

THE LOOKOUT

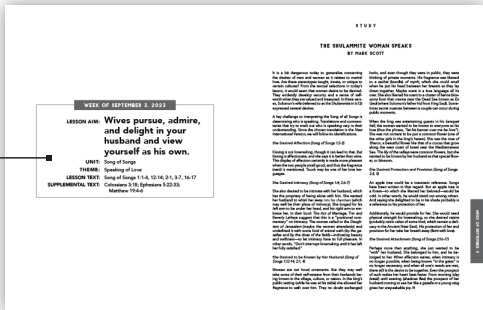
OCTOBER 2023

Unit: Acts (Part 1) Theme: The Church Begins

Overview: Since the creation of Adam and Eve, God has always had a people, but he has not always had a church. Even though the church was envisioned in the great commission of the Old Testament (Genesis 12:1-3), predicted by the prophets during a locust plague (Joel 2:28-32), and promised to the apostles at Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:13-20), she was not actually born until the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-41). But after her birth, the church spread like fire across the Roman Empire. In this first part of our study of Acts, students will learn about that birth, how the early disciples shared their possessions with any who had need (especially widows), and how Philip the evangelist and Peter the apostle stretched that early church to be more inclusive.

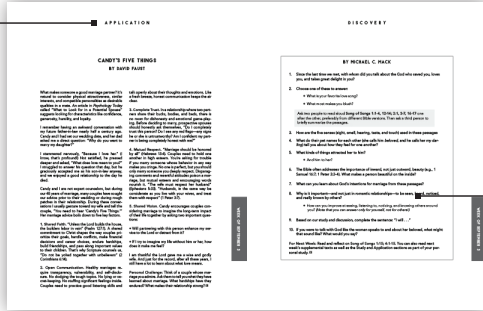
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Each page has a tab indicating the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF OCTOBER 1, 2023

LESSON AIM: **Devote yourself to the things the early church devoted itself to.**

UNIT: Acts (Part 1)

THEME: The Church Begins

LESSON TEXT: Acts 2:1-4, 14-15, 22-24, 29-32; 36-42

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Acts 2:1-47; Joel 2:28-32; Psalm 16:8-11

BIRTH OF THE CHURCH

BY MARK SCOTT

Many will recognize the name of evangelist Dean Sharp. He preached a revival sermon entitled “Operation Steadfast.” It was based on the *King James Version* reading of Acts 2:42, “They continued steadfastly in. . . .” The message traced what the young church continued to do in its earliest days. When the church was born, it immediately gave herself to doing what “Jesus began to do and to teach” (Acts 1:1).

The Spirit and the Church

Acts 2:1-4

Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and so was the church. The Twelve (minus Judas, plus Matthias) constituted the New Israel. The prayer meeting that preceded the birth of the church consisted of about 120 people—notice the number 12 even in that number (Acts 1:15-26). The apostles waited and waited (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4). Then, on the 50th day following the Passover Sabbath, the Holy Spirit gave birth to the church.

The pronoun *they* might refer to the 120 people gathered for prayer, but it would certainly refer to at least the Twelve apostles. They were in *one place*, though the precise location is unknown. Wherever it was, it gave way to a larger area that would accommodate the large Pentecost crowd. Three events characterized the Spirit birthing the church—wind (the sound of it, at least), fire, and speech—which are all rather consistent “signs” of the presence of God in both Testaments. The sound *like the blowing of a violent wind* reminded the apostles of Jesus’ promise (John 20:22). The fire (shaped like tongues on their heads) was symbolic of purification and even judgment (Matthew 3:11; Hebrews 10:26-27). The “inspired” speech was the ability to speak other languages, discerned by the nations and the people who would have spoken those dialects (Acts 2:5-11).

Jesus and the Church

Acts 2:14-15, 22-24, 29-31

First the apostles came together, and then the multitude came together. Sixteen people groups and places are mentioned that had come to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost (and perhaps Passover earlier). They were amazed and perplexed by what they heard (i.e., the gospel in their own languages and dialects). But some mocked the apostles, saying that they were filled with new (or sweet, the Greek word *gleukos*, the source of our word *glucose*) wine.

The apostles preached about Jesus, Jesus, and Jesus, and Peter’s sermon was the one recorded. He addressed the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the guests of Jerusalem, and then he quickly dismissed the mockery. Not only would new wine not have been produced in the spring of the year, but to be drunk at such an early hour of the day made the charge ridiculous.

Peter then quoted from Joel 2:28-32, which was the prediction of the coming of the Spirit. Then he moved quickly to speak about Jesus. The gospel was all about Jesus. Peter mentioned Jesus’ credentials (*miracles, wonders, and signs*), his fulfillment of God’s *deliberate plan*, his gruesome crucifixion, and his glorious resurrection.

Spoiler alert: the bulk of the Pentecost sermon was about the resurrection; 10 of the 19 verses were about it. Peter marshaled support from Psalm 16 and Psalm 110 to prove his point. Much of the good news is summarized in the phrase “death could not hold him.” The Psalms make us think of King David. But that *patriarch* and *prophet* has a grave in Jerusalem to this very day (though the credibility of the designated spot is unlikely). David’s bones are somewhere in Jerusalem. The Son of David’s bones are nowhere to be found.

The People in the Church

Acts 2:36-42

Peter’s sermon-in-a-sentence is verse 36. By virtue of the resurrection, God made Jesus, whom the people had crucified, *both Lord and Messiah*. That was as much as the people could take. They were deeply convicted (*cut to the heart*) and asked what they could do to get right with God (a question asked four times in the New Testament).

Peter did not tell his audience to believe, because they would not have asked their question if they did not already believe. Peter told them to *repent and be baptized* because they desperately needed to do both. This would provide *forgiveness* and the reception of the Holy Spirit. Two commands followed by two promises. And this promise of salvation was for individuals, families, and ethnic groups far off.

Peter’s sermon went on as he exhorted the people to *save yourselves*. Three thousand responded, and the church was born. They gave themselves to *teaching, fellowship, Communion, and prayer*. Those actions should steadfastly be enjoined today. ■

APPLICATION

MORE TO RESTORE

BY DAVID FAUST

I was brought up in the Independent Christian Churches and Churches of Christ, but I have remained in this tribe by personal choice. After field-testing Restoration Movement ideals over nearly five decades of ministry, I am convinced these principles remain relevant and appealing to Christians weary of division and to seekers looking for a place to belong.

Our movement's goals make sense: honor Christ, respect biblical authority, pursue unity with other Christ followers, and make disciples of all ethnic groups. I agree with our slogans, even though we fall short in applying them. "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent." "In essentials, unity; in opinions, liberty; in all things, love." "We are not the only Christians, but we are Christians only."

Keeping the Movement Moving

There is still more to restore. Lost souls need peace with God. God's family shouldn't be splintered and distracted by human opinions and traditions. The faith, hope, and love that marked Jesus' first-century disciples still need to be restored.

Restoration hasn't been completed. It's an ongoing movement—a work in progress. The Bible's church history record is called the book of Acts, not the "Book of Inaction" or the "Book of Good Ideas." The early church had its problems, but the New Testament offers encouraging glimpses of what God can do through ordinary people who are convinced about Jesus' resurrection, filled with the Holy Spirit, and focused on making disciples. Finding fault is easy. It's more productive to ask, *How can we keep the movement moving?*

Revisiting Pentecost

If you have read the second chapter of Acts, you are familiar with Dr. Luke's record of what transpired on the Day of Pentecost. Does the story still inspire you? What can we discover (or rediscover) by reading Acts 2 with fresh eyes?

Reliance on prayer and the Holy Spirit. Before preaching the gospel to diverse groups of listeners

in Jerusalem, Jesus' followers "all joined together constantly in prayer" (Acts 1:14). In today's complicated world, we can't make disciples in our own strength. We need to pray for the Spirit's help.

Christ-centered preaching. A few weeks earlier, Peter lost his nerve and denied knowing Jesus; but at Pentecost he spoke boldly, clearly, and logically, declaring Jesus to be the Lord and Messiah. Effective preaching still centers on the prophesied, crucified, and risen Christ.

Urgency about the mission. Peter "assured," "warned," and "pleaded with" his listeners to believe in Christ, repent, and be baptized (Acts 2:36-41). Paul's life goal was "to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace" (Acts 20:24). We need to restore the sense of urgency that motivated the first-century church.

Keep the main things the main things. After thousands were baptized on the Day of Pentecost, those new believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, shared their lives and resources in fellowship (*koinonia*), remembered Christ by breaking bread together, and continued steadfastly in prayer (Acts 2:42). Do our church calendars and programs prioritize these vital practices?

Acts 2 describes an exciting movement. People were awe-filled and joy-filled. Devoted and united. Hospitable and generous. Praising God and serving others. Seeing new Christ followers added daily. Don't you want to be part of that? What "Acts" of ours will help to keep the movement moving?

Personal Challenge: If you are *not* well acquainted with the Restoration Movement, ask someone (perhaps a minister or elder at your church) to inform you about the movement's history and guiding principles. If you *are* already well acquainted with the Restoration Movement, find an opportunity to discuss the movement's ideals and slogans with your small group, a class, or a friend who knows little or nothing about it. ■

DISCOVERY

BY DOUG REDFORD

1. How did you “go public” with your love for God and his love for you this past week?
2. What sounds and sights come to mind as you think about what happens when you come to worship each Lord’s Day?

Ask two people to read aloud **Acts 2:1-4, 14-15, 22-24, 29-32, 36-42** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passages.

3. Jesus’ followers were “all together in one place” when the Holy Spirit came in the form of wind (the sound of it, at least), fire, and speech. Why was this convincing evidence of God’s presence?
 - What convincing evidence of God’s presence do we have today?
4. The Holy Spirit enabled Jesus’ followers to “speak in other tongues” (v. 4). A crowd of people of various nationalities gathered and “each one heard their own language being spoken” (v. 6).
 - What does this reveal about God’s love for the world and his desire for us in regard to that world?
5. Some people who were gathered at Pentecost mocked those who spoke in “other tongues.” Have you ever been mocked for your faith?
 - How did you respond?
 - Looking back on that incident, is there something you would do differently?
6. In his Bible Study this week, Mark Scott notes that 10 of the 19 verses in Peter’s Pentecost sermon were about Jesus’ resurrection.
 - Why is Jesus’ resurrection such an important part of the Christian faith?
 - When in your life has the impact of Jesus’ resurrection been especially powerful to you?
7. Mark Scott refers to verse 36 as Peter’s “sermon in a sentence.” Why were the people, upon hearing Peter’s message, “cut to the heart” and eager to do something (v. 37)?
8. Peter challenged his audience to “repent and be baptized” (Acts 2:38). What specific challenges do people in our culture face in following this instruction?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: “I will . . .”
10. Complete this statement: “I need the help of the Holy Spirit most of all in this area of my life: _____.”

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Acts 4:32—5:16**. You can also read next week’s supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■