

THE ASSIGNMENT

MARCH 29, 2020



INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL

SCRIPTURE

Acts 1

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

Read the book of Acts. Seriously, read it. You know you have lots of time on your hands. One of the things that you might notice, when you reach the book's concluding chapter is that it doesn't wrap the plot up in a tidy little bow. If you think that Paul in Rome awaiting a hearing with the emperor is closure, then I suppose it is wrapped up, but if this were a movie, you'd be waiting for the final scene to tell us what happened. But then Acts is really a sort of unfinished work. Presumably, it doesn't tell us about how Paul's legal situation resolved itself because Luke didn't yet know how it turned out. Tradition tells us that Paul came through this dust-up and walked free, enabled to do further missionary work. Eventually then, he died a martyr's death on a succeeding visit to Rome in the midst of another run-in with the authorities.

Acts is unfinished, and we are supposed to be part of its continuation. Some of our brethren think the current Corona situation is a sign of the end times. I am absolutely certain that it could be but also couldn't be. What I do know is that we are part of the church. We are placed here, like the saints of Acts, to plow through all the situations, the good and the bad.

Read the book of Acts and you'll find that there are plenty of bad situations. Look how things turned out for Stephen and James the apostle. Look how often Paul had to beat feet out of town, one step ahead of the mob. It makes a quarantine seem pretty feeble by comparison.

The mission Jesus delivered in Acts 1:8 was not voided by oppression or famine or pandemic. It was their mission and remains ours.

INTRODUCTION

One of our church's widows needed her grass mowed. Her assigned deacon learned this but couldn't do the job himself. Looking at her address, I decided that I'd load my mower in the car and drive over there rather than try to find someone else to do it.

"You will be my witnesses," Jesus told His followers in Acts 1:8. He didn't qualify that by saying that we'd be His witnesses if the weather was nice or if there was nothing else going on or if the world hadn't gone crazy from a virus. "You will receive power," He told them.

Sometimes that power is a car and a mower and a reasonably able body. Sometimes it is the clear and definite work of the Holy Spirit. When I got to that lady's house, I got her grass mowed, but there was more to it. I got to be Christ's witness. What will come of that? I'm not sure, but that's not what Jesus called us to know. He just gave us a job. Today, I think, I did okay.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

READ ACTS 1:1-5

1. How does Acts flow from Luke? Is there overlap? Is it clear why Luke divided his account at this point?
2. What did Jesus do in the forty days between the resurrection and the ascension? How would you sum up the purpose(s) of these actions?
3. Why do you believe Jesus remained with the disciples for forty days? Why not thirty or fifty?
4. How does the Holy Spirit promised in 1:4-5 differ from the previous encounters with the Spirit in the Old Testament or gospels?

READ ACTS 1:6-14

1. How does Jesus' answer in 1:7-8 follow from the "kingdom" question in 1:6?
2. Do the elements in 1:8 (the power and the witnessing) stand independently or does one naturally lead to the other?
3. Who was given the charge—the mission—in 1:8? Was it just the twelve or the entire gathering of the church?
4. Since Jesus had apparently popped in and out of the disciples' presence over the forty days, why do you believe he made such a dramatic exit?

READ ACTS 1:12-26

1. What do we learn about the nature of the gathering that would become the church in these verses?
2. Since Judas was replaced as an apostle, should we replace apostles today? Why or why not?
3. What value can we derive from the fate that Judas suffered here? Why is this "negative" story in the midst of the positive?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. How have you experienced the power of the Holy Spirit? What does that look or feel like? Is it appropriate for us to pray for a greater measure of that power?
2. When was the last time that you served as a witness to Jesus, either near at home or in the wider world? What does it mean to be a witness?
3. What is a way in which you could stand as a witness to Christ in these strange days of virus and quarantine? Are you doing it? What stops you from doing more?
4. Are you convinced that Jesus will return in the same way that He went? How will He feel about your actions if He comes back today?
5. Can you do more to be united with other believers in prayer?

GLOSSARY

Receive (Acts 1:8) The Greek verb here, *lambano*, means one of two things: take or receive. Which one is appropriate here? It is almost always translated as “receive,” since the power is given by God through the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, why shouldn’t we “take” power when we receive the Holy Spirit?

Power (Acts 1:8) This is a fun Greek word: *dynamis*. It’s the root for English words like “dynamic” or “dynamo.” This same word is the one used in the Lord’s Prayer: “the kingdom and the *power* and the glory.” Sometimes we read over that word too quickly, but the power is real.

Witnesses (Acts 1:8) Does “witnessing” simply mean telling people about Jesus. That, I think, is what I learned in church growing up. But this word, *martys*, means more. Yes, it gives us the English “martyr.” Those who witness do so with their whole selves, even, if necessary, to the point of death.

Taken up (Acts 1:9) We speak of the ascension as something Jesus did, but He “was taken up.” The passive voice here suggests some other force working on the physical Jesus. Jesus didn’t fly, but the power of God seems to have “flown” Him. Significance? I’m not sure.

ONLINE RESOURCES

- Background on Acts
<https://www.biblica.com/resources/scholar-notes/niv-study-bible/intro-to-acts/>
- You Shall Receive Power Till Jesus Comes—John Piper
<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/you-shall-receive-power-till-jesus-comes>
- You will be My Witnesses—Matt Slick
<https://carm.org/sermon-acts-18-you-will-be-my-witnesses>
- Study Guide for Acts 1—David Guzik
https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Act/Act-1.cfm