

Acts of The Apostles (#1)
Introduction to the Book of Acts
Acts 1:1-26
Sermon by Pastor Sylvia Chan

A bridge between the Gospel accounts and the preaching of the Gospel in all the earth

Today we begin to study the book of Acts, an important book. What is this book about and why is it important?

The life and the teaching of the Lord Jesus were recorded in the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. After the Lord had been crucified and then resurrected from the dead, he appeared to his disciples and gave them the commission to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth. The disciples then carried out the Lord's commands, and their activities are recorded in the book of Acts. Therefore Acts is a bridge between the Gospel accounts of the Lord Jesus Christ and the preaching of the Gospel after the Lord's resurrection.

The Lord Jesus commanded the apostles to stay in Jerusalem to wait for the promise of the Father

^{ESV} **Acts 1:1-8** In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴ And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." ⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them,

“It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Act 1:1-8 ESV)

1. The recipient of the book of Acts

Here this passage says right from the start in verse 1, “In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach”; it is addressed to a person named Theophilus (“Theophilus” means “someone who loves God”); he is the recipient of the book of Acts.

2. The book of Acts is the second book

It also says in verse 1 that the first book is about all that Jesus began to do and teach, which means that Acts is the second book. What then is the first book?

^{ESV} **Luke 1:3** it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, (Luk 1:3 ESV)

This verse says that the Gospel of Luke was also written to the same recipient Theophilus as the book of Acts; hence the first book is the Gospel of Luke, and the second book is the book of Acts. Both were written by Luke for the same person Theophilus.

3. The promise of the Father: baptism with the Holy Spirit

The passage Acts 1:1-8 says that the first book, the Gospel of Luke, was about the Lord Jesus’ teaching and his work among the people. After the Lord was crucified and then resurrected from the dead, he appeared to the 11 apostles (minus Judas, who had betrayed the Lord). For forty days the Lord taught them many things concerning the Kingdom of God (please refer to my earlier series of sermons on “The Kingdom of God and Eternal Life”). In verses 4-5 the Lord told them to stay in Jerusalem to wait for the promise of the Father:

^{ESV} **Acts 1:4-5** And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” (Act 1:4-5 ESV)

Here the Lord told the disciples about the promise of the Father which is the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

“Baptism with the Holy Spirit” is very important, and is something that all Christians ought to seek and experience. Usually Christians should not seek spiritual experiences merely to satisfy our pride and our curiosity, but this one particular experience we should seek: “baptism with the Holy Spirit”.

My testimony: I was baptized in 1983 at Ottawa Bible Church. According to the practice of the church, all the newly baptized would share his or her testimony at the pulpit one week after the baptism. I was very timid by nature; in my childhood back in Vietnam, at school I didn’t dare say a word to answer the teachers’ questions even though I knew all the answers, and that made the teachers very angry. Not only that, my English was very poor during my time in Ottawa because I had learned English on my own by self study; I didn’t have a teacher to guide me. (Please refer to my testimony “Goodness and Lovingkindness Will Follow Me All The Days of My Life” at my website www.GospelAndSalvation.com.) After the baptism, I prepared my testimony in Chinese, having written down every word. The pastor arranged a sister to be my translator. When I walked up to the pulpit, my whole body was trembling, but I didn’t stop, I kept on walking. I stood at the pulpit, and once I opened my mouth, suddenly I felt as if a big bucket of water was poured down on my head. I got quite a shock, but all my fears were gone. I looked at my written testimony and read every word carefully and with clarity. From that day on, I was transformed, and have since been very eager to share the word of God and about my experience.

We are going to study the baptism with the Holy Spirit in the next chapter Acts 2.

The Lord Jesus will come in the same way as he goes into heaven

^{ESV} **Acts 1:9-11** And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” (Act 1:9-11 ESV)

Here this passage says the Lord Jesus was lifted up into heaven. After the Lord had finished teaching the apostles, he was lifted up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. Two men in white appeared, and told the apostles that the Lord Jesus will come back in the same way as he had been taken into heaven.

This is a prophecy, and a very important one. The Lord had been warning us again and again that many false Christs will appear in the Last Days, and they will deceive many people and lead many astray. But here it says in verse 11 that the Lord Jesus will come back in the same way as he had gone into heaven. Today the global communication via the web is so advanced and effective that the whole world will see his coming in real time. That means anyone who does not descend from heaven is not Jesus Christ coming back! That is the clear sign to discern who is the real Christ, and who is the false Christ!

Choosing an apostle to replace Judas

^{ESV} **Acts 1:12-26** Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away. ¹³ And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. ¹⁴ All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. ¹⁵

In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said,¹⁶ “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.¹⁷ For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.”¹⁸ (Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.¹⁹ And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)²⁰ “For it is written in the Book of Psalms, ‘May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it’; and ‘Let another take his office.’²¹ So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.”²³ And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias.²⁴ And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen²⁵ to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.”²⁶ And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. (Act 1:12-26 ESV)

Here this passage says the 11 apostles returned to Jerusalem to wait for the baptism with the Holy Spirit just as the Lord Jesus had instructed them. Together with Mary the mother of the Lord Jesus, his brothers and some other women who had followed the Lord Jesus, they formed a group of about 120 people and they devoted themselves to prayer daily. On one of those days, Peter stood up and suggested that they choose someone among them to replace Judas who had betrayed the Lord Jesus.

Please take notice that Peter and the disciples did not come to this decision based on their own opinion, but they followed the prophecy in the book of Psalms. The first part of the prophecy: “May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it” is from Psalm 69:25:

^{ESV} **Psalm 69:25** May their camp be a desolation; let no one dwell in their tents.
(Psa 69:25 ESV)

The second part of the prophecy: “Let another take his office” is from Psalm 109:8:

^{ESV} **Psalm 109:8** May his days be few; may another take his office! (Psa 109:8
ESV)

Then the disciples put forward two persons who had followed the Lord Jesus the whole time since the baptism of John the Baptist until the day the Lord Jesus was taken up to heaven. One person was Joseph called Barsabbas, the other was Matthias. They cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

Conclusion

Please take notice that this is the last time that the casting of lots is found in the Bible. Casting lots was a common practice in the Hebrew Scripture. Ever since the time of Aaron and Moses, the Israelites would often cast lots with the Urim and Thummim to seek the will of Yahweh God. But when it came to the time of the New Covenant, this was the last time that Christians cast lots, because after this incident the Holy Spirit was given to disciples as the Lord Jesus had promised, and they would be led by the Holy Spirit, and won't need to cast lots anymore.

^{ESV} **John 14:26** But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. (Joh 14:26 ESV)

^{ESV} **John 16:13** When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. (Joh 16:13
ESV)

But on the other hand, only the true disciples who follow the teaching of the Lord totally would be led by the Holy Spirit and will know the will of Yahweh God:

^{ESV} **Romans 12:1-2** I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

(Rom 12:1-2 ESV)

Only those who are willing to offer their bodies totally as a living sacrifice to Yahweh God, would have their minds transformed, and be able to discern the will of God.