

As God's people, we want to be guided by His Word and empowered by His Spirit to look more like Jesus. This Scripture Guide is based on this morning's passage to further equip you with what God's Word says.

Scripture Guide

Week 1 - Acts 1:1-11

Background

The author, Luke, viewed the Book of Acts as the sequel to his Gospel. At the beginning of Acts, he states why he wrote it, "In my first account concerning everything that the Lord Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1). This is interesting because he is saying that in the first book, the Gospel of Luke, he told what Jesus did during his earthly life and ministry (Luke 1:1-4). Now in this second book he is telling the account of what Jesus would continue doing and teaching through his eyewitnesses and disciples - the apostles.

The climax of the work of Jesus and the story of Luke-Acts is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. While Luke's Gospel narrative builds up to the resurrection as its resolution, Acts positions it as the story's launch pad. From Pentecost, the repeated gospel message is that Jesus has risen from the dead and he is Lord. Jesus Christ as the risen Lord of all, is the substance behind every struggle and tension in the proceeding story of the book of Acts.

As we go through the book of Acts two major themes drive the story: The Spirit and The Kingdom.

The Holy Spirit

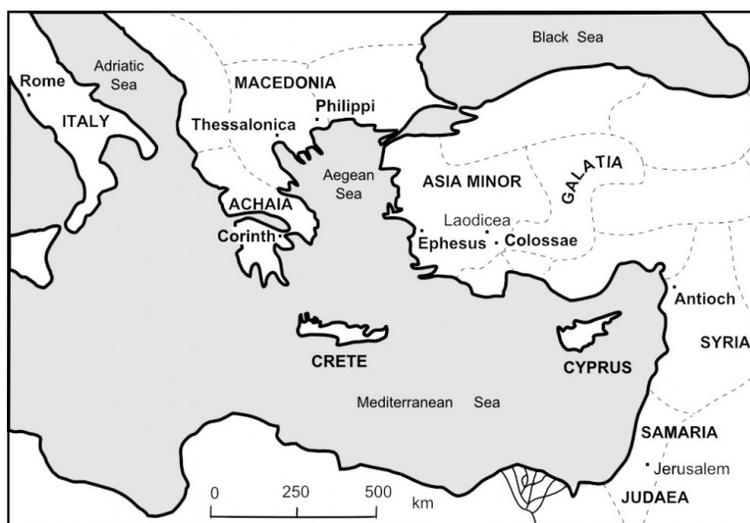
The movement of Jesus and his work in the world was carried out by the Spirit of God. A unique and key focus within Acts is the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Luke mentions the Spirit about 60 times in Acts alone, which is at least twice as frequent as any other book in the Bible.

Chapter 1 of Acts sets the tone for Jesus' purpose for his disciples in the world in verse 8, "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." He begins fulfilling his promise gets shortly afterward when the Holy Spirit rushes in on the disciples and immediately makes his presence known on the day of Pentecost (2:1-4). Then from this point, the apostles and the rest of Jesus' disciples are the mouthpieces of God and boldly preach, exalt, and exemplify the gospel message. The book of Acts shows vignettes of the Holy Spirit coming to fill Peter, Stephen, Barnabas, Saul/Paul, and others so that they can preach and demonstrate the power of God. Each of the key characters in Acts shows that the Holy Spirit fills, gives life, and empowers for the mission of Jesus' kingdom. Along with structuring Acts through key characters, we can also see the book outline geographically with Jesus' words in Acts 1:8, that they will be his witnesses from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the world (i.e. Rome), coming to fulfillment.

The Kingdom

A major point within the Gospel of Luke is the Kingdom. Jesus' teaching ministry highlights the kingdom of God at least 40 times. Luke seeks to demonstrate throughout Luke-Acts exactly what Jesus meant by "the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Luke 11:20). So, at the beginning of Acts, we see again Jesus teaching about the kingdom, yet we get the sense that it has yet to fully come. The disciples ask him, "when will you restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). But Jesus does not answer their question directly, instead, He declares that they will be agents of his Spirit and go out from Jerusalem to the farthest parts of the world. In this way, Luke sets the stage for how the Kingdom of God will expand from the people of Israel to encompass the whole world. And the Spirit of God will direct and drive the

Kingdom's expansion. In fact, within theirs and the rest of the first disciples' lifetime, the gospel would make its way from Jerusalem (bottom right of the map below) to the heart of the Roman empire, the city of Rome itself (pictured top left).



(The journey to Rome being 2,344 miles – roughly the same distance as Columbia to Los Angeles.)

When the disciples begin speaking different languages in Acts chapter 2, this acted as the preview for the gospel message and the Holy Spirit pouring out on, not only for the Jewish nation, but all peoples, nations, and languages (Act 2:39, Joel 2:28). In chapter 8 we see Phillip preaching the gospel to the Samaritans, just as Jesus had commanded in 1:8. Then the Spirit immediately sends him to go to an Ethiopian and teach him about Jesus and share the gospel. Then in Acts 10, Peter receives a vision from God and he explicitly calls him to preach the gospel to Gentiles, starting with the Roman Centurion. Not long after we see the first church planted among the Gentiles in Antioch.

In chapter 11, the church in Antioch marks a significant turning point for God's people and who are the citizens of Jesus' kingdom. Up until this point in Acts, the movement of the gospel and the church has been almost entirely among the Jewish people and within the confines of the national borders of Israel. However, Luke begins to shift the narrative in chapter 11, where the Gentile people become the stage for the Spirit's work. It is from Antioch that the first missionaries are sent out to go bring the gospel to the Gentiles. When Paul and Barnabas preach the gospel in chapter 13, they draw clear application from Scripture that God intends his kingdom and salvation to go to the ends of the earth – not just the people of Israel (13:47). They understood God's promise of salvation for all peoples was the driving narrative for his Kingdom.

The story arc of Acts shows us that the ends of the earth, at least in part, in the apostles' day would be reached. When we get to the end of Luke's narrative we find Paul in Rome preaching the gospel. He says that this message of salvation for all nations and the hope of resurrection by the power of the Spirit of Jesus is the "hope of Israel" (Act 28:20). He continues ministering in Rome preaching and teaching about the coming kingdom of the Lord Jesus (Acts 28:31). Luke leaves his readers with a sense of "to be continued". Yet this is where the church picks up the mantle by the power of the same Holy Spirit, to continue to be Jesus' witnesses to the ends of the earth. And like the apostles at the beginning of Acts, we too await the return of our Lord Jesus - come Lord Jesus!

A digital version of this Scripture Guide is also available on this week's sermon page online.