

THE ACT OF THE APOSTLES - NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY - PART TWO - CHAPTERS ONE AND TWO

Chapter one of Acts is in a sense chapter 25 of Luke's Gospel. It concludes the account of the resurrection appearances of Jesus and His ascension back to heaven.(1:1-11) In 1:1 Luke reminded Theophilus how the gospel was about all that Jesus began to do and to teach. He now completes the account of all that Jesus did and taught in one human body. What He did was proof;(1:3) what He said was a command(1:4,8), a promise(1:5) and a warning.(1:7) He made it clear that while He would have a future kingdom on earth, and there would be eternal life for them in heaven, they were not to be preoccupied with the future but with the tasks He had given them to do right now on earth establishing the kingdom of God in the hearts of men.

He gave them a command to be His witnesses first in their home town, Jerusalem, then in the rest of their country, Judea, next in the place they least wanted to go, Samaria, and finally to the ends of the earth. (1:8) He promised them the power of the Holy Spirit to make the task possible. This would happen when they were baptised with the Holy Spirit.(1:5) People get confused as to what this means but I Cor.12:13 and Rom.6:1-11 make it clear that it is simply that act of the Holy Spirit by which He takes the repentant sinner and makes him part of the body of Christ who died on the cross, went back to heaven, and is now His church on earth. At the same time we 'drink' of the Spirit by receiving the resurrection life of Christ into us so that we can live the Christian life and fulfil the task He has given to us.

From the Mount of Olives, where the ascension took place and to which He will one day return,(Zech.14:4) they returned to the same upper room in which they had celebrated the Passover and met Jesus after His resurrection. We are reminded again of the 11 remaining apostles. From the Gospels we know them as a very ordinary group of men, very different in personalities and backgrounds, and consequently up till now frequently in conflict with one another. With them were the women who had faithfully followed the Lord and sought to care for Him and the apostles in a practical sense. There were also His brothers who are named in Matt.13:55 and who had at an earlier stage in His ministry found Him an embarrassment and tried to have Him locked up.(Mk.3:21, 31-35) Humanly speaking they were not an impressive group of people which makes what follows so exciting because of the extraordinary things which the Holy Spirit did with ordinary people.

The rest of the chapter one describes the one meeting which Peter called in the ten days from the Ascension to the day of Pentecost. The time was otherwise spent in prayer. Peter decided that the vacancy left by Judas had to be filled and what the qualifications had to be for the twelfth apostle. Left with a short list of two, they cast lots and hoped God would bless their choice. We tend to do the same. It was a futile exercise then, and still is. When God was ready He would choose the twelfth apostle, Paul, but Paul was not yet ready. The Lord still wants to be the one who appoints Christians to a task for which He knows they are ready and for which He has equipped them. How God equips people is the subject of chapter 2.

2:1 Q.1 What three annual feasts did the Jews celebrate?(Lev.23) Of what events in history did they remind the Jews? To what did they look forward? In what way was Pentecost to be different from the other feasts?

2:2-4 Q.2 What four unusual events occurred on this special day? What special picture was contained in each one? What connection might there be between these four ideas?

2:5-11 Q.3 What significant background are we given which explains why God did this particular thing on this day? Check a map to see where the crowd present actually came from. What explanation do verses 6,8 and 11 give of what happened? What help does this explanation give us as to why God might do similar things in the rest of the New Testament and today?

2:12,13 Q.4 How did the events of the day of Pentecost divide the listening crowd? Why does this still happen today when the gospel is preached?

2:14-21 Q.5 Peter referred to Joel chapter 2 to explain what had just happened. What were the key points Joel had made about what God would do on this special day? What other event does verse 20 link to the giving of the Holy Spirit? How would our relationship with the Holy Spirit be different before and after this day? What response did God want men to make?

2:22-36 Q.6 What three vital facts concerning Jesus does Peter ask his audience to consider? Two of these facts many present had witnessed. What were they? How did he use the Old Testament to support the third fact which none of the audience had actually seen? How was Peter's explanation of those OT scriptures different from the way the Jews had previously been taught to understand them? What help does Peter's message give us in knowing how to convince people today about Jesus?

2:37-39 Q.7 What does verse 37 tell us about the effectiveness of Peter's preaching? How should we learn from his example? What did Peter tell the crowd to do? What did he promise God would do in response? Again how should we keep his example in mind?

2:40-42 Q.8 What was the outcome of Peter's message that day? Why had his preaching been so effective? If we preached the same message in the main street of our town, would we see the same results? What four activities were characteristic of this new church?

2:43-47 Q.9 How do these verses explain verse 42 in more detail? In what way should they still be the heart of our church life? What effect did such a programme have on church growth? Do the same principles still work in the same way today?