the church would get in our western context if this happened? What do you learn from it about God and about us?

8. What is the significance of naming these people?

MAKING IT STICK

9. What things are essential for us to be one in heart and mind? What can you do to contribute to being one in heart and mind?

10. What is your immediate response to the story of Ananias and Sapphira?

11. Do you take the opportunity for confession seriously? What sort of things do you confess?

12. What things in your life expose the motivation of your heart?

STUDY EIGHT

ACTS 5:17-42

WHOSE WORK IS IT ANYWAY?

“Day after day, the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.” Acts 5:42.

Think about the overall pattern of events in these verses. They show a basic similarity: the apostles perform miracles; the gospel is preached; the apostles are arrested and threatened; the apostles boldly keep preaching.³

1. Why are the apostles being opposed in Acts 5:17-28? How is this different to Acts 4:2?

2. What does Peter mean in Acts 5:29?

3. Gamaliel was a well respected member of the Sanhedrin and the teacher of the Apostle Paul when he was being trained as a Pharisee before his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. How does he persuade the members of the Sanhedrin to think differently about what they are doing in response to Peter and John?

4. Does the disciples response (Acts 5:41-42) surprise you? If so, how? If not why not?

3 “Mission Unstoppable” Bible Study by Bryson smith p12

GOING DEEPER

5. In what ways is Christianity opposed and criticised today? Is it justified? How would you answer the opposition and criticism that have been raised?

6. Why do you think the Sadducees were filled with jealousy?

7. Why is it good news that Jesus is the Messiah (Acts 5:42)?

MAKING IT STICK

8. "We must obey God rather than men" (5:29). When do you find this especially hard? What are some specific, practical ways we can help each other in this matter?

9. In this passage we are told that the apostles rejoiced because they were considered worthy to suffer for the Name (5:41). In what ways have you suffered for the Name? How did you feel? How did you respond?

10. How can we teach those around us the good news (or gospel) whether believers or unbelievers?

STUDY NINE

ACTS 6:8-7:53

THE UNSTOPPABLE WORD

The scene has suddenly changed from internal tensions (Acts 6:1-7) to external danger, as Stephen is hauled before the Sanhedrin to give a defence of his actions. It is important to notice the specific charges that are brought against Stephen: that he speaks "against this holy place and the law" (6:13). The 'holy place' is a reference to the Jerusalem temple, and the 'law' is a reference to the Old Testament law. It is with these accusations in mind that Stephen now launches into his defence.⁴

1. What was Stephen full of?

2. Even after false accusations what was remarkable about Stephen?

3. Why do you think Stephen goes over so much of Israel's history from the Old Testament?

4. Stephen has been accused of being against the temple. What does Stephen say about the temple in verses 44-50? In what way is this a defence against the accusations?

5. Stephen has been accused of being against Moses. What does Stephen say about Moses in verses 35- 39? In what way is this a defence against the accusations?

⁴ "Mission Unstoppable" Bible Study by Bryson smith p15

6. What is it in Stephen's speech that most annoys the Sanhedrin?

GOING DEEPER

7. What do you think it means to be full of God's grace and power (6:8)?

8. In Acts 7:44-50 Stephen talks about the tabernacle. He goes on to quote from Isaiah 66:1-2. The people that Stephen is talking to would know the passage Stephen is talking from and they would know that context. Look at Isaiah 66:1-4. How would this passage contribute to the anger of those listening? Why do you think he stops at verse 2? How does this contribute to his argument?

9. What does it mean to resist the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51)?

MAKING IT STICK

10. What gives you confidence in the Word?

11. Are there times when you feel you have resisted the Holy Spirit? What did it feel like? Why did you resist?

12. Are you prepared to have difficult conversations with other believers? How should we approach these conversations?

STUDY TEN

ACTS 7:51-8:1

THE UNSTOPPABLE WORD

“But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” Acts 7:55-56.

1. In Acts 7:52 what is Stephen saying happened to the prophets? What was the role of the prophets?
2. In Acts 7:53, why is this such an indictment on those to whom Stephen is speaking?
3. How is the Sanhedrin contrasted with Stephen in Acts 7:54-56?
4. How does Stephen pray for those who are persecuting him (Acts 7:60)?

GOING DEEPER

5. What kinds of things cause divisions amongst Christians today? How should we address them?

6. What did Stephen mean by Acts 7:56?

7. "The God of the Old Testament is one of wrath and judgement, but the God of the New Testament is one of grace and love." What do you think about this comment? How do you think Stephen would respond to it?

MAKING IT STICK

8. In what ways do you see the divisiveness of Christ in your life?

9. Are you ready to give an answer to anyone who asks as Stephen was (1 Peter 3:13-17)?

10. Stephen found his worth in Christ. In what or whom do you find your worth and identity?

STUDY ELEVEN

THE DEEP MAGIC

ACTS 8:1-39

"It means," said Aslan, "that though the Witch knew the Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know. Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of Time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before Time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation. She would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backwards."⁵

1. What negative things happened as a result of Stephen's death?
2. Was there anything positive that happened after Stephen's death?
3. What did those who were scattered do? How do you feel about this? What was the result of this?
4. What did Simon get wrong? How was he similar to Ananias and Sapphira?
5. Why do you think the Holy Spirit had not come upon any of the people prior to the arrival of Peter and John?

5 C.S. Lewis. "The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe."

6. Why do you think the encounter Philip had with the Ethiopian is important? What do you learn about sharing Jesus with others?

GOING DEEPER

7. In Acts 8:4-8 the word was preached and signs were performed. In Acts 8:9-16 people heard the good news of the kingdom of God that Philip proclaimed. In Acts 9:25 Peter and John preached the gospel. In Acts 9:26-40 Philip preached the good news about Jesus. There is an emphasis on speaking the truth about Jesus to people and this was often accompanied by amazing signs. What was the significance of the signs? Why is speaking the message important?

8. Why do you think the Holy Spirit had not come upon any of the people prior to the arrival of Peter and John?

9. In Acts 8:8 and Acts 8:39 we are told that there is joy at what they have received, both the good news and the signs. Why do you think there was joy? In what ways does the gospel bring you joy? How can it bring joy to 21 century people?

MAKING IT STICK

10. In Acts 9:19 Simon wants to be given the ability to give the Spirit at the laying on of hands. In what ways do we try to earn God's favour?

11. Do you pray for God to give you opportunities to 'proclaim' the good news of the Kingdom of God? If not, why not?



ST PAUL'S
CASTLE HILL