

Study 2: Chapter 1

Introduction

Acts begins where Luke's last account finished (Lk 24: 46- 53), with the ascension of Jesus. Right from the very beginning of the book of Acts, we see a "seamless" transition between the two chronologies.

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Homework:

What is the "*Baptism with the Holy Spirit*"?

- Who was it promised to?
- Who received it?
- What special things did it accomplish in those who received it?

Read Acts chapter 2 in preparation for the next study.

Notes for Study 2: Chapter 1

Introduction

Acts begins where Luke's last account finished (Lk 24: 46- 53), with the ascension of Jesus. Right from the very beginning of the book of Acts, we see Luke "declaring his colours" in leaving no gaps or room to guess what has happened, but rather a "seamless" transition between the two chronologies.

Timing: *When did these events occur?*

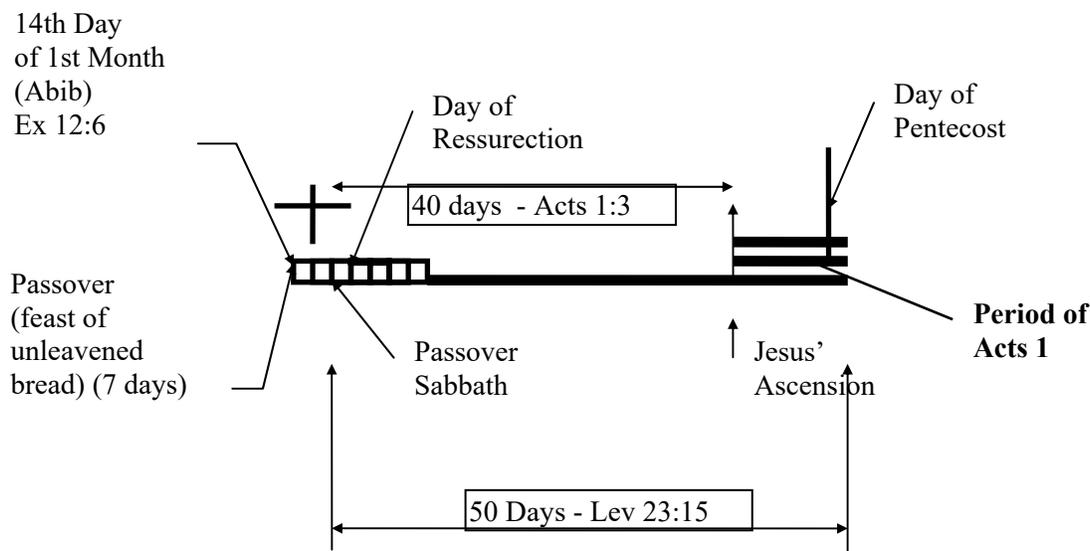
Content: *What are the major events?*

Cast: *Who are the major players?*

Body of the Study

Timing of the events covered by chapter 1

Acts 1 covers the period of 10 days, following Jesus ascension, and before the day of Pentecost.



The period of Acts chapter 1

Content of chapter 1

Jesus tells His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for HS to come upon them; Jesus' ascension; election of Matthias.

The major players in chapter 1

In forming the transition between his gospel and the Acts narrative, Luke begins with the final instructions of the Lord with the disciples. Judas Iscariot had died by this time, so the apostles number "11", although Judas' death is reiterated in the chapter. Matthias takes the place of Judas, and features towards the end of the chapter.

Jesus' final time with the apostles

After the resurrection, Jesus has been with the apostles for 40 days, and has appeared to all or some of them on many occasions. The NT writers have documented at least 13 occasions where Jesus has appeared¹. Until this time, Jesus has told the disciples on several occasions not to tell others that He was the Christ (c/f Mt 16: 20; 17: 9). However, in the *great commission* He empowers them to commence their ministry.

How would the apostles be feeling at this time? The one they thought would redeem Israel has been killed (as shown in the story of the two on the road to Emmaus Lk 24:13-37). They were devastated at the thought of their hopes being lost. But then they see the resurrected Jesus. And not just once! They see him again and again! Their hopes were restored! They see Him over a 40 day period. But then He disappears again! And He tells them to "...wait here for a while..." So what are they thinking? How are they reacting to this? Confused? What next? Is He coming back in the next few days? Is this when He will set up the kingdom (and redeem Israel)?

Why were the apostles told to wait in Jerusalem?

Jesus had discussed the Holy Spirit with the apostles in the long discourse with them on the night before He died (Jn 14:25-26; 16:12-14). They were promised to receive the HS, but the time was then not quite right.

There were three feasts of the Lord that required Jews to come to Jerusalem (preferably every year) – Dt 16:16. For the Jews from Palestine, this was not too much of an impost – perhaps only a couple of day's journey. However for those from the far away places, it could perhaps take several weeks of travel each way. The feasts were Passover (on the 14th day of the first month), Pentecost (in the 3rd month, and 50 days after the Sabbath of Passover), and the Feast of Tabernacles (beginning on the 21st day of the seventh month). Many Jews had come from around the world for Passover, and had witnessed the events of the crucifixion (Lk 24:18). Because of the distance of travel, many of them were waiting for Pentecost before they went home again. Then there were those who were not too far away who went home after Passover, but would be back in Jerusalem at the time of Pentecost. This provided (by God's design) the perfect opportunity and audience for the proclaiming of the gospel.

The apostles were commanded to "...wait in Jerusalem to receive Holy Spirit..." (1:4-5). The promise was made during the discourse in John, although it was only at this time that there was any indication as to when the timing might be.

Who was the Holy Spirit promised to?

The Holy Spirit is a subject of much confusion, which we will shed much light on during this study series. The first question is *who actually received the Holy Spirit*, and the answer to that question lies in understanding to whom it was promised. Reading from 1:2, we see:

*"...after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. ³ After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. ⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit
AC 1:6 So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"
AC 1:7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ 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..." (1:2-8 NIV –emphasis mine)*

¹ Reese, p 4 provides the list and the scripture references.

Notice that the promise was quite specific. It was promised to the apostles. Not to the general population of believers, nor to others. This was to be the fulfilment of what Jesus had said 7 weeks earlier when He was with them the night before He died (Jn 14). On that occasion, there was no-one there **except Jesus and the apostles**. Notice also in Mt 28:16→ that it was the 11 apostles who went with him to the mountain in Galilee. And it was to them that He spoke when He gave His parting words – words that Luke reiterates for us here in Acts 1.

The promise is baptism (*immersion*) with the Holy Spirit, and was to occur “...not many days from now...” (1:5 NKJV).

What about the kingdom?

The disciples were looking for the re-establishment of an earthly kingdom, with the glory that it had under David and Solomon. The re-establishment of God’s kingdom had been prophesied throughout the Old Testament (eg Is 2 : 2 - 4; Dan 2 : 44; Mic 4 : 1-5). The disciples recognised Jesus as the Messiah, and were waiting for Him to act in taking control over the Jewish leaders who had perverted God’s ways, and over the Romans who had taken political control. But Jesus’ kingdom was not an earthly one, and would not have the physical nature that the disciples (and still many people) thought that it would.

Clearly, there are two things that this passage shows:

1. That the kingdom was not yet in existence – it had not yet been established. Yet Jesus said during His ministry that it was “on the doorstep” Mk 9: 1, Lk 16: 16 Jesus said that there were some people who would not die before they had seen it happen. No wonder that the disciples were so expectant.
2. That the disciples did not have a complete knowledge of the things that Jesus had taught them. They still didn’t get it. It was not until the HS came and “...guided them into all truth...” (Jn 16:13) and “...brought to their remembrance all the things that (Jesus) said to them...” (Jn 14:26) that they had that proper understanding. The change was dramatic, and was about to occur.

How was the Holy Spirit going to come?

The apostles were to receive Holy Spirit “with Power” (We will look again at this in the next study – when “Power” came to the apostles). The gospel was to be spread: to Jerusalem - to Judea - to Samaria - to the world. As discussed in the introductory study, 1:8 summarises the book of Acts, and to some degree sets in place the purpose and charter that Luke had in writing it. The book covers the empowering of the apostles as they take the gospel into the world.

What is a Sabbath day’s journey?

Mt of Olives is said to be “a Sabbath day’s journey” from Jerusalem (about 900m - Num 35:5). This raises the question as to *why a journey is limited on a Sabbath day?*

On a Sabbath day the Jews were to rest, do nothing, and go nowhere, except the things that they had to do “to eat”. The Sabbath was to be observed as a day of rest. But they might not have had enough water within their homes, and might have had to go a short distance to get some – even on a Sabbath day. Besides this, they did not have “indoor plumbing” and their toilets were to be located outside of the camp area. So there were legitimate reasons why a person might have had to travel a short distance, even on a Sabbath day. So the law allowed such a short journey, but limited it to a distance of around 900m.

We notice here some additional information beyond Lk 24 – that the mount of ascension was the Mount of Olives. Bethany was on the far side of the Mt of Olives, but was 3 km from Jerusalem (Jn 11:18), so we know that the ascension did not occur from Bethany, although Luke’s gospel records that “...Jesus led them out as far as Bethany...” (Lk 24:50).

A complete listing of the apostles

Other complete lists of the apostles are found in Lk 6:13-16; Mt 10:2-4; Mk 3:14-19. Partial lists are also found in Jn 1 and Jn 21. There is additional information provided by the various accounts – such as the “brother” relationships, and the alternate names given to some of them.

Acts 1	Lk 6	Mt 10	Mk 3	Jn 1	Jn 21
Peter	Simon Peter	Simon Peter	Simon Peter	Cephas	Simon Peter
James	James	James son of Zebedee	James son of Zebedee		Sons of Zebedee
John	John	John brother of James	John Brother of James		Sons of Zebedee
Andrew	Andrew	Andrew	Andrew	Andrew	
Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip	
Thomas	Thomas	Thomas	Thomas		Didymus
Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Nathanael	Nathaniel of Cana
Matthew	Matthew	Matthew	Matthew		
James son of Alphaeus	James son of Alphaeus	James son of Alphaeus	James son of Alphaeus		
Simon the Zealot	Simon the Zealot	Simon the Canaanite	Simon the Canaanite		
Judas brother of James	Judas brother of James	Lebbaeus Thaddaeus	Thaddaeus		
Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot		

Who were gathered together?

Jesus had many disciples – not just the 12 apostles – and on this occasion 120 of them had gathered together to hear from the apostles (presumably about what had happened to Jesus and His ascension) and no doubt to encourage one another with fellowship. But we learn from 1 Cor 15: 6 that Jesus had appeared to more than 500 brethren at once. The implication of this of course, is that there were probably more than the 500 as well – although that is somewhat speculation.

But we know that not all of the disciples were gathered together here in Acts 1, but only around 120 of them, and there were other disciples who were not gathered together.

How was Judas killed?

Judas is said to be killed by “...*falling headlong and bursting open in the middle, his entrails fell out...*” However, we see a slightly different account in Mt 27:5: “... *So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself...*” (Mt 27:5 NIV).

Whilst this might seem to be a contradiction, by putting the two accounts together we would get the following situation: Judas went out and hanged himself, following which the rope broke (some have suggested that people refused to take his body down, and that he may have stayed there for several days, causing his body the “bloat”). When the rope broke, he fell to the ground, causing his body to burst and his intestines to come out. It is from this description that some have concluded the bloated body which ruptured when he fell. However, it is also possible that he fell on something that caused his body to be torn and rupture.

The point here is, that we should not immediately look at seeming contradictions and conclude that that is what they are, but rather look for explanations that render both accounts to be correct.

A specific fulfilment of Psalms 69:25, 109:8

Many prophecies in the Old Testament are said to be fulfilled in the New Testament. The interesting thing is that in reading the prophecies, we would never conclude what the fulfilment would be. Can you imagine how the Jews could perceive it, not understanding the fulfilment in Christ, as we do? And yet, when we read the New Testament, we have the meaning of the prophecies explained for us – not in speculative terms by men who are guessing at what the prophecies might mean – but by the inspired writers of the New Testament revealing what God says the prophecies mean.

In this case, a specific application is made of the prophecies relating to the replacement of Judas to the office of an apostle. This raises an interesting question as to how Peter had perceived this when the HS had yet to empower him, and shows that the apostles were empowered with sufficient information to enable them to perform their function. There will be further examples of “progressive revelation” as we continue through the studies.

The qualifications of an apostle

The qualifications for an Apostle include that he be “...*a witness of His resurrection...*” Yet this was not the only qualification. They were also “...*chosen by God...*”, and were “...*baptised (immersed) with the Holy Spirit...*”.

The qualifications could not include “...*accompanying Jesus earthly ministry...*” (1:21), or this would exclude Paul. Yet Jesus said that He appeared to Paul so that he would be qualified to be an apostle as a witness of the resurrected Christ: “... *I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting, the Lord replied.* ¹⁶ *.... I have appeared to you to appoint you ... as a witness of what you have seen of me ...*” (Acts 28:16 NIV), and “...*But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel...*” (Acts 9:15 NIV). (Emphasis mine). It can be shown that all of the apostles fulfilled these qualifications (eg Acts 1:2).

Matthias was chosen by God as an Apostle, by the drawing of lots (ie drawing straws). This was a common way in the Old Testament of determining God’s choice in matters.