

My Favorite Thing About ACTS

Acts 1:4-8

October 30, 2021

On to Acts and the History of 1st Century Christianity.

Acts was written around **62/63 AD** and Luke is believed to be the author. Once again, the information was directed to one person – **Theophilus**.

The book covers the first 30 years of Christianity and is a bridge between the story of Jesus and the church of the New Testament.

Which brings us to **My Favorite Thing – The powerful working of the Holy Spirit on behalf of the fledgling church** (named 40 times in the book).

Jesus had promised the disciples the **Holy Spirit**:

- **Luke 24:49** - I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.
- **John 14:26** - ... But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.
- **Acts 1:8** - 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.

After He returned to heaven, Jesus' disciples returned to Jerusalem to await the promised "**Counselor**". While they waited, the group, which included Jesus' mother and brothers – 120 people in all – devoted themselves to prayer.

10 days later, on the Day of Pentecost, they were all together when suddenly, they heard a noise like a violent wind as tongues of fire came to rest on each person in the room – they were **all** filled with the **Holy Spirit** and the whole group began to speak in different languages.

Because of Pentecost, there were many Jews from the Diaspora in Jerusalem. They had also heard the sound of the wind and were amazed when the Apostles spoke to them of the mighty works of God in their own languages - "**How is this possible? They are from Galilee**"

As a result of **Holy Spirit Power** working through Peter, 3000 people were baptized that day.

Let's consider Peter for a moment.

Just 6 weeks earlier, Peter, who had boldly sworn that he **WOULD NOT** abandon Jesus, **HAD** denied Him and run out into the night. Now, here we are. Not only was the **Holy Spirit** working in Peter, He was working through Peter and many lives were being changed.

Peter will dominate the first 12 chapters of Acts.

In the Temple a lame man asked Peter and John for a donation. Peter responded, "**I don't have silver or gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth – get up!**"

Immediately the man's feet and ankles became strong and he began to leap and walk around – a crowd began to gather. Peter addressed them: "**Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. ¹⁴ You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. ¹⁵ You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶ By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see..... ¹⁹ Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.... {Acts 3:12-19}**

Peter and John were arrested.

- **Acts 4:4** - But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.

The next day the religious leaders began to question them, "**By what power, or in Whose name have you done this?**"

Peter, filled with the **Holy Spirit** responded: *"Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹ If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, ¹⁰ then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹ He is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone." ¹² Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." {Acts 4:8-12}*

The Sanhedrin knew these men were uneducated fishermen, but they spoke with power and conviction and the council began to understand that these men had been with Jesus.

As the congregation spent time praising God and asking for His guidance, the house was, once again, filled with the **Holy Spirit** and they began to speak the Word of God with boldness and with great power regarding the resurrection of Jesus. Those who listened were moved to provide for the needy among the congregation.

Peter was given **Holy Spirit** power when he and John were arrested again and taken to the Sanhedrin: *"We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name."*

Peter: *"We must obey God rather than men! Jesus -- whom you killed by hanging him on a tree -- was raised from the dead and now sits at the right hand of God that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."*

The Sanhedrin wanted to kill the entire group, but Gamaliel, a highly respected teacher of the law, stepped in. He told the Apostles to leave then he addressed the Sanhedrin: *"Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. ³⁶ Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. ³⁷ After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. ³⁸ Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. ³⁹ But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God." {Acts 5:28-39}*

Meanwhile....

Stephen, whom Luke described as a man full of faith and the **Holy Spirit**, was performing great signs and wonders in Jerusalem. Men were paid to bring false charges against him and he was arrested and taken before the Sanhedrin {See Ch. 7} *"You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! ⁵² Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him-- ⁵³ you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it. {Acts 7:51-53}*

The religious leaders became so angry that they dragged Stephen outside the city and stoned him. Saul looked on with approval.

After the stoning of Stephen, a great persecution began in Jerusalem as Saul went house to house looking for the followers of Jesus. Except for the Apostles, the whole congregation fled throughout Judea and Samaria - preaching the Word as they went.

Meanwhile....

Philip was in Samaria preaching and healing. An angel came to him: *"Go south to the desert road that runs between Jerusalem and Gaza."*

Philip obeyed. There he encountered an Ethiopian Official, from the royal court of Candace, who was on his way home after worshipping at Jerusalem. He was riding in his chariot studying the book of Isaiah when Philip approached: *"Do you understand what you're reading?"*

Official: *"How can I unless someone explains it to me?"* ---- he was reading Isaiah 53

Philip explained the prophecies regarding Jesus and when they came to a pond the official asked to be baptized. When they came up out of the water the **Holy Spirit** took Philip away.

Meanwhile....

Not satisfied with persecuting followers of Jesus in Jerusalem, Saul went to Damascus to hunt them there. He was just outside the city when he encountered Jesus, Himself. A light from heaven knocked him to the ground and he heard a voice, *"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"*

Saul: *"Who are you?"*

Voice: *"I am Jesus and you are persecuting me. Get up, go into the city and you will be told what to do."*

When Saul stood up, he was blind and had to be led into the city. A believer named Ananias was told, in vision, to go to Saul and restore his sight. *"This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." {Acts 9:15-16}*

Saul's sight was restored, he was baptized and immediately began to preach about Jesus. The Jews in Damascus plotted to have Saul killed.... his disciples lowered him over the wall in a basket.

- **Acts 9:31** - Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the **Holy Spirit**, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.

Meanwhile....

Cornelius was a Gentile and an officer in the Italian Cohort. He was also a generous man who prayed to God. After a vision, Cornelius sent some men to Joppa to find Peter. The next day, while Peter was up on the roof of the house waiting for dinner, he had a vision. The sky opened and something resembling a sheet came down. In it were all kinds of unclean animals. Peter was instructed to get up, kill and eat.

He protested: *"I have never eaten anything unholy or unclean!"*

Voice: *"What God has made clean is no longer unholy or unclean."*

Historically, Jews had real problems with anyone who wasn't a *"Descendent of Abraham"* and Peter was not above this prejudice. In this context, the vision had to do with Peter's prejudices, **NOT** literal food. God desired to save Cornelius and his family – **Gentiles** – and He needed Peter – **a Jew** – to get on board with that plan.

The men found Peter and he returned with them to Cornelius' home. After a long conversation, the **Holy Spirit** fell on all those listening **BEFORE** they were baptized. Praise God!!

However, when Peter returned to Jerusalem, his fellow Jews took issue: *"You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them!"* When Peter shared the entire experience and the fact that the **Holy Spirit** had fallen on Cornelius and his family, the group stopped complaining and praised and glorified God.

Meanwhile... 45-58 AD

In Antioch, the believers began to be called Christians. While Barnabas and Saul {**now Paul**} were there, the **Holy Spirit** instructed that they be set apart for a special work. Hands were laid on them and they were sent to **Cyprus**.

From **Cyprus**, they went to **Perga** and then **Antioch Pisidia**. On Sabbath, they went to the Synagogue, but they were rejected by the Jewish leaders out of jealousy. Boldly, Paul and Barnabas spoke, *"We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. 47 For this is what the Lord has commanded us: "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." {Acts 13:46-47}*

The Gentiles began to rejoice and praise God and many believed. The Jews, however, instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas and drove them out of the district. They shook the dust off their feet in protest and went to **Iconium**.

- **Acts 13:52** - And the disciples were filled with joy and with the **Holy Spirit**.

During the 2nd Missionary Journey, Paul and Silas traveled through **Phrygia** and **Galatia** because the **Holy Spirit** had forbidden them to go to Asia. In **Troas**, Paul had a dream. He saw a man standing before him pleading: *"Come over into Macedonia and help us."* The next day the group set sail for **Philippi**. As a result of their work in **Philippi**, Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison. Even there, the **Holy Spirit** did a mighty work and the jailer and his entire family were saved as a result.

Athens

Athens was a city full of intellectuals and philosophers..... and idols. Everywhere Paul went, he talked openly about Jesus. Many believed including Dionysius and a woman named Damaris.

Ephesus

Before returning to Jerusalem, Paul spent several years in Ephesus and during that time God performed many miracles through him:

- **Acts 19:13-16** - Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." 14 Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. 15 *One day* the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" 16 Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

At the end of the 3rd Missionary Journey, Paul spent 2 years in prison, but finally, in the fall of **60 AD**, he began his journey to **Rome**. On the way, he was ship wrecked on the island of **Malta** and bitten by a poisonous snake. In **61 AD** he finally arrived in **Rome**.

- **Acts 28:30-31** - For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. ³¹ Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Luke's account ends in triumph and does not include Paul's death, which occurred in **67 AD** by order of Nero.

Gamaliel was right. There was nothing the Sanhedrin could do to stop this new "**Jesus Movement**". It might have started with 120 scared people hiding in an upper room, but through the **Power of the Holy Spirit**, it became a mighty movement that turned the world upside down.

In **313 AD** Christianity became a legal religion and by **380 AD** it was the official religion of the Roman Empire. Today there are over 800 million Protestants and over 1 billion Catholics worldwide.

- **Zechariah 4:6b** - Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty.
- **Acts 1:8** - 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."

Today, however, in many Christian circles the **Holy Spirit** is neglected and misunderstood. We spend more time worrying about what **we think** church should look like and we no longer depend on or expect the **Holy Spirit** to work. We may even hope He doesn't work because He might interfere with our plans.

A.W. Tozer: If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95 percent of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference. If the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church, 95 percent of what they did would stop, and everybody would know the difference.

Holy Spirit power is vital in the life of a Christian – it is not an optional extra. **He:**

- Transforms our hearts – Titus 3:4-5
- Convicts of sin – John 16:7-8
- Is our Comforter – John 14:16
- Is our Teacher and He helps us remember – John 14:26 and John 16:13
- Gives us power to overcome Satan – 1 John 4:4
- Communicates for us – Romans 8:26-27
- Gives us spiritual gifts and the power to use them – 1 Corinthians 12 and Acts

A.W. Tozer: The Spirit-filled life is not a special, deluxe edition of Christianity. It is part and parcel of the total plan of God for His people.

That's why **the powerful working of the Holy Spirit** is **My Favorite Thing About ACTS**.