

Week beginning Monday 4th January 2021

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Acts of the Apostles starting Tuesday 5th January

Welcome to our reading of the Acts of the Apostles. Acts is the sequel or second instalment of our third Gospel, thought to be written by Luke, between 63 & 70 AD. These two books make up a quarter of the New Testament. Luke was a Gentile physician and one of Paul's companions. Knowing the story, the places, the people and the issues in Acts make it easier to understand the significance of the New Testament letters.

SECTION ONE: IN JERUSALEM.

Acts 1. Ten days of waiting.

Luke tells Theophilus, which may mean "anyone who loves God", his purpose in writing this book. Cf. Luke 1:1-4. Notice Jesus' instructions and promises to his disciples a] at the shared meal vv 4-5. b] at their final meeting v 8. As we read Acts we learn how both were fulfilled. There is a period of prayerful waiting. Note the size and makeup of the group v 15, Peter's reliance on the scriptures for guidance and how important it was that all the leaders had been witnesses to Jesus' life and teaching, death, resurrection and ascension. vv 21-22

Acts 2. The Day of Pentecost: A promise fulfilled.

An event we are all familiar with; however we seldom hear it as a complete story. This is an opportunity to read the whole day's events.

At their prayer meeting God's presence is experienced in noise, wind and fire. It is their joyful response that leads the crowd to enquire what is happening. Peter explained that God's promises had come true; Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension, to which they were witnesses, show that Jesus is the promised Messiah. The crowd believed Peter's message, asked what their response should be v 38. Note the signs of the Kingdom which followed. vv 42-46.

Acts 3. More signs of the Kingdom.

Peter orders and helps a man lame from birth to stand up. The man's exuberant praise again gathered a crowd. God acts, the crowd investigate, Peter explains. Peter uses different Scriptures but it is the same sermon! Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled, Jesus is the promised Messiah, proved by his resurrection, to which they are witnesses.

What does Peter urge the crowd to do and promise if they respond? vv 19-20?

Acts 4. Trouble and the response.

What upset the religious leaders?

Another sermon with the same focus: the risen Jesus. But this time to a hostile influential audience who are amazed by Peter's skill & boldness. Cf. Mark 13:11. Another prayer meeting: an earth shaking one.

Note the pattern of prayer including their intercessions. vv 29-30.

Luke describes the growth of a caring, sharing growing church. We will meet the man of outstanding generosity, Barnabus, later in the story.