

# ***SENT BY LOVE: ACTS—PART 1***

## **STUDY OUTLINE & SCHEDULE**

- I. Preparation for Witness: August 16—September 6, 2020**
  - A. August 16, Acts 1:1-2, “Introduction to Acts”
  - B. August 23, Acts 1:1-5, “The Promise of the Holy Spirit”
  - C. August 30, Acts 1:6-11, “The Ascension”
  - D. September 6, Acts 1:12-26, “The Next Disciple”
- II. The Spirit Empowers for Witness: September 13-27, 2020**
  - A. September 13, Acts 2:1-13, “The Holy Spirit Comes”
  - B. September 20, Acts 2:14-41, “Peter Preaches”
  - C. September 27, Acts 2:42-47, “The Believers Meet Together”
- III. Witness in Jerusalem: October 4—November 15, 2020**
  - A. October 4, Acts 3:1-26, “Peter Heals and Preaches in the Temple”
  - B. October 11, Acts 4:1-22, “Peter and John Before the Council”
  - C. October 18, Acts 4:23-37, “The Believers Pray and Share”
  - D. October 25, Acts 5:1-16, “Awe and Wonder”
  - E. November 1, Acts 5:17-42, “Opposition”
  - F. November 8, Acts 6:1-15, “Seven Chosen to Serve”
  - G. November 15, Acts 7:1—8:1a, “The Martyrdom of Stephen”
- IV. Witness Beyond Jerusalem: November 22—December 6, 2020**
  - A. November 22, Acts 8:1b-25, “Scattered for Witness”
  - B. November 29, Acts 8:26-40, “Philip and the Ethiopian”
  - C. December 6, Acts 9:1-31, “The Conversion of Saul”
- V. Witness Among the Gentiles: December 13, 2020—January 17, 2021**
  - A. December 13, Acts 9:32—10:33, “Gentiles Hear the Good News”
  - B. December 20, Acts 10:34-48, “Gentiles Believe the Good News”
  - C. December 27—No Sunday Morning Classes
  - D. January 3—No Sunday Morning Classes
  - E. January 10, Acts 11:1-18, “Peter Explains His Actions”
  - F. January 17, Acts 11:19—12:25, “Outreach and Persecution”
- VI. Witness Through Paul’s 1st Journey: January 24—February 14, 2021**
  - A. January 24, Acts 13:1-12, “Paul and Barnabas Sent Out”
  - B. January 31, Acts 13:13-43, “Antioch of Pisidia”
  - C. February 7, Acts 14:1-7, “Iconium”
  - D. February 14, Acts 14:8-28, “In Lystra and Derbe”

## TEACHING HELPS

### *Sent by Love: A Study of Acts, Part 1*

#### II. The Spirit Empowers for Witness: September 13-27, 2020

##### A. September 13, Acts 2:1-13, “The Holy Spirit Comes”

#### Points to Ponder for “The Holy Spirit Comes”

##### **1. Wind, Fire, and Language**

Wind, fire, and language are common to us. We feel a hot, southerly wind as we stand outside in August. We sit near a fire for warmth on a cold night. We speak daily to communicate our thoughts, ideas, and wishes with others. And yet, these three usual items receive unusual significance, for they describe the coming of the Holy Spirit in fulfillment of Acts 1:8’s promise. They confirm the Spirit’s presence and power on the community of 120 people gathered together. Please note the wind and fire are used by Luke to describe the indescribable, as similes describing what’s unknown in terms of what’s known. As John Stott notes, “The noise was not wind, but sounded like it; the sight was not fire but resembled it” (*The Message of Acts*, p. 62). By contrast, the known languages aren’t literary images, but real languages existing at the time. However, the speakers are given supernatural abilities to speak them. For the record, this event isn’t equivalent with speaking in unknown tongues (*glossolalia*), found in 1 Corinthians 12, but rather it shows what many understand to be a purposeful reversal of Babel (*Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, p. 388; *NIV Application Commentary*, pp. 90-91).

##### **2. From Every Nation Under Heaven**

Some think they find a contradiction here. The list of nations at Pentecost is not “every” nation by the strictest use of the term; no pilgrims from Indonesia, for example. However, Luke doesn’t intend his “every” to convey that every single possible nation on earth was present as he checks off a list. To so insist is to view a 1st-century narrative through 21st-century lenses. Luke simply means to communicate an assembling of nations known to Luke and Theophilus where Jewish life was present at that time. It’s certainly possible to discern an ordering of the list given in Acts (see *Cornerstone*, p. 389, for one example). But it may be more instructive to note as Ajith Fernando quotes John Stott: “The list of nations given in verses 9-11 suggests that Luke ‘was speaking, as the biblical writers normally did, from his own horizon, not ours, and was referring to the Graeco-Roman world situated around the Mediterranean basin, indeed to every nation in which there were Jews” (*NIV Application*, p. 88; *The Message of Acts*, p. 63).

##### **3. Amazement and Dismissal**

While many Pentecost pilgrims are amazed by the miracle in front of them, many others dismiss it outright. This shouldn’t surprise us. Humans can view the same event and yet come up with multiple evaluations and responses to it. This seems especially true when we consider the Christian message; what makes sense to one person is reprehensible to another. John Calvin wrote from his own preaching experience, “If the same sermon is preached, say, to a hundred people, twenty receive it with the ready obedience of faith, while the rest hold it valueless, or laugh, or hiss, or loathe it” (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill and trans. Ford Lewis Battles [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960], III.xxiv.12). We should never weigh the effectiveness of witness solely by public response. Both are true: 1) The Holy Spirit is the true Evangelist, and 2) human receptivity to the gospel continues to be a mystery.

## **Sample 45-Minute Lesson Plan for “The Holy Spirit Comes”**

- 1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Acts 2:1-13. [5 minutes]**
- 2. Review very briefly Acts 1:5,8 about the promise of the Spirit. [5 minutes]**
- 3. Discuss the coming of the Spirit in Acts 2:1-4. [10 minutes]**
  - Pentecost one of the great festivals of Judaism; primarily a harvest celebration
  - “All together” in a room waiting upon Jesus’ promise
  - From heaven comes: 1) a sound like a mighty wind; 2) “divided tongues as of fire”
  - Then a third event: Known languages, not unknown tongues as in other settings
  - How are wind, fire, and languages connected? What does each event communicate about who the Spirit is and what He does?
  - What does the need to speak in other languages imply about God’s mission? About grace? About the mission of Jesus Christ’s followers?
- 4. Discuss the importance of the nations represented in Acts 2:5-11. [10 minutes]**
  - Jews from many other nations present in Jerusalem for Pentecost
  - Review the list of nations represented; its characteristics and importance
  - How does the use of national languages draw upon what happened at Babel (Genesis 11)? Upon the promise made to Abraham (Genesis 12)?
  - What claims do such allusions make about the gospel? About our focus today?
- 5. Discuss the two responses of the crowd in Acts 2:12-13. [15 minutes]**
  - First group: astonished, amazed, wanting to find out what’s happening
  - Second group: mocking, dismissive, “They’re just drunk, that’s all” (2:13 NLT)
  - Why are both responses not entirely unexpected? What other Scripture passages speak to each response?
  - What parallels do you find from both responses with contemporary reactions to the Christian message in our time?
- 6. Close in prayer.**

## **Sample Discussion Questions for “The Holy Spirit Comes”**

After starting your small group with prayer, read Acts 2:1-13 and discuss the following:

- The group of 120 followers of Christ are “all together” in a room in Acts 2:1. How and why do you think this is significant?
- What three events mark the coming of the Holy Spirit to the disciples in Acts 2:2-4? How are these three events connected? What does each event communicate about who the Spirit is and what He does?
- What does the need to speak in other known languages (Acts 2:4,8) imply about God’s mission? About grace? About the mission of Jesus Christ’s followers?
- What do you notice about the nations represented at Pentecost? How does the use of national languages draw upon what happened at Babel (Genesis 11)? Upon the promise made to Abraham (Genesis 12)?
- What claims do such allusions to Genesis 11 and 12 make about the gospel? About our focus today? How has the Kingdom already come? How has it not yet come?
- Note the responses given by both groups of people in Acts 2:12-13. Why are both responses not entirely unexpected? What other Scripture passages speak here?
- What parallels do you find from both responses in Acts 2:12-13 with contemporary reactions to the Christian message in our time?

## TEACHING HELPS

### *Sent by Love: A Study of Acts, Part 1*

#### II. The Spirit Empowers for Witness: September 13-27, 2020

##### B. September 20, Acts 2:14-41, “Peter Preaches”

#### Points to Ponder for “Peter Preaches”

##### **1. The Preacher**

The man Peter, seen in Acts 2:14 and following, looks totally different from the man we see and hear in the Gospels. The person first intimidated by a servant girl (see Luke 22:54-62) into denying he even knows Jesus is now the person taking the lead in explaining to the thousands of gathered pilgrims what’s happening before them. His rural accent marks him as a Galilean, a culturally inferior status. His lack of education falls short of what’s usually required for religious leadership. His career as a fisherman makes clear he is a common man, one of the “hoi polloi,” which means “the many,” a Greek phrase used then and today by elites to describe the masses. But reluctant, redneck, remedial Peter now is filled with the Holy Spirit. He spent more than three years walking with Jesus, and in particular an intensive post-resurrection apprenticeship, with a level of on-the-job training received by few. He has eaten with the crucified, risen Lord. God uses everything in Peter’s life thus far to prepare him for this singular event. Peter responds with willingness and commitment.

##### **2. The Sermon**

Peter does not “go rogue” in stepping forward to preach, for he stands with the other apostles, an act clearly meant to show the unity brought by the Spirit among the Jesus movement’s core leadership. Peter’s sermon is masterful, especially considering his lack of experience. The sermon truly represents the Holy Spirit’s ability to prepare and then to work through those who make themselves available to God. Beginning with the crowd’s question about what’s happening (and thereby refuting the claim the 120 are drunk), Peter proceeds to connect his listeners first with Joel 2:28-32’s prophecy and then with Jesus of Nazareth’s death and resurrection as central to God’s claim upon them. He uses both the Psalms (16,110) and the events to which he and others have been eyewitnesses. The Christocentric focus of the sermon comes through. Little doubt exists that this sermon is in some form a summary, as 2:40 directly states that “with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them” (ESV). The appeal is personal and direct; little subtlety marks Peter’s content and method.

##### **3. The Response**

The first evangelistic sermon preached in Christian history experiences an admirable result. Its listeners are “cut to the heart” (2:37, ESV), a phrase intended to denote an inner conviction of sin, then and ask what they should do. Peter’s unambiguous response? To repent and to be baptized in Christ’s name. Such a response will result in the work of the cross being applied to their lives and their sins accordingly forgiven. In so doing, they will receive the Holy Spirit, noting for us that it is upon a response of faith in Christ as Savior and Lord that the Spirit enters human lives, and not as a second blessing to be experienced later. There is a covenantal aspect of this forgiveness, as 2:39 notes it is “for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God shall call to Himself” (ESV). Three thousand people express their faith in Jesus Christ in a Spirit-led reply to Peter’s evangelistic sermon.

## **Sample 45-Minute Lesson Plan for “Peter Preaches”**

- 1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Acts 2:14-41 [5 minutes].**
- 2. Remind the class about the events of Acts 2:1-13 [5 minutes].**
- 3. Discuss Peter as the first Christian preacher in Acts 2:14 [10 minutes].**
  - Remarkable transformation in his life since denying Jesus in Luke 22:54-62
  - Stands in clear concert with the other apostles
  - Does God transform lives today as He did Peter’s? Who are examples we would lift up as signs that He still changes people today?
- 4. Discuss Peter’s sermon in Acts 2:15-36 [15 minutes].**
  - Peter begins by answering what is happening with Joel 2:28-32
  - Then transitions to Jesus as Peter describes what he and the others have witnessed: Jesus Christ crucified and risen, “Lord and Christ” (2:36, ESV)
  - Psalm 16 and 110 provide Scriptural support for Peter’s strong claims about Jesus; important support for a Jewish audience
  - Peter begins with what everyone is asking. How is this starting-off point helpful in spiritual conversations? How do we move from “felt” needs to true needs?
  - Peter’s sermon is direct, clear, and strong. How might our discussions of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior benefit from a similar emphasis upon directness, clarity, and strength? How do we strike the right balance?
- 5. Discuss the response to Peter’s sermon in Acts 2:37-41 [10 minutes].**
  - The crowd is “cut to the heart”: growing awareness of their sin and need
  - Peter’s reply: repent and be baptized, and receive forgiveness and the presence/power of the Spirit; approximately 3000 “souls” respond
  - Covenantal: for you, for your children, and for those far away geographically and spiritually, “everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself” (2:39)
  - Why is the Spirit’s coming linked here with the time of salvation and not to a “second blessing” that comes after professing Christ? Why is this important?
  - How is God still bringing “souls” into relationship with Himself? Where is this happening today? How can we be part of God’s continuing work of salvation in the name of Jesus Christ at home? At work? In the neighborhood?
- 6. Close in prayer.**

## ***Sample Discussion Questions for “Peter Preaches”***

After starting your small group with prayer, read Acts 2:14-41 and discuss the following:

- Cover the “brass tacks” of the passage by asking and answering basic observational questions about it: Who? What? When? Where? How? Why? Discuss your answers.
- A important side bar: This passage shows all the signs of being a historical narrative. Compared to what other biblical styles? How does this help us understand and apply the text?
- Does God transform lives today as he did Peter’s? Who are examples we would lift up as signs that He still changes people today?
- Peter begins with what everyone is asking. How is this starting-off point helpful in spiritual conversations? How then do we move from “felt” needs to true needs?
- Peter’s sermon is direct, clear, and strong. How might our discussions of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior benefit from a similar emphasis upon directness, clarity, and strength? How do we strike the right balance?
- How is God still bringing “souls” into relationship with Himself? Where is this happening today? How can we be part of God’s continuing work of salvation in the name of Jesus Christ at home? At work? In the neighborhood?

## TEACHING HELPS

### *Sent by Love: A Study of Acts, Part 1*

#### II. The Spirit Empowers for Witness: September 13-27, 2020

#### C. September 27, Acts 2:42-47, “The Believers Meet Together”

#### Points to Ponder for “The Believers Meet Together”

##### **1. They Devoted Themselves**

A complaint common to times of religious revival is that its effects are not long-lasting, for the fervor quickly dies off and things return as they were before. Acts 2:42 quickly emphasizes that such is not the fate of the first Christian evangelistic effort. Why? Because “they devoted themselves,” as the verse begins. Ajith Fernando writes, “‘Devoting’ (*proskartereo*) is the same word as is used in connection with the persistent devotion of the disciples to prayer in [Acts]1:14 (translated ‘constantly’ there). . . The word is used often with the idea of ‘persisting obstinately in’ [C. K. Barrett, *Acts*, p. 164] something—a meaning that is appropriate here” (*NIV Application Commentary*, pp. 119-120). The new followers of Jesus Christ exhibit a measure of devotion to four practices that quickly develop and mature them in Christian faith: 1) the teaching of the apostles, 2) fellowship together, 3) the breaking of bread, considered by many (including this writer) as a Lord’s Supper reference, and 4) prayer. Where many mountain top experiences of faith fail is in follow up with new disciples of Christ. No such failing here.

##### **2. All Who Believed Were Together**

Also present in the new Christian community is a depth of connectedness far outstripping anything its participants had previously known. Awe and wonder from a sense of God’s abiding presence co-exists with a caring for each other well beyond the norm, with Christian brothers and sisters willing to share their resources to help out those in need. (No doubt there were many in great need for two reasons: 1) many were in Jerusalem for the festival and were staying longer than they had planned, and 2) the Christian church from its beginnings appealed to the poor both in heart and in finances.) This selfless serving of one another is not to be understood as some type of compulsory mandate, but rather as “an unassuming, self-giving meeting of physical needs across all socioeconomic boundaries (*Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, p. 398).” Relationships develop and deepen as the new believers worship at the Temple and share meals in homes together, marking the new community as something radically different than what has been witnessed before in Jerusalem.

##### **3. The Lord Added to Their Number**

The combination of continuing development in Christian discipleship and continuing relational depth with one another leads to a winsomeness of witness. The inevitable result? God continues to add people to the community as more and more trust Christ and follow Him as Lord. It’s hard to overemphasize the importance of this winsomeness the first Christians exhibit, especially when compared to the cultural stereotypes of Christians today as narrow-minded, bigoted, legalistic, and sharp-tongued. Even as we acknowledge the stereotypes are generally inaccurate and unfair, as stereotypes usually are, we also must admit that sometimes they are on target. Many claim that they are enamored of Jesus Christ, yet not so fond of His professed followers. Sometimes such a claim is an excuse. Other times it’s the truth.

## **Sample 45-Minute Lesson Plan for “The Believers Meet Together”**

- 1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Acts 2:42-47 [5 minutes].**
- 2. Review Acts 2:1-41 very briefly [5 minutes].**
- 3. Discuss the development of the new Christians in Acts 2:42 [10 minutes].**
  - Significant commitment exists, nurtured by a devotion to four ongoing practices: 1) learning the apostles’ teachings, 2) experiencing fellowship with one another, 3) sharing the Lord’s Supper with each other, and 4) praying together
  - Religious fervor and commitment often fade quickly. How much of this lessening is to be expected, and how much can and should be prevented? Why?
  - What four practices did the early church lead its participants to do? What might these four look like in our day? How might we benefit from each of these?
- 4. Discuss the winsomeness of the first Christians in Acts 2:43-47a [15 minutes].**
  - Christians are helping out one another in extraordinary and self-giving ways
  - A depth of relationship among the members of the faith community continues to grow through worship and fellowship
  - The above combines into a sense of societal favor and appreciation
  - Why is caring for one another such a powerful witness to Jesus Christ?
  - The winsomeness of the first Christians stands in stark contrast to the often unfavorable ways Christians are described and portrayed in today’s culture. Why is this the case? What are some ways to combat these impressions?
- 5. Discuss the continuing response to the faith community’s growth and fellowship in Acts 2:47b [10 minutes].**
  - God adds to the growing number of new Christians with even more Christians
  - Clearly understood as God’s work, not the result of human initiative; yet there is a synergy between a vibrant faith community and a vibrant evangelism
  - Why is community so important to the vital practice of Christianity? How does this emphasis upon community in Acts 2 compare to the individualism and consumerism prevalent today?
  - What can we learn from the first Christians? How might we take their example and translate it into something helpful and significant in our time?
- 6. Close in prayer.**

## **Sample Discussion Questions for “The Believers Meet Together”**

After starting your small group with prayer, read Acts 2:42-47 and discuss the following:

- Set the scene for Acts 2:42-47 by quickly reviewing what happened in Acts 2:1-41.
- Then describe how Luke details the first Christian church in Acts 2:42-47.
- Religious fervor and commitment often fade quickly. How much of this lessening is to be expected, and how much can and should be prevented? Why?
- What four practices did the early church lead its participants to do in Acts 2:42? What might these four look like in our day? How might we benefit from each of these?
- Why is caring for one another, as in Acts 2:44-46, such a powerful witness to Christ?
- Why is community so important to the vital practice of Christianity? How does this emphasis upon community in Acts 2 compare to the individualism and consumerism prevalent today?
- The winsomeness of the first Christians stands in stark contrast to the often unfavorable ways Christians are described and portrayed in today’s culture. Why is this the case? What are some ways to combat these impressions?
- What can we learn from the first Christians? How might we take their example and translate it into something helpful and significant in our time?