

# **CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian  
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

## **DHW BIBLE CLASS LESSON 1 THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES CHAPTERS 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Book of Acts, which is logically placed after the four gospels, should be studied as a continuation of the teaching, preaching and works of the Lord Jesus Christ. In particular, it should be read as a sequel to the gospel according to Luke because Luke also wrote the book of Acts.<sup>1</sup> In fact Luke, in his opening statement of the book of Acts, intimates that it is a natural sequel to “the former treatise”, that is the gospel book that bears his name (Acts 1:1). He wrote to one whom he called by the name of Theophilus (Luke 1:3, Acts 1:1).

Luke is mentioned three times in the epistles of Paul. Luke was a medical practitioner and a travelling companion and co-worker of Paul (Colossians 4:14; Philemon 1:24). When Paul was imprisoned the second time, awaiting

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<sup>1</sup> It is the traditional and accepted view of the church that Luke, the physician, a companion of the Apostle Paul (Colossians 4:14) is the writer of the gospel which bears his name and the book of Acts. For a discussion of the authorship of the two books read *An Introduction to the New Testament-The Gospels and the Acts* (volume 1, pages 114-132; and 248-250) by D. Edmond Hierbert.

his death, Luke remained a loyal and faithful friend (2 Timothy 4:11). He was a Gentile Christian for in Acts 1:19; he referred to the word “Aceldama” as “their proper tongue”, that is the Jewish language. He was a well-educated man who was interested in missionary work.

The study of the book of Acts should benefit the diligent and conscientious student in many ways. It is the only divinely inspired account of the beginning and early expansion of the Christian church. It is our main and reliable source of information of the Christians and the church in that period. Luke recorded the period which began with the ascension of Christ (around A.D. 30) to the time when Paul was under house arrest (A.D. 62) – a period of about thirty-two years. Although it was not his intention to give a totally historical account of the church, Luke aimed at giving a proper account of the geographical expansion of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and its supernatural origin. The account of the charges brought up by the Jews against Gentile Christians at the Jerusalem Council shows Luke’s purpose in eliminating any religious suspicions against Judaism by the Gentile believers. In addition, Luke’s accounts of Paul’s trials before the Roman governors show that Christianity was not and is not against the Roman government.

Acts 1:8 gives the outline of the book. The Apostles and the disciples were to be witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ to the world; starting from Jerusalem (Acts 1-7) to the surrounding regions of Judaea and Samaria (Acts 8-11), and ultimately to the ends of the earth (Acts 12-28). The whole chapter falls naturally into two main sections: the final preparation of the disciples before they are sent forth (1:1-14); and the

choosing of the twelfth Apostle to take the place of Judas Iscariot (1:15-26).

## COMMENTARY

### Jesus' Final Instructions to His Disciples

Luke referred to a "former treatise" which he had written to Theophilus. This previous paper, which Luke wrote to Theophilus, was the Gospel-book that bears his name. Theophilus is a name in Greek. It is a compound of two words: *theos* which means "God" and *philein* which means "to love". Hence, the name indicates a lover of God or a friend of God. It is a proper name. Theophilus probably was a Roman official of considerable rank. In the Gospel, Luke accorded him with great honour when he addressed him as "most excellent Theophilus", (Luke 1; 3). Interestingly in Acts, Luke called him simply "O Theophilus" – a term of endearment and probably they had become close friends. If Theophilus was a Roman high official, Luke's purpose for writing is to defend the Christians and their faith against any misunderstanding by the Roman government regarding the Christian faith. It seems that Theophilus was persuaded and it can be correctly affirmed that he was a believer of Christ.

At the very outset, Luke indicated that the contents of Acts picture a continuation of the work of Jesus Christ from his previous dissertation. The phrase "of all that Jesus began both to do and teach" pin-points that whatever Jesus accomplished in His brief earthly ministry was only the beginning, leading to greater things as recorded in Acts. Jesus declared this when He was with His disciples in the Upper Room: "*Verily,*

*verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father* (John 14:12). Luke mentioned that before Jesus Christ ascended to heaven, He had appeared to His disciples and proved to the frightened apostles and disciples that He was alive. The Lord Jesus Christ was seen by His disciples for a period of forty days. The bodily appearances of the Lord Jesus Christ after His death are **infallible proofs** of His resurrection. When they were distraught and discouraged, the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to them. He told them to see and touch Him and that He was not a spirit (or ghost), which has no "flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39). He even ate fish and honey before them to prove that He Himself was real. When the apostle Thomas disbelieved the testimony of the others that they had seen Jesus alive, the Lord Jesus appeared again to them and told Thomas to touch Him and told him not to be unbelieving. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a vital historic fact and indispensable spiritual truth. The disciples had seen, touched and handled Him. They did not have to prove it. They simply declared it in their messages. This is the emphasis in the book of Acts.

During this period of forty days with His apostles, the Lord Jesus taught them the things relating to the Kingdom of God. Note that these apostles were not ordinary people in the sense that they had been chosen by God. This is very significant. That made them different from the other disciples. This also means that their teaching and work in behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ would be clearly authorized and authenticated. They were chosen of God to continue

and carry on with the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus explained to them the Kingdom of God. Jesus began His earthly ministry by preaching and teaching concerning the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14, 15; Luke 4:43). The Kingdom of God is essentially the rule of God in the lives of the people of God. God is their king. But the Lord Jesus Christ was not referring to the particular aspect of God's providential government of the present world. Indeed, God is sovereign and He could put up or put down a Pharaoh or a Nebuchadnezzar. God is indeed in control of the affairs of men in this world. But this Kingdom of God which Jesus taught them was the promise of a literal kingdom on earth in which the greater Son of David, who is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, would reign absolutely on earth with Jerusalem as the capital (Daniel 7:27; Isaiah 66:20; Micah 4:1-8). This literal kingdom will be established at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ in all His glory and power and majesty! The Lord Jesus Christ told His disciples not to depart from Jerusalem. Most of them were fishermen and they were from Galilee. They were to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit. John, the baptizer, baptized them with water, a baptism unto repentance. But "not many days thence" (about ten days) they would be baptized "with the Holy Ghost (Spirit)".

The disciples asked the Lord Jesus Christ (1:6): "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom of Israel?" The disciples knew the Holy Scriptures. Israel then was under the rule of Emperor Caesar and the Romans. They came to recognise and acknowledge that the Lord Jesus Christ is their Messiah who would come and reign. They came to know that He has

the power and the authority to subdue and rule the world. He had declared to them that "all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." One can understand their nationalistic understanding. They expected their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, to overthrow the Roman government and set up an Israeli government to rule the world. But the Lord Jesus Christ's response indicates that God had bigger plans. It is God's intention to extend the gospel of salvation to all people, calling a people out unto Himself beside the Jews.

There would be a literal kingdom of God on earth in the future. The Lord Jesus Christ did not say that they were wrong about their understanding of a literal kingdom of God on earth. If it were so, the Lord Jesus would have said that. But the Lord Jesus Christ responded by saying that it was not for them to know "the times of the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (1:7). God the Father has set an appointed time, known only to Him. This is God's prerogative. He did not want His people to know the hour and day of the coming event. But the Lord Jesus Christ continued to say that they would receive power after the Holy Spirit came upon them. The word "power" is translated from the Greek word "*dunamis*". It has a wide range of meaning. It means that the disciples would be empowered with ability, wisdom and strength. Their mission or mandate was to be witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Greek word translated "witnesses" here is derived from the root word "*martus*" from which the English word "martyr" was formed. It strongly suggests that being witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ, the disciples must be willing to endure persecution

including martyrdom. The Gospel Message of Salvation and the Kingdom of God must continue to be proclaimed. The geographical areas are given; starting “in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and into the uttermost parts of the earth” (1:8). This key verse draws the divisions of the book of Acts, which has been given above.

### **Jesus' Ascension & Promise of His Return**

After giving His final instructions and preparing the disciples, the Lord Jesus Christ was taken up to heaven and a cloud received Him out of their sight. What a glorious ascent to heaven. It was stupendous and supernatural! The disciples were astounded as their Lord and Saviour ascended to heaven. Two angels stood by them in white garments and said to them: “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (1:11). The angels called their attention to the way Jesus Christ was taken up into heaven. They said that Jesus Christ would return to earth in the same way as they saw Him go to heaven. When He returns, it would be as glorious as when He was taken up.

The ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ marked the end of His earthly appearances. There is no more need to appear repeatedly to future disciples. This awe-inspiring event, in a simple and convincing way, proves beyond any shadow of doubt the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no need for future believers to demand His bodily appearance like doubting Thomas. The disciples were honest and honourable men, and the account of Jesus'

resurrection and ascension is real. The ascension manifests that the Lord Jesus Christ remains the same in heaven and when He comes again. This was at Mount Olivet. When the Lord Jesus Christ returns, His feet shall stand on the same mount (Zechariah 14:4).

### **Being in One Accord in Prayer & Supplication**

The disciples walked back to Jerusalem from Mount Olivet. The distance was about “a sabbath day's” journey. All the eleven apostles were there. They gathered together in “an upper room”, which probably was the same room in which the Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Lord's Supper. The disciples were united. There was no divisive spirit among them. They were of one mind and heart. They occupied themselves in prayer and supplication. Prayer is a general term that conveys the worship of God, which includes praising God, thanking God and confession of sin. Supplication means to beg or humbly make a request to God. The order of prayer and supplication is significant. Praying, praising, thanking and worshipping of God come before any request and petition. When supplicating, a person hopes to receive; and when praying, the person gives before receiving. It is also interesting to note that there were women among the men, and they were praying together with the men. In the four Gospels, women were seldom mentioned being together with the men. Here they were seen together. A new order was ushered in. In Christ, there is neither male nor female, for all are one

### **Choosing the Twelfth Disciple**

“And in those days, Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples” strongly suggests that Peter emerged as the

leader of the disciples. The disciples who were gathered together numbered one hundred and twenty. Peter proposed that another disciple be chosen to fill the position left vacant by the betrayer Judas. Peter based his proposition on Psalm 69:25: *“Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein,”* and on Psalm 109:8: *“His bishop-rick let another take.”* Peter interpreted these psalms to apply to Judas. He said that the Holy Spirit had spoken these words through David. David spoke these words metaphorically to describe his experience, but Peter applied them literally to Judas. It was not without basis that Peter understood these portions of Scriptures in this way. Just before the Lord Jesus Christ suffered and died, He quoted Psalm 69:4 to prepare His disciples for what would happen to Him (John 15:25). So, Psalm 69 foreshadowed the rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ’s by the religious leaders and the betrayer Judas’ suicide.

Having quoted Scriptures to support his proposition, Peter spelt out the qualifications of the disciple who was to be numbered as one of the twelfth. He stipulated that he must be one who had been with them since the time when John the Baptist was baptising in the river Jordan to the time of Christ’s ascension. He must be a witness with them of Christ’s resurrection. This shows Peter’s understanding of the position of apostleship. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is vital to the Christian faith. Luke records that the apostles testified with great power to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. If Christ were not raised from the dead, the Christian faith is nothing and Christ’s disciples are the most miserable people (1 Corinthians 15:17-19).

Peter and the apostles found two men who met the criteria. They were Joseph who was also known as Barnabas and whose surname was Justus; and Matthias. Then they prayed to the Lord (1:24, 25): *“Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.”* After they had prayed, they cast lots and the lot fell on Matthias, who was then numbered among the twelve. The casting of lots was sanctioned by Scriptures in the Old Testament (Leviticus 16:8; Numbers 26:55; Proverbs 16:33). But this practice is not used after the Holy Spirit has come to indwell every believer. However, the choosing of another to replace Judas was done prayerfully with a correct understanding of the Word of God and finally, they committed to God to make known His choice to them.

### **PRACTICAL VALUE**

Our study of Acts will accrue much spiritual benefits for us as we travel through life in this world as pilgrims bound for the heavenly abode where God our Father and the Lord Jesus are. Luke wrote Acts in defence of the Christian faith. Like Luke, a Gentile believer, who was convinced of the infallible proofs concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we should be strong and steadfast. We should not be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ for we truly serve a living Saviour who has ascended to Heaven and promised to return in power and majesty. We should look expectantly and desire earnestly for the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. And

when He comes, we know that He would fulfil His promise to David and establish the Kingdom of God on earth. How gracious and wonderful for us that God extends the gospel of salvation in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to Gentiles the world over to be a part of His great and glorious Kingdom for all eternity!

As the Lord Jesus Christ told His first disciples that they should be witnesses of Him to others, we too are called to be His “martyrs”. The geographical pattern of witnessing Christ to others is given to us – first to those who are our own immediate kin (Jerusalem), and to our relatives (Judaea), and then to our friends and neighbours (Samaria), and lastly, to others in faraway places. Short mission trips are not as effective as if one were to spend one’s life as a missionary. It is another thing altogether to be a missionary to work and witness for Christ in foreign lands.

The method of choosing another to fill the apostleship vacancy is very instructive. It starts with reading the Word of God intelligently and discerning His will. Having ascertained that, we should use our common sense to determine the next step to fulfil God’s Word. And finally, we should commit the whole thing to the Lord in earnest prayer. The way: God’s Word—Common Sense—Prayer.

The early Christians are an example to us in the way they relate to each other. They were of one mind and heart. They gathered together for prayer and to make known their needs to God together. There was sharing of their spiritual needs. We should be doing the same in our church. What a

blessed community we would be!  
AMEN

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Daily Readings**

**Monday:** Acts 1:1-4; Micah 4:1-8.

**Tuesday:** Acts 1:5-8; Philippians 4:13; John 16:7-14.

**Wednesday:** Acts 1:9-11; Luke 19:11-27; Psalm 24:7-10.

**Thursday:** Acts 1:12-14; Philippians 4:6; Proverbs 3:5,6.

**Friday:** Acts 1:15-26; Psalm 69:1-36.

**Discussion Questions**

1. From Acts 1:1-11, what did the Lord Jesus do in the midst of His disciples?

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2. What evidence is there for the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you need to see this evidence before you believe? Why?

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learn from their example in choosing leaders?

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3. What significant preparation for mission is given to the Apostles in Acts 1:3? What matters were the Apostles further instructed and enlightened?

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7. In this chapter:

a. Give an Example to follow

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4. What is said in Acts 1:1-11 about God the Father, about the Lord Jesus Christ, and about the Holy Spirit?

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b. A Sin to avoid

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5. What is taught in Acts 1:11 about the fact and manner of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ?

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c. A Command to obey

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6. Do you think that the Apostles were wrong in choosing another to fill the place of Judas? How can the church

d. A Promise to claim

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e. An Area of Service to the Lord

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