

# Learn to Read Acts Effectively

Distance Learning Programme

Session 1



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# Session 1

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All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version.  
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# Introduction

## Welcome

Welcome to the Learn to Read Acts Effectively Distance Learning Course! We are very pleased that you want to increase your understanding of the Bible with the help of this course and pray that you will find it exciting and helpful. As in previous courses, our aim is to show how the Bible is the inspired Word of God and how it interprets itself. In addition, we have tried to provide things of interest for you, whatever your background and knowledge of the Bible.

Like all of our Distance Learning Courses, if you just work your way through the basic course notes with your Bible open you should get a lot out of it. However, please also look at the other course materials. Many of the additional notes are about things we couldn't easily include in the basic notes, but, as we hope you will agree, we couldn't leave out!

The Acts of the Apostles was written to show what the first-century church believed and how the believers reacted to the challenge of Jesus Christ. This will make us think about the really important things in life and consider how we can follow their example and learn from their mistakes. The *Additional Notes* contain some information about the content of the letters, which were written by Paul and others to various believers during the first century.

As in the first course, we shall be using the New King James Version (1982 edition) of the Bible except where otherwise stated.

## Course content and structure

If you have already received our earlier Distance Learning Courses, you may be familiar with most of this section. If that is the case, you can skip this section now and use it as a reference.

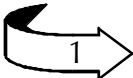
Each session will have a summary and suggestions for further optional self-study to help you to understand difficult passages.

This course has various features which you can use to help you study at the level you require:

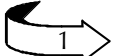
- **Basic study notes** will lead you through a study of Acts and help you to understand the book quickly, but you may miss out on some fascinating insights. Each time a verse is written *in italics*, the notes following refer to that verse.

**Self-study sections** are included in the *basic study notes*. They are enclosed in boxes like the one surrounding this paragraph, and will help you look a little more closely at a particular subject. We will give you some guidance at the end of each session to help you. Please feel free to send your conclusions to your tutor, who will be willing to discuss them with you.

- **Questions** are included in the *basic study notes* at the end of each session to help you to think about what you have learned from the session.
- **Additional Notes** and **Cross-references** are in separate booklets which you should have received with this session.

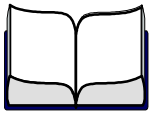
 *Additional Notes* are further notes on issues arising from the *basic study notes*. They are referred to at the appropriate point in the notes by arrows like the one shown. You will find more details of the particular subject at the bottom of the page concerned. The number in the arrow refers to the section number in the *Additional Notes* booklet.

*Cross-references* are taken from \**The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*. These references will allow you to do your own in-depth study of a particular verse or of a whole chapter if you so wish.

 Additional Notes subject

\**The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge* 1982 published by  
Hendrickson  
ISBN 0-917006-22-4

The following **symbols** will be used throughout the course:



Recommended Bible readings



Important points and challenges arising from the study. We hope that you will think seriously about these issues.



Questions to think about before moving on. We would also encourage you to ask your own questions! These could form starting points for further study.

**X-Refs-**  
Acts 1 v 1

Cross-references which we suggest you look at. These are taken from *The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*. If you have a Bible with other cross-references, look up those references as well.

**Echoes -**  
Acts 1 v 1

References to “Echoes” from the verse(s) mentioned. Echoes are links between Bible passages not necessarily indicated by marginal cross-references. If you follow up these echoes it will help you understand what follows.



Information from *Young’s* and *Strong’s Concordances*. Part of the entry for the particular word will be found at the end of the session, on the page number indicated.

## Preparation and study methods

Remember to allow yourself time. Use a good translation (remind yourself of what you learnt in the *Learn to Read the Bible Effectively* course, Session 9) and ask yourself questions about what you read. When you don't understand something, be patient, look up cross-references and use concordances, lexicons and other translations. Allow the Bible to interpret itself.

You can of course discuss your findings and questions with your tutor by post or telephone, or possibly e-mail.



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## Overview of the book of Acts

The book of Acts has been described as the “pivotal” book in the New Testament, linking the Gospel records with the letters. It carries on the record of the work started by Jesus in preaching the gospel by giving the story of the apostles and their preaching, following the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

Mark’s Gospel ends with Christ’s commission to his apostles to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16 v 15). The Acts tells us how they carried out this commission. The two main characters involved in this work are the apostles Peter and Paul.

### Outline summary of events

The book can be divided into two sections. Firstly, it records the preaching of the gospel to the Jews in the land of Israel. Then it goes on to tell us of the preaching to both Jews and non-Jews in the Roman Empire, which eventually included Europe. As we go through the story we will look at the message that the apostles gave and people’s reactions to it. We will also look at the letters the apostles wrote to the believers they had preached to. This will enable us to see what the first-century apostles taught, and to learn how we should react to their teaching.

To help you find the places mentioned in the book of Acts, you will find several maps at the start of the *Additional Notes* booklet which you should have received with this session. We will refer to these at the appropriate points in the course.

The second section of the *Additional Notes* booklet is a “Chronology of the Acts”. This is a table showing all the events recorded in the Acts, and is very useful when you want to find out where one event is in relation to another.

# Session 1 - The start of the first-century church in Jerusalem Acts 1 and 2

## Introduction

Chapter 1 mentions the forty days between Jesus' resurrection and ascension. The record of his ascension into heaven is followed by the promise of the angels that he will return. The eleven apostles then return to Jerusalem and select a replacement for Judas Iscariot.

Chapter 2 tells of the giving of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Peter's address follows, resulting in the baptism of the first 3,000 members of the first-century church.

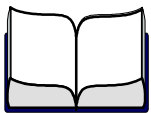
You may wish to read Acts 1 and 2 all the way through before you look at the notes.

## Summary

The church in Jerusalem

The ascension of Jesus	1 v 1 to 14
Matthias chosen	1 v 15 to 26
The Holy Spirit given	2 v 1 to 13
Peter's address	2 v 14 to 40
Believers baptised	2 v 41 to 47

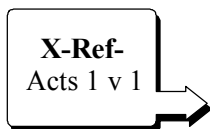
## Acts 1 v 1 to 14 - The ascension of Jesus



Read Acts 1 v 1 to 14

*Acts 1 v 1 The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach*

Look at the cross-reference and you will discover that the "former account" was the Gospel of Luke:

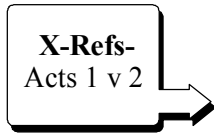


Luke 1 v 3.

Luke wrote the Acts as a sequel to his Gospel, showing how the apostles continued the work that "Jesus began".

*Acts 1 v 2 until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen*

The cross- references tell us what the commands were that Jesus had given to his apostles:



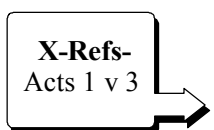
Matthew 28 v 19 and 20; Mark 16 v 15 to 20; Luke 24 v 45 to 49.

- They were to:
  - Preach to all nations
  - Baptise them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
  - Teach them to obey all Christ's commands
- The references also tell us that:
  - This teaching would involve "repentance and remission of sins"
  - Jesus would be with them in their work of preaching
  - The believers would be able to perform miracles to confirm that the message was from God
  - They were to wait in Jerusalem until they were given this power to help in their witness to others

*Acts 1 v 3 to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.*

After his resurrection, Jesus concentrated on convincing his disciples that he had risen from the dead and that he was to be the king of the future kingdom of God.

Look at the cross-references and you will see that Jesus was seen by many people after his resurrection:



Matthew 28 v 9, 16 and 17; Luke 24 v 15 and 36; John 20 v 19 and 20;  
Acts 13 v 31; 1 Corinthians 15 v 5 to 8.

In addition to the statements made in the Bible, there are other considerations which encourage our faith in the resurrection:

- The disciples did not at first believe that Jesus had risen (Luke 24 v 11, 25 and 41). The evidence must have been convincing because they changed from being frightened men in hiding (John 20 v 19) to men who fearlessly accepted persecution as a result of their testimony to the resurrection (Acts 4 v 18 to 21; Acts 5 v 29 and 30, 40 to 42)
- Some have suggested the apostles were mistaken and that Jesus did not really die. But Pilate made sure that Jesus was dead before handing over the body (Mark 15 v 43 to 45). He wanted to be sure that Jesus and his followers caused no more problems for him
- The dead body of Jesus was never seen again. The Jewish leaders would have gladly produced the body of Jesus in order to silence the apostles, whose claims were causing them so many problems
- Matthew 28 v 12 to 15 tells us that the Jewish leaders had no better explanation than that his frightened disciples had stolen the body from the guarded and sealed tomb. They bribed the guard to say this happened while they slept - a very unlikely story for two reasons. Firstly, the soldiers would not know who stole the body if they were asleep, and secondly, there were severe punishments for Roman soldiers who slept on duty



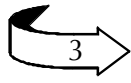
If you look carefully at the book of Acts, you will realise that a small band of frightened, working-class Jews challenged the religious leaders of their nation and devoted their lives to preaching a totally novel and unpopular faith. The certainty of the resurrection of Christ is the only way we can explain the sudden rise of Christianity in a totally hostile world.

The certainty of Christ's resurrection should make us confident that he was no ordinary man and that his message is worth listening to!

*Acts 1 v 4 And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me;  
5 "for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."*

These verses tell us that the Holy Spirit, or power of God, was to be involved in the work that the apostles were about to start. As we go through Acts we shall see that the Holy Spirit guided the work.

*Acts 1 v 6 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"*

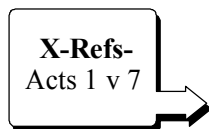


This is probably one of the most significant questions to be asked in the book of Acts. The disciples were expecting Jesus to re-establish the kingdom of Israel. You will see why if you look at the *Additional Notes* section, which shows how Israel is at the centre of God's plan. We will learn more about this as we go through the book of Acts.

*Acts 1 v 7 And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority."*

Jesus told his disciples that it was not for them to know God's timetable.

Have a look at the cross-references from these verses and you will see two main messages coming from them:



Daniel 2 v 20 and 21; Matthew 24 v 36 and 37;  
Mark 13 v 32; 1 Thessalonians 5 v 1 to 3.

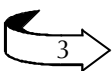
- God is in control of the nations
- God has not revealed the exact date of the return of Jesus

Verse 8 is another reminder that God's power was to be with the disciples in their preaching work to help them witness to Jesus.

Verses 9 and 10 tell about the ascension of Jesus into heaven and about the angels who then gave the following message to the disciples:

*Acts 1 v 11 who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."*

Notice how the verse emphasises that it will be the same Jesus who will come back physically in the same way as he went.



The significance of the Kingdom of Israel

The cross-references give some of the many references to the return of Jesus to the earth.

Have a look at the references and write down what they tell you about the return of Jesus to the earth.

Compare your findings with the notes on page 22.

**X-Refs-**  
Acts 1 v 11

Daniel 7 v 13 and 14; Matthew 24 v 30; 25 v 31; 1 Thessalonians 4 v 16 and 17; 2 Thessalonians 1 v 7 to 10; Revelation 1 v 7.

In these references we are beginning to see that God's purpose involves a resurrection of the dead at the return of Jesus and the establishment of a world-wide kingdom ruled over by Jesus.

Verses 12 to 14 record that the little group who had seen Jesus go into heaven returned to Jerusalem and stayed there as they were commanded in verse 4.

*Acts 1 v 14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.*

The echoes show that the phrase "with one accord" indicates "having one mind":

**Echoes -**  
One accord

Acts 2 v 1; 2 v 46; 7 v 57; 18 v 12; 19 v 29.

The opposition in Acts 7 v 57; 18 v 12 and 19 v 29 would have been very determined and united. The believers had one main purpose - to witness for Jesus - and they did this enthusiastically.

**Echoes -**  
Prayer and  
supplication

Ephesians 6 v 18; Philippians 4 v 6.

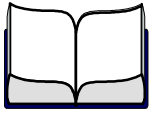
"Supplication" means "asking" or "entreating". It is clear that the little group of believers were constantly praying and showing their confidence in God by regularly asking His help.

**Echo -**  
The brothers  
of Jesus

John 7 v 5.

This echo tells us that the half-brothers of Jesus, or at least some of them, who did not previously believe in him, were now among the believers.

## Acts 1 v 15 to 26 - Matthias chosen

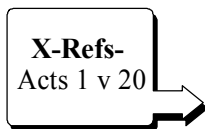


Read Acts 1 v 15 to 26

This section records the choice of a replacement for Judas Iscariot.

*Acts 1v 20 "For it is written in the book of Psalms:  
'Let his dwelling place be desolate,  
And let no one live in it';  
and,  
'Let another take his office.'"*

The cross-references lead us to the passages that Peter was referring to:

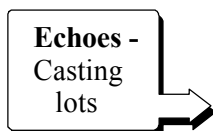


Psalm 69 v 25; 109 v 8.

In verses 21 and 22 Peter suggested that, based on Psalm 109 v 8, they should choose a replacement for Judas Iscariot who had betrayed Jesus and subsequently hanged himself.

To be an effective witness, the replacement must have been with the apostles all through Jesus' ministry.

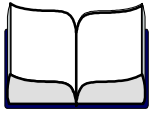
Two people were proposed, Joseph and Matthias. Notice that the final choice was to be God's. The echoes below show that "casting lots" was introduced by God and used in Old Testament times. One way of casting lots was to write each name on a separate tablet, place them in an urn, and then shake the urn until one came out. Casting lots was the recognised way of asking God to show His choice in the matter:



Leviticus 16 v 8; Joshua 18 v 10; 1 Samuel 14 v 41 and 42.

By their actions the disciples showed that they did the best they could themselves. However, they also showed that God was to be involved in their decision. They drew lots after praying that God would decide the outcome.

## Acts 2 v 1 to 13 - The Holy Spirit given

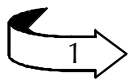


Read Acts 2 v 1 to 13

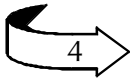
In Acts 1 v 4 and 5, Jesus told the disciples to stay in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit was given them. In chapter 2 we see the giving of this special power and the effect that it had on the disciples.

*Acts 2 v 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

This verse tells us that the power of the Holy Spirit enabled the disciples to speak in foreign languages without ever having learned them.



Verses 8 to 11 detail the languages they could speak. Have a look at Map 1 on page 1 of the *Additional Notes* booklet to see where these people came from.



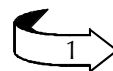
The Holy Spirit was at work to help the believers and spread God's plan of salvation. We look more closely at this work of the Holy Spirit in the *Additional Notes*.

*Acts 2 v 12 So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "Whatever could this mean?"*

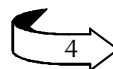


Look at the *Strong's Concordance* meaning of the word "amazed" on page 24 and you will see that the people were astonished by these events and did not know what to think. They were amazed that the disciples were suddenly able to speak so many different languages, and should have realised that God was in control of events.

Verse 13, however, shows that there are always some who will not realise the implications of what they are seeing.



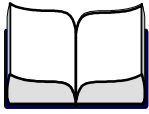
Map 1



The work of the Holy Spirit



## Acts 2 v 14 to 40 - Peter's address



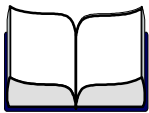
Read Acts 2 v 14 to 21

Peter told his audience that they were involved in a fulfilment of a prophecy given by Joel. The cross-reference from verse 16 tells us which part of Joel's prophecy Peter was quoting:

**X-Ref-**  
Acts  
2 v 16

Joel 2 v 28 to 32.

Verse 27 of Joel 2 gives us the context of this passage - God wanted people to know that He is involved in Israel's affairs.



Read Acts 2 v 22 to 36

This was Peter's first address explaining what is involved in the message of salvation through Jesus. If we look at the speech carefully we can learn the basics of the gospel message.

*Acts 2 v 22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man ..."*

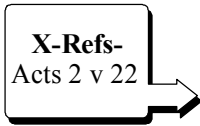
Have a look at the echoes and write down what they tell you about the nature of Jesus. Compare your findings with the notes on page 23.

**Echoes -**  
Jesus  
a man

Matthew 1 v 1; Romans 1 v 3; 8 v 3; 2 Timothy 2 v 8; Hebrews 2 v 14 and 17.

*Acts 2 v 22 "... Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs ..."*

Look at the cross-references and you will see several indications that the miracles that Jesus did were the evidence to the people of his time that he was sent from God:



Luke 7 v 20 to 23; John 3 v 2; 6 v 14; 9 v 32 and 33; Acts 10 v 37 to 39.

The miracles clearly provided evidence for the first-century believers. Enough evidence was given by God for the first-century church to become established. God did not expect people to believe in Jesus and the apostles just because they *said* they had a message from God - God gave evidence to back up their claim. The same situation applies in our day; God has given us evidence in the Bible that the Bible is not an ordinary book. We look at some of this evidence in the *God-given evidence* booklet which you will have received with this session. (If you have received the Luke course, you will already have a copy of this booklet.) So we, too, can be in the same position as Peter's hearers in Acts 2 - ready to accept this message after having seen the evidence.

*Acts 2 v 22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know--*

*23 "Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death;*

*24 "whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it."*

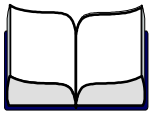


What did Peter tell us in these verses about God's plan regarding Jesus?

- All that happened to Jesus was planned by God
- God planned the crucifixion of Jesus by wicked men
- God also raised Jesus from the dead because it "was not possible that He should be held by [death]"

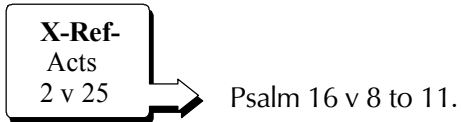


The resurrection of Jesus is the central point of God's plan.



Read Acts 2 v 25 to 28

Have a look at the cross-reference and you will see where Peter was quoting from:

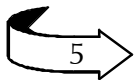


Peter said that Psalm 16 v 8 to 11 is talking about the Lord Jesus Christ.

This establishes the important principle that we can look for hints of Jesus' work all through the Old Testament. Sometimes these passages have an initial application to the time in which they were written and then a much fuller application to Jesus.

Verses 25 to 28 give an insight into the thoughts of Jesus in relation to God's plan for him:

- He was always conscious that God was there (v 25)
- He was confident that he could carry out God's wishes for him despite the problems to be overcome (v 26)
- Because he never disobeyed God, he knew that God would raise him from the dead (v 27 and 28)

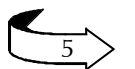


Have a look at the *Additional Notes* booklet for more information on the Bible use of the words "hell" or "Hades".



Read Acts 2 v 29 to 40

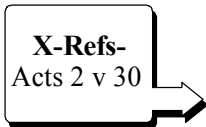
In verse 29, Peter reminded his hearers that David himself was dead and buried - this implied that the verses from Psalm 16 written by David could not apply to David himself because he had not been raised from the dead.



The Bible meaning of "Hell"

*Acts 2 v 30 "Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne"*

Peter told his hearers that David was a prophet, and God had promised him that a person called "the Christ" would sit on his throne. "Christ" is the Hebrew for "anointed". Kings were anointed when they were chosen. When Peter refers to the "Christ", he is referring to a special king promised in the Old Testament. Look at the cross-references and you will read the promises of this special king.



2 Samuel 7 v 11 to 16; 1 Chronicles 17 v 10 to 15.

Both these passages record the promises from God given to David by Nathan the prophet. The main features of the promises can be summarised:

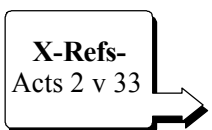
	2 Samuel 7	1 Chronicles 17
God was going to make David "a house"	v 11	v 10
God would put a descendant of David on his throne after his death and establish his kingdom	v 12	v 11
This kingdom and "house" would last for ever	v 13	v 12

We can see that God was promising David that his "house" or "dynasty" would continue for ever and that a particular descendant whom Peter called "the Christ" would sit on David's throne over his kingdom.

In verses 31 and 32 Peter clearly told the people that Jesus was this special descendant. As we have seen that the reign of the descendant (seed) would not end, so he could be no ordinary man. Peter explained that God had raised Jesus from the dead and therefore he would be able to reign over the house of David for ever.

*Acts 2 v 33 "Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear."*

Look at the cross-references and you will see more of what this verse is telling us:



Luke 24 v 47 to 49; John 14 v 26; 15 v 26.

- Jesus promised the disciples that he would help them spread the message of the gospel by giving them special powers
- The spirit would help the disciples remember accurately all that Jesus had done and said

So we can see that hearing the disciples speaking in foreign languages, which they had never learned, should have made the listeners realise that they were sent from God. They should therefore have listened to God's message of salvation which the disciples were giving them.

*Acts 2 v 36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."*



This verse is the climax of Peter's argument. The main point he was wanting to make was that Jesus of Nazareth was the special descendant spoken of in the Old Testament and called "the Christ".

This pricked the consciences of the listeners because they had all recently clamoured for the death of Jesus - the one sent by God to save them. As a result, in verse 37, they all asked, "What shall we do?"

*Acts 2 v 38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

*39 "For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call "*

Peter then told them how they could rectify the terrible situation they were in. His reply was important to those listening - it is just as important to us, so we will look at each phrase in turn and see what the cross-references tell us:

**X-Refs-  
Repent**

Matthew 3 v 2; 4 v 17; Luke 24 v 47; Acts 3 v 19; 17 v 30; 20 v 21.

We can see that repentance is a major theme in the New Testament. It is mentioned by John the Baptist, Jesus. Peter and Paul. It is required by God Himself and applies to all people from all nations.



What does repentance mean?



Look at the *Strong's Concordance* definition on page 24 and you will see that the word means "to think differently or reconsider".

This implies that we realise that the way we have gone in the past is wrong and that we must now go in a different direction. This was particularly relevant to those who had just killed the one sent by God to save them, but it is relevant to us as well.

Look at these two echoes and you will see that if we continue in our normal way of life we will die and that will be the end of us:

**Echoes -**  
Our need  
for change  
of mind

Proverbs 14 v 12; Romans 6 v 21.



Peter was saying that something must be done about the fact that eventually we all must die.

*Acts 2 v 38 "... and let everyone of you be baptised in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins ..."*

The references show us that baptism was required whenever people understood and believed the message the apostles gave.

Have a look at the cross-references from "baptised" and write down what these references tell you about baptism.

Compare your findings with the notes on page 23.

**X-Refs-**  
baptised

Acts 8 v 12, 36 to 38; 16 v 31 to 34; 22 v 16; Romans 6 v 4 to 6;  
1 Peter 3 v 21.

If you continue to read Romans 6, you will learn more about the significance of baptism.

Romans 6 ends with a summary of what Christ's work is all about:

*Romans 6 v 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

- Wages are something we earn. We cannot earn eternal life, that is God's gift depending on our response to His call
- If we continue in our natural way we will die and that will be the end of us
- If we listen and act on God's plan through Jesus Christ, we can be raised to eternal life



We can now begin to see how we can be involved in the events at the return of Jesus that we looked at on page 10. We can summarise what we have seen so far as follows:

- In the Old Testament, God promised David that he would have a special descendant who would reign over an endless kingdom
- The special descendant was the Lord Jesus Christ
- The endless kingdom will be set up at the return of Jesus
- Those who are baptised will be raised from the dead at the return of Jesus

*Acts 2 v 38 "... and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

This was the fulfilment of the promise that we read of in Acts 1 v 4 and 5.



You will see from the *Additional Notes* section on "The work of the Holy Spirit" that one special work of God's Spirit was to witness to the truth of the apostles message.

*Acts 2 v 39 "For the promise ..."*



What is this promise of the spirit which we are all offered?

**Echo -  
Promise of  
the spirit**

Galatians 3 v 14.

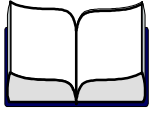
This echo links God's plan of salvation through Abraham and Christ with the promise of the spirit if we have faith. We will look more at God's dealings with Abraham in Session 2 .



The work of the Holy Spirit

The rest of verse 39 of Acts 2 assures us all that we can all have salvation through faith in Jesus. Verse 40 confirms that “being saved” is what Peter is talking about.

## Acts 2 v 41 to 47 - Believers baptised



Read Acts 2 v 41 to 47

This section records the rapid growth of the early church at this time - about 3,000 new members in one day.

*Acts 2 v 42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

This verse summarises the main activities in the early church. Look at the cross-references and you will learn more about these activities:

**X-Refs-  
Apostles'  
doctrine**

Acts 14 v 22; John 8 v 31 and 32; Galatians 1 v 6; Ephesians 2 v 20;  
Colossians 1 v 23.

- We must keep to what Jesus and the apostles taught
- We must continue in the faith despite problems
- Some people were turning to other ideas
- The early church was built on the teaching of the apostles and prophets



Look up the *Strong's Concordance* definition of “fellowship” on page 24 and you will see it reflected in the cross-references:

**X-Refs-  
Fellowship**

Acts 5 v 12; 1 John 1 v 3 and 7.

- The believers were all of one accord - we looked at this on page 10
- We can all share in the purpose that God has through Jesus. This results in forgiveness of all our sin



Have a look at the cross-references from “breaking of bread” and write down what these references tell you about the breaking of bread and its significance. Compare your findings with the notes on page 23.

**X-Refs-  
Breaking  
of bread**

Acts 20 v 7 and 11; 1 Corinthians 10 v 16 and 17; 11 v 23 to 26.

The cross-references from “prayers” show that prayer was a vital part of life in the first-century church:

**X-Refs-  
Prayers**

Acts 1 v 14; 6 v 4; Romans 12 v 12; Ephesians 6 v 18; Colossians 4 v 2.

- Prayer was offered regularly in the early church
- The apostles regarded prayer as equally important as preaching
- Paul recommended that prayer should be offered regularly by all and for all
- Their prayers should also include thanksgiving

Verses 44 to 47 record how the church grew. The believers sold their possessions and had all things common. This was possible when there were large numbers in a small area, like Jerusalem, but when the church spread throughout the land of Israel and then to other lands, the same system could not operate. The believers could no longer have all things common, but they still helped each other, as we shall see later.

In the next session we will look at Peter healing a lame man, and at the continuation of his preaching. We will also see how Peter’s message builds up our picture of God’s plan *and challenges us personally*.

## Summary of Session 1

Chapter 1 of Acts covers the period from the resurrection of Jesus to shortly after his ascension to heaven:

- For forty days Jesus concentrated on convincing his disciples that he had risen from the dead and that he was to be the king of the future kingdom of God
- When Jesus ascended to heaven, the disciples were assured that he would come back
- We have looked at what will happen when Jesus does come back
- The disciples then returned to Jerusalem, where Matthias was chosen to replace Judas Iscariot

Chapter 2 records the giving of the Holy Spirit and Peter's address telling the Jews in Jerusalem that Jesus was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament:

- The gift of the Holy Spirit enabled the apostles to speak in other languages so that all present could understand their message
- God gave Jesus the same Holy Spirit power as evidence of his being sent from Him
- Jesus was crucified and raised again as part of God's plan
- Peter showed that Jesus was the "special descendant" promised to David who would sit on David's throne and set up a kingdom that would not end
- To be involved in this kingdom, we must understand the implications of the death and resurrection of Jesus. We must turn from our natural way of life, be baptised to associate ourselves with the sacrifice of Jesus, and try to live our lives in accordance with the teaching of Jesus

## Questions

1. Why was the resurrection of Jesus an important teaching?
2. Why do we need Jesus to return to the earth?
3. What have you learnt about the activities of the early church?
4. What have you learnt about the beliefs of the early church?

## Self-study notes

(Look at the cross-references from the relevant verses to gain more information)

What will happen when Jesus comes back to the earth? (page 10)

When he comes:

- Jesus will rule over a world-wide kingdom that will not end (Daniel 7 v 13 and 14; Matthew 24 v 30)
- He will sit on the throne of his glory accompanied by the angels (Matthew 25 v 31)
- The dead will be raised (1 Thessalonians 4 v 16)
- Jesus will descend from heaven and meet those raised from the dead (1 Thessalonians 4 v 17)
- He will destroy those who do not obey the gospel (2 Thessalonians 1 v 7 to 10)
- He will be seen by all the world (Revelation 1 v 7)

The nature of Jesus (page 13)

- Jesus was a descendant of David and Abraham (Matthew 1 v 1; 2 Timothy 2 v 8)
- Jesus was born with the same human nature as the descendants of David (Romans 1 v 3)
- God sent His Son in the likeness of sinful man (Romans 8 v 3)
- Jesus shared our humanity (Hebrews 2 v 14)
- Jesus was made in every way the same as us (Hebrews 2 v 17)

Baptism (page 18)

- Baptism follows belief "in the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8 v 12)
- Baptism required enough water to go down into (Acts 8 v 38)
- Baptism follows belief that Jesus is the Son of God (Acts 8 v 37)
- Baptism is necessary for salvation and follows belief in God's message through the apostles (Acts 16 v 31 to 33)
- Baptism washes away our sins (Acts 22 v 16)
- Baptism is a symbolic death with Christ (Romans 6 v 4 and 5)
- Coming up out of the water is symbolic of Christ's resurrection (Romans 6 v 4)
- We are symbolically putting to death our old way of life (Romans 6 v 6)
- We are then rising again to a new spiritual life (Romans 6 v 4)
- We can then be confident that we will also be raised from the dead (Romans 6 v 5)
- Baptism is the "answer of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3 v 21)

The breaking of bread and its significance (page 21)

- The disciples used to meet to “break bread” on the “first day of the week”, which started after dark on the equivalent of our Saturday evening (Acts 20 v 7 and 11)
- The breaking of bread is a sharing in the sacrifice of Jesus. The bread and wine symbolise his body and blood (1 Corinthians 10 v 16 and 17)
- This sacrifice resulted in the new covenant (or agreement) with God (1 Corinthians 11 v 25)
- Believers are united into one body by taking part (1 Corinthians 10 v 17)
- It is a reminder of the death of Jesus (1 Corinthians 11 v 26)
- Jesus commanded his followers to remember him in this way regularly (1 Corinthians 11 v 23 to 26)

## Strong's Concordance definitions

### Amazed

1839 **existemi** (ex-is'-tay-mee)

from 1537 and 2476;

to *put (stand) out* of wits,

i.e. *astound*, or (reflex.) *become astounded, insane*:

amaze, be (make) astonished, be beside self (selves), bewitch, wonder.

### Repent

3340 **metanoeo** (met-an-o-eh'-o)

from 3326 and 3539;

to *think differently* or *afterwards*,

i.e. *reconsider* (mor. *feel compunction*):

repent.

### Fellowship

2842 **koinonia** (koy-nohn-ee'-ah)

from 2844;

*partnership*,

i.e. (lit.) *participation*, or (social) *intercourse*, or (pecuniary) *benefaction*:

(to) communicate (-ation), communion, (contri-) distribution, fellowship.