

Back to the Basics

—a study of Acts

How to Use This Study Book

This study book will not only help you prepare for discussion in your Bible study group each week, it is also uniquely designed to guide you daily in God's Word and toward a closer walk with Him.

At the beginning of each lesson, you will find the Scripture to memorize for the week, as well as daily Bible readings. Both the memory verse and the daily readings directly correlate to the lesson theme. Begin memorizing early in the week, and by the end of the week you'll have it well hidden in your heart for God to use richly in your life. The Bible readings can be a daily part of your time with the Lord. Read and meditate upon the passage, and then spend some time in prayer. The prayer requests you wrote down at the end of the previous lesson can be part of your prayer time.

The passage of Scripture covered in each lesson is at the top of the first page with the lesson title. The Lesson Overview and Life Awareness sections will help prepare you for the Bible study. The actual study itself is usually divided into two or three sections each week. We recommend that you cover one section a day for Bible study, with an additional day toward the end of the week dedicated to the Bible and Life Application section at the end of each lesson.

Each section of the Bible study begins with the title and a Scripture reference. This is the passage of Scripture to be studied. Read the passage from your own Bible before reading the commentary that follows in the lesson. You'll get much more out of your study. There is no divine power in the commentary, only in the Word of God. The commentary, however, can help you better understand and apply God's Word to your life. After reading the commentary, prayerfully read and answer the questions that follow.

After the Bible study, on a separate day if possible, take time before the Lord to search your heart for how He would have you respond to what He has said to you during the week. The Bible and Life Application section has a reading that will help you begin to focus on how to apply the Word of God, and there is a space for you to record how you believe God is leading you to respond to Him. Then *do* it, in accordance with God's command for us to be "doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22).

Most of all, relish your time with the One who redeemed you by the blood of His Son and made you a member of His family.

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*I will build my church; and the gates of
hell shall not prevail against it.*

—Matt. 16:18b

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Christ's Commission to Believers

Acts 1:1-8

SCRIPTURE TO MEMORIZE

“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

WALKING WITH THE LORD

These Scriptures give you a ready-made devotional that will take your heart and mind into the subject of this week’s study. Walk with the Lord prayerfully this week.

Sunday	Matthew 28	Thursday	Romans 1:1-16
Monday	Psalms 16	Friday	II Corinthians 4:1-7
Tuesday	Ephesians 2:11-22	Saturday	Romans 9:25-10:5, 12-13; 11:7-12, 25
Wednesday	John 20:19-31		

LESSON OVERVIEW

Jesus commanded His disciples to carry out the mission originally given to Israel (I Chron. 16:8-9, 24, 30-31). Israel had failed to declare God’s glory to the world and was set aside because of it. The Book of Acts records the exciting launch of a new witness to the world—His church. Today, Jesus calls each believer to be His witness. We are to live in a manner pleasing to Christ and to proclaim His salvation to the lost.

LIFE AWARENESS

Imagine your niece, unsaved and uninterested, is HIV positive. This vibrant young lady suddenly doesn’t have all the time in the world. Her family, your sister and her husband, are equally

uninterested in hearing about *your* religious beliefs. The victory through the risen Saviour lies in your heart. What do you do? How do you do it? How do you get them to listen?

The “Go ye” of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19 is definitely not a new command to believers. Therefore, if we aren’t careful we can become complacent about proclaiming the message of victory in Christ. We need to declare the Gospel with a new attitude—a new fervor. The need is not so much for a greater understanding of the task before us as it is for a greater zeal to do what we already know. The resurrection of Christ was the heartbeat of the early church’s witness. Is it ours?

PREPARATION FOR WITNESS

(Acts 1:1-5)

In Acts we see the church at work. First century believers didn’t play church games; they gave serious attention to the responsibility to make Jesus Christ known. The truth of the Resurrection profoundly affected their witness and service to others. It transformed them in amazing ways. The zeal of the early church is our model. How well do we follow it?

In the first chapter of Acts, the emphasis is on the Lord’s preparation of believers for worldwide witness. This preparation included giving the Christians absolute proof that Jesus Christ is alive, having risen from the dead. After receiving this proof, the apostles were commanded to wait in Jerusalem until they were empowered from Heaven. These men were expected to give a valiant witness of Christ’s resurrection. But it was a ministry for which they were completely inadequate to do by themselves. Only God could empower them to do His will.

How was this small group of believers to meet the Lord’s commission? The same way we do today. Our faith is founded upon the certainty of God’s promises, not upon feelings. We have the same Source of power the early church did. When the Spirit was “poured out” upon the church on the day of Pentecost, the disciples became new people of God (Acts 2:14-18). Only in the power of the Spirit can we carry out the Lord’s commission (1:8).

Many students of the Bible mistakenly think that the Lord’s command to the disciples to be His witnesses was original and unique to the church. However, His command to witness can be traced to the Old Testament—to Israel. (Isaiah 44:1-8 is an Old Testament counterpart to Acts 1:8. See also I Chronicles 16:8-9; II Chronicles 6:32-33; Isaiah 55.) King David encouraged the nation of Israel to witness to the nations after the ark of the covenant was returned to Jerusalem.

Isaiah exhorted Israel to be a “light of the Gentiles” (Isa. 42:6) and declared her to be “my witnesses” (43:10). It was God’s intention from the beginning of Israel’s history to use her to reach out to the world. God expected Israel to “declare His glory and His marvellous works” (66:19) to the surrounding nations in order that they, too, could know His salvation.

Sadly Israel failed in this task. So God set them aside for a time. Now Jesus calls His church to be the witness of His salvation and glory to the world. However, God is not finished with Israel. One day they will again have the opportunity to declare the sublime glory and saving grace of their Messiah.

1. What difference has the truth of the resurrection of Jesus made in your life?

2. What “infallible proofs” (Acts 1:3) has Christ shown you that He is alive?

3. How is your church similar to the early church?

How is it different?

PLAN FOR WITNESS

(Acts 1:6-8)

At the time of Christ’s ascension, the disciples were primarily interested in learning when the kingdom would be restored to Israel. But their concern with the future kingdom threatened to obscure their vision of God’s present plan for them to be witnesses of Christ’s death and resurrection to the world.

Our Lord did not rebuke the apostles for their kingdom beliefs. Their doctrine was correct, and it demonstrated faith in God's prophetic Word. But the Lord had extensive work for the disciples—His church—to do before the prophecies would be fulfilled.

The order in which things happen is often significant. In order to succeed, the disciples had to first receive empowerment, which came in the Person of the Holy Spirit.

Many churches face problems because they rely on their own strength rather than the power available in the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. Empowerment must come before witnessing. When churches rely on God's power, how are things different? The Word of God is preached boldly, conversion of the lost is more evident, prayers are more fervent and less self-centered, and more people are willing to offer themselves in sacrificial service to the Lord and His people.

God's power is available to all Christians—from the greatest preachers to the humblest believers—for His ministry and purposes. The focus of what we proclaim is to be the Person and work of Jesus Christ. There is no substitute for the power of God in carrying out the purposes of God. And God's great purposes are carried out by obedient believers witnessing for Christ by words, actions, choices, lifestyle—at home, work, or school.

The strategy outlined by Jesus to His disciples had both a geographical and theological significance. The extension of the Gospel message began in Jerusalem but rippled out in ever-widening circles, eventually to include the whole world.

Jesus told the woman of Samaria that God's strategy from the beginning was that "salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22b). The Gospel moved from the centers of Jewish population to Samaria, comprised of those who were half-Jew and half-Gentile. Then the Gospel was proclaimed among a purely Gentile audience—"to the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8b).

1. What sources of spiritual "power" do some false religions claim to have?

2. How do Christians avail themselves of the true Source of spiritual power?

What can we do to help fellow believers find God's power for their lives?

3. What kind of outreach strategy do you have personally?

What kind of strategy does your church have to reach its community?

What might a biblical outreach strategy look like in the area where you live?

BIBLE AND LIFE APPLICATION

In the early stages of adulthood, we are full of physical power and energy. However, injury or illness can rob our strength. Similarly, there are times in our Christian walk when we serve in the power of the Holy Spirit. But when we turn our eyes from God, we rob ourselves of the strength He gives us. In those times, we must recognize the need for spiritual empowerment that can come only by submitting to the will of God.

Do you grow weary in the details and conflicts of daily living? Has your joy been obscured by poor health, family situations, or problems at work? Remember the Source of your power. Don't attempt the business of living or witnessing without spending time before the Lord.

The joy of serving God and others glows in the life of the believer who is convinced of the victory he or she has in the resurrected Christ and the glory of knowing Him intimately. Witnessing is something every heart without Christ needs. The blessing and triumph available to all who hear the Gospel must ring joyfully in every believer's life. This joy and true success come through dependence on the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and obedience to the Word of God.

CLASS PRAYER NEEDS

Pray for each member of your class, specifically that they may experience the power that comes by prayer and the difference that Christ's resurrection can make in their lives.