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Through
Series®

 JourneyThrough™

Acts

50 Daily Insights from God's Word by **David Cook**

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Foreword

Former physician and preacher Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones once said, “I know of no greater tonic, in the realm of the Spirit, than a thorough reading of that book.” He was referring to the book of Acts, and when a renowned medical doctor gives such advice we need to take notice.

Luke is the author of both the gospel which bears his name and the book of Acts. Like a modern movie director, he never lets his camera slip out of focus or off target. We might be tempted to follow characters touched by the gospel back to their homes: the Ethiopian treasurer or perhaps the Philippian gaoler and his newly Christian family. We would love the camera to linger longer, but it never does. The focus in the gospel is on the Lord Jesus and His movement towards Jerusalem, whereas in Acts the focus is on the unstoppable gospel as it moves out of Jerusalem and to the ends of the earth.

Let this book be a tonic for you, strengthening your faith in God as you let Him work in and through you to bring the gospel to others. This gospel is still powerful in transforming and bringing people to new life in Christ. The same God is at work, and we are empowered by the same Spirit to bring the same gospel to the world.

All Glory to Him,
David Cook



We're glad you've decided to join us on a journey into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ!

For over 50 years, we have been known for our daily Bible reading notes, *Our Daily Bread*. Many readers enjoy the pithy, inspiring, and relevant articles that point them to God and the wisdom and promises of His unchanging Word.

Building on the foundation of *Our Daily Bread*, we have developed this devotional series to help believers spend time with God in His Word, book by book. We trust this daily meditation on God's Word will draw you into a closer relationship with Him through our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

How to use this resource

READ: This book is designed to be read alongside God's Word as you journey with Him. It offers explanatory notes to help you understand the Scriptures in fresh ways.

REFLECT: The questions are designed to help you respond to God and His Word, letting Him change you from the inside out.

RECORD: The space provided allows you to keep a diary of your journey as you record your thoughts and jot down your responses.

An Overview

The book of Acts is one of the most exciting parts of the whole Bible. Jesus has just ascended to heaven, the Spirit has come to the church, and we see God at work. Luke's purpose in writing Acts is to show the triumphant progress of the gospel, starting from Jerusalem, through Judea, into Samaria, throughout Asia Minor, into Europe, and finally to Rome. However this is not triumphalism, for the gospel messenger will be opposed, tortured, imprisoned, and martyred. There will be opposition from outside religious and commercial interests and even dissension within the church, yet the gospel will progress and people will come to Christ. Embark on a journey through the book of Acts, and see how the Holy Spirit empowers the church to witness in ever widening circles, until the gospel reaches the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

The Structure of Acts

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| 1–7 | The gospel in Jerusalem and Judea; Peter the primary apostle; Jews the primary target. |
| 8–12 | Into Samaria; Peter still active; Paul converted; the Gentile Cornelius converted. |
| 13–28 | The missionary journeys; the gospel reaches Rome; Paul the primary apostle; Jews still contacted first, but Gentiles now the primary target. |

Key Verse

"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."
—Acts 1:8

Day 1

Read Luke 24:46–49 and Acts 1:8

Luke is the author of both the Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles. Today's verses provide the bridge between the two volumes.

In Luke 24:46–47, Jesus summarises the purpose of God. Notice that verse 46 is a good summary of Luke's gospel—the suffering, death, and resurrection of the Christ. Verse 47 is a good summary of Acts—that same gospel being preached to the ends of the earth. Notice that verse 47 is as much the purpose of God as verse 46. It clearly states that the broadcast of the gospel, mission, and evangelism is at the very heart of God's ongoing purpose until His Son returns.

Acts 1:8 is a similar verse to Luke 24:47–49. It sets the pattern for the unfolding narrative of Acts. The Holy Spirit will come on the church to empower the church for witness in ever widening circles until the gospel reaches the ends of the earth.

God buries His messengers but not His message.

One of the characteristics of Luke's writing is that he allows his emphasis

to fall on his last words. In the original Greek, the last word of his long introduction in Luke 1:4 is "certainty". He wants his patron Theophilus to be certain of the facts that Luke reports.

Similarly, in Greek the last words of Acts are "without hindrance" (Acts 28:31). The gospel has reached Rome, but it will continue on its unstoppable and unhindered way until all God's purposes have been fulfilled. This truth will be amply demonstrated throughout the book.

The book of Acts provides the church of the twenty-first century with its mandate and your mandate for today. **You have the Holy Spirit. He will empower you today for witness to Christ in a lost world.**

As Christian preacher and author C. H. Spurgeon writes, "All hope in ministry lies in the Spirit of God operating on the spirit of men."¹

¹ C. H. Spurgeon, quoted in *Reformation and Revival* 9, no. 1 (2000).

ThinkThrough

Think of the people you contact and of your witness to them. How can it be more effective?

Do you think we make Luke 24:47 of lesser importance than Luke 24:46? What effect does this have on the church?

SAMPLE

Day 2

Read Acts 1:1–11

The opening two verses connect the reader to Luke 1:1–4, and just as in Luke, they are addressed to Theophilus. Acts takes up where the gospel of Luke left off, that is, with the resurrection of Jesus.

In verses 4–8, Luke records Jesus' final words to His disciples before He ascends to His Father. The disciples' question of verse 6 is a natural one. As resurrected Messiah, will Jesus now bring down the curtain of history, restore Israel to her rightful place, and reign over all creation? Jesus makes it clear that before this happens, there is more to be done, but it is not merely human work, it is Spirit-empowered witness.

So they are to wait (v. 4), and they will receive power (v. 8)—this is the gift of God to His people of which John the Baptist was speaking (v. 5)—the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The effect of this baptism is that the Holy Spirit will enable the church in its witness. Your witness today is one part of a two-part witness. You witness, but as you do, the Holy Spirit also witnesses with you (see John 15:26–27).

Jesus then ascends to the right hand of the Father (v. 9; Acts 2:33).

The proof of this, says Peter, is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:32–33). The disciples are reminded that just as Jesus has gone up, so He will come down. These heavenly messengers, similar to those who announced the resurrection (Luke 24:4), now remind the church that Jesus, who has just ascended, will come back again (vv. 10–11). This implies a limited time to work until Jesus returns.

Jesus spoke of His ascension in Luke 22:69. **His resurrection culminated in His ascension, and His ascension means His total exaltation to the right hand of God where He intercedes for us (Romans 8:34).** He now occupies the highest place (Philippians 2:9) He bestows gifts to His people (Ephesians 4:11) and from the place of exaltation, He will return in triumph to bring in the new heaven and the new earth.

It is little wonder that Paul encourages us to set our hearts and minds on the things above where Christ is seated at God's right hand (Colossians 3:1–3).



ThinkThrough

Think of the ways in which Christ's ascension can be a source of blessing for you. What is He doing at the Father's right hand?

What do you think the ascension meant to the Lord Jesus?

SAMPLE

Day 3

Read Acts 1:12–26

With the final separation of Jesus from His disciples of numbering 120 (Acts 1:15), one would have expected gloom to set in. But no, we find the Christians going about their business. They return to Jerusalem where Jesus told them they were to wait for the gift of God (Acts 1:4) and they set themselves to pray earnestly (v. 14).

Peter seems by now to be the acknowledged leader and spokesman for the group. He sees, in the betrayal of Christ by Judas and the selection of a replacement for him among the apostles, a fulfilment of Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8. To qualify for selection, a man must have been with the apostles, from the time John was baptising up to the ascension of Jesus, and must have personally seen the risen Christ, as a witness to the resurrection (vv. 21–22). Two men are proposed, prayer is offered for guidance, lots are cast, and Matthias is added to the eleven apostles.

Why does Luke include this detail? Why not move from the ascension straight to Pentecost? After all, Matthias is not mentioned again in the book. Judas' betrayal was a major failure of leadership that needs to be acknowledged and rectified. Luke tells us in some detail of the failure of Judas because he is providing a "warts and all" coverage of the history of

the church. He does not idealise the church; he recognises the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, the bickering over the widows in Acts 6, Peter's behaviour in Acts 10, and even Paul's impatience with John Mark in Acts 15.

"The best of men are men at best."

We are to recognise our own frailty, and Luke shows the church facing up to the need to renew its leadership following the apostasy of one of the apostles.

Damage had been done and restoration was required. The church did not—and must not—simply try to cover up its sin. Sin needs to be acknowledged and dealt with.

In an atmosphere of prayer, Peter sets out the necessary criteria, the lot is cast, and Matthias is the choice. The apostolate is now complete once more and its key function (v. 22) is to witness to the reality of Christ's resurrection.

Bible commentator Matthew Henry writes on Acts 1:22, "See what the apostles were ordained to; not a secular dignity and dominion . . . but to preach Christ and the power of His resurrection."²

² Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 6 (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing, 1985).

ThinkThrough

In what ways does the early church provide a model for us concerning leadership selection?

In what ways does the example of Judas serve as a warning to you (vv. 16–17)?

SAMPLE

Day 4

Read Acts 2:1–13

Pentecost (meaning “fifty”) was one of the three great festivals of Judaism, known as the Festival of Weeks in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 16:9–12). It was celebrated 50 days after the beginning of barley harvest, a time to give thanks to God for the completion of the harvest. Later, it came to commemorate the giving of the law to Moses at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:1). The festival was all about fulfillment, completion, and finality. It is most fitting then that the Holy Spirit should be poured out on the church at this festival. His coming is the evidence that Christ has risen and ascended to God’s right hand; His work is now complete.

The coming of the Spirit is associated with the sound of wind (v. 2; cf. John 3:8) and the sight of fire (v. 3; cf. Exodus 3:2). The effect is that the 120 gathered disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit (v. 4; see Jeremiah 31:33, which anticipates this day) and they speak in tongues, so that the different language groups in the crowd (vv. 9–11) hear them disclosing the wonders of God in their own language. Luke records the range of responses—“bewilderment” (v. 6), “utterly amazed” (v. 7), “amazed and perplexed” (v. 12), and mockery (v. 13).

We may argue about tongues here, but note that the recipients did not

speak in inarticulate sounds. The word “language” in verse 6 translates the original word “dialect” and parallels with verses 4 and 11 where the word used is *glossa*, or tongue. The ideas are parallel and the words are used synonymously—the “tongue” here is a dialect; here are people speaking in known native languages and dialects without having attended language school.

The focus of these verses is that God has come to live among His people, and according to some commentaries, the immediate effect of this is the reversal of the scrambling of languages that occurred with the building of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11). **The Holy Spirit has come upon the church and He enables effective witness.** He is the Spirit who Jesus said would empower believers for witness (Acts 1:8).

Matthew Henry says the significance of this event “is to dignify and so to distinguish these men as messengers from heaven and therefore like Moses at the bush, the crowd will turn aside and see this great sight”.³

³ Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*.



ThinkThrough

How do you think the Holy Spirit helps you in your witness?

What do you think wind, fire, and tongues might symbolise about the Holy Spirit's ministry?

SAMPLE

Day 5

Read Acts 2:14–41

Whenever a crowd gathers in Acts, a believer takes the opportunity of preaching to it. Here is Peter, who a little earlier had denied Christ, now fearlessly and preaching the gospel with crystal clarity. The day of Pentecost is the day in the church calendar when many churches would preach on the Holy Spirit. But the Spirit is not the focus of Peter's address, rather, Jesus is. Peter speaks only of the Spirit in relation to Jesus.

The big idea of this Pentecostal sermon is that Jesus was crucified, was raised to life, and is now exalted to God's right hand, and that Peter and the others are eyewitnesses of these events. Jesus was accredited by God (v. 22) according to the set purpose of God, was crucified (v. 23), and was raised from the dead. Death had no claim on Him because He had no sin (v. 24). The proof that He is exalted to God's right hand is that He now pours out the Holy Spirit (vv. 32–33). The summary is found in verse 36.

Peter's audience was Jewish. Therefore, he wants them to know they should not be surprised at these events because they fulfil what Joel predicted for the last days (vv. 17–21;

Joel 2:28–32). In verses 25–28, Peter quotes David in Psalm 16:8–11. Acts 2:27 are rich and highly significant words—Peter says David did not use these words of himself but of one greater than David who will not be abandoned “to the realm of the dead”. The Old Testament is Peter's reference point for the Jewish audience.

Notice also that Peter does not hesitate to be direct. In verses 23–24, he makes the clearest contrast between what they did to the Son—“put him to death”—and what God himself did—“raised him from the dead”. The response to this sermon was deep conviction (v. 37). Peter tells them they are to repent and give public witness to their repentance through baptism (v. 38).

The Christian gospel involves take and give (v. 38). God takes our sin and deals with it and then gives us His Holy Spirit. This is the ongoing offer to all those who repent and turn to Christ.

3,000 accepted the message that day (v. 41).



ThinkThrough

Think about the twin blessings of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit you have received. Turn your thoughts into praise.

In verse 40, Luke describes Peter as warning the crowd. Are we serious enough in sharing the gospel with others?

SAMPLE

NOTE TO THE READER

We invite you to share your response to the message
in this book by writing to us at:

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or sending an email to:

dhdasiapacific@dhp.org

For more information about Journey Through series,
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Journey Through **Acts**

The book of Acts is one of the most exciting parts of the whole Bible. Jesus has just ascended to heaven, the Spirit has come to the church, and we see God at work—building the church and causing the gospel message to spread through Judea, into Samaria, throughout Asia, into Europe, and finally to Rome. We see that despite opposition from outside religious and commercial interests and even dissension within the church, the gospel will progress and people will come to Christ.

Embark on a daily journey through the book of Acts, and see how the Holy Spirit empowers the church to witness in ever widening circles, until the gospel reaches the ends of the earth.



David Cook was Principal of the Sydney Missionary and Bible College for 26 years. He is an accomplished writer and has authored Bible commentaries, books on the Minor Prophets, and several Bible study guides.

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