

These pages are drawn from the actual Study Guide and Commentary (Study Set) used for *The Acts of the Apostles*. The full study contains materials for nine lessons. All Little Rock Scripture Study materials are copyrighted and published with a *nihil obstat* and *imprimatur*.

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## STUDY GUIDE

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# THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Little Rock Scripture Study Staff



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## LITTLE ROCK SCRIPTURE STUDY

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*A ministry of the Diocese of Little Rock  
in partnership with Liturgical Press*



Office of the Bishop

## DIOCESE OF LITTLE ROCK

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Dear Friends in Christ,

The Bible comes to us as both a gift and an opportunity. It is a gift of God who loves us enough to communicate with us. The only way to enjoy the gift is to open and savor it. The Bible is also an opportunity to actually meet God who is present in the stories, teachings, people, and prayers that fill its pages.

I encourage you to open your Bibles in anticipation that God will do something good in your life. I encourage you to take advantage of the opportunity to meet God in prayer, study, and small-group discussion.

Little Rock Scripture Study offers materials that are simple to use, and a method that has been tested by time. The questions in this study guide will direct your study, help you to understand the passages you are reading, and challenge you to relate the Scriptures to your own life experiences.

Allow the Word of God to form you as a disciple of the Lord Jesus. Accept the challenge to be "transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Romans 12:2). Above all, receive God's Word as his gift, and act upon it.

Sincerely in Christ,

✠ J. Peter Sartain  
Bishop of Little Rock

## *Sacred Scripture*

“The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since from the table of both the word of God and of the body of Christ she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life, especially in the sacred liturgy. She has always regarded the Scriptures together with sacred tradition as the supreme rule of faith, and will ever do so. For, inspired by God and committed once and for all to writing, they impart the word of God Himself without change, and make the voice of the Holy Spirit resound in the words of the prophets and apostles. Therefore, like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and ruled by sacred Scripture. For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the force and power in the word of God is so great that it remains the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and perennial source of spiritual life.”

Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, no. 21.

### **INTERPRETATION OF SACRED SCRIPTURE**

“Since God speaks in sacred Scripture through men in human fashion, the interpreter of sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words.

“Those who search out the intention of the sacred writers must, among other things, have regard for ‘literary forms.’ For truth is proposed and expressed in a variety of ways, depending on whether a text is history of one kind or another, or whether its form is that of prophecy, poetry, or some other type of speech. The interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in particular circumstances as he used contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation

#### 4 Instructions

of his own time and culture. For the correct understanding of what the sacred author wanted to assert, due attention must be paid to the customary and characteristic styles of perceiving, speaking, and narrating which prevailed at the time of the sacred writer, and to the customs men normally followed in that period in their everyday dealings with one another.”

Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, no. 12.

## Instructions

### MATERIALS FOR THE STUDY

**This Study Guide:** The Acts of the Apostles

**Bible:** The New American Bible with Revised New Testament or The New Jerusalem Bible is recommended. Paraphrased editions are discouraged as they offer little if any help when facing difficult textual questions. Choose a Bible you feel free to write in or underline.

**Commentary:** The New Collegeville Bible Commentary, volume 5, *The Acts of the Apostles* by Dennis Hamm, S.J. (Liturgical Press) is used with this study. The abbreviations for this commentary, NCBC-NT volume 5, and the assigned pages are found at the beginning of each lesson.

### ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

**Bible Dictionary:** *The Dictionary of the Bible* by John L. McKenzie (Simon & Schuster) is highly recommended as a reference.

**Notebook:** A notebook may be used for lecture notes and your personal reflections.

### WEEKLY LESSONS

Lesson 1—Acts 1–2

Lesson 2—Acts 3–5

Lesson 3—Acts 6–8

Lesson 4—Acts 9–12

Lesson 5—Acts 13–15

Lesson 6—Acts 16–18

Lesson 7—Acts 19–21

Lesson 8—Acts 22–24

Lesson 9—Acts 25–28

### YOUR DAILY PERSONAL STUDY

The first step is prayer. Open your heart and mind to God. Reading Scripture is an opportunity to listen to God who loves you. Pray that the same Holy Spirit who guided the formation of Scripture will inspire you to correctly understand what you read and empower you to make what you read a part of your life.

The next step is commitment. Daily spiritual food is as necessary as food for the body. This study is divided into daily units. Schedule a regular time and place for your study, as free from distractions as possible. Allow about twenty minutes a day. Make it a daily appointment with God.

As you begin each lesson read the assigned chapters of Scripture found at the beginning of each lesson, the footnotes in your Bible, and then the indicated pages of the commentary. This preparation will give you an overview of the entire lesson and help you to appreciate the context of individual passages.

As you reflect on Scripture, ask yourself these four questions:

1. *What does the Scripture passage say?*  
Read the passage slowly and reflectively. Use your imagination to picture the scene or enter into it.
2. *What does the Scripture passage mean?*  
Read the footnotes and the commentary to help you understand what the sacred writers intended and what God wanted to communicate by means of their words.
3. *What does the Scripture passage mean to me?*  
Meditate on the passage. God's Word is living and powerful. What is God saying to you today? How does the Scripture passage apply to your life today?

4. *What am I going to do about it?*

Try to discover how God may be challenging you in this passage. An encounter with God contains a challenge to know God's will and follow it more closely in daily life.

**THE QUESTIONS ASSIGNED FOR EACH DAY**

Read the questions and references for each day. The questions are designed to help you listen to God's Word and to prepare you for the weekly small-group discussion.

Some of the questions can be answered briefly and objectively by referring to the Bible references and the commentary (*What does the passage say?*). Some will lead you to a better understanding of how the Scriptures apply to the Church, sacraments, and society (*What does the passage mean?*). Some questions will invite you to consider how God's Word challenges or supports you in your relationships with God and others (*What does the passage mean to me?*). Finally, the questions will lead you to examine your actions in light of Scripture (*What am I going to do about it?*).

Write your responses in this study guide or in a notebook to help you clarify and organize your thoughts and feelings.

**THE WEEKLY SMALL-GROUP MEETING**

The weekly small-group sharing is the heart of the Little Rock Scripture Study Program. Participants gather in small groups to share the results of praying, reading, and reflecting on Scripture and on the assigned questions. The goal of the discussion is for group members to be strengthened and nourished individually and as a community through sharing how God's Word speaks to them and affects their daily lives. The daily study questions will guide the discussion; it is not necessary to discuss all the questions.

All members share the responsibility of creating an atmosphere of loving support and trust in the group by respecting the opinions and experiences of others, and by affirming and encouraging one another. The simple shared prayer which be-

gins and ends each small group meeting also helps create the open and trusting environment in which group members can share their faith deeply and grow in the study of God's Word.

A distinctive feature of this program is its emphasis on and trust in God's presence working in and through each member. Sharing responses to God's presence in the Word and in others can bring about remarkable growth and transformation.

#### **THE WRAP-UP LECTURE**

The lecture is designed to develop and clarify the themes of each lesson. It is not intended to be the focus of the group's discussion. For this reason, the lecture always occurs *after* the small group discussion. If several small groups meet at one time, the groups may gather in a central location to listen to the lecture.

Lectures may be presented by a local speaker. They are also available on DVD, VHS, or CD.

## **LESSON I**

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# **Acts 1–2**

**NCBC-NT VOLUME 5, PAGES 5–22**

### **Day 1**

1. What do you hope to gain from this study of the Acts of the Apostles?
2. a) How does the opening of Acts reveal its relationship to the Gospel we know as Luke (Acts 1:1-2)? (See Luke 1:1-4.)  
b) What is Luke's purpose in writing a sequel to his Gospel (1:1-2)?
3. The apostles ask Jesus about restoring the kingdom to Israel. How does his response prepare the reader for the major events of the book of Acts? (1:6-8)

### **Day 2**

4. What categories does Luke use to identify the three different groups of people gathered in the upper room (1:13-14)?
5. Compare Luke's account of Judas Iscariot's death in Acts (1:16-19) with Matthew's. (See Matt 27:3-10.) In what do they agree or disagree?
6. a) What were the requirements for the replacement for Judas (1:21-22)? (See 3:15; 10:37-43.)  
b) Why was it important to replace Judas (1:15-26)? (See Luke 22:29-30.)



SAMPLE

**Day 3**

7. a) How was the coming of the Holy Spirit identified (2:2-4.)?  
b) How does the Christian Pentecost reverse the punishment at the Tower of Babel? (See Gen 11:1-9; Eph 4:3-13.)
8. What does it mean to be “filled with the Holy Spirit” (2:4)? (See 1:5; 2:38; Luke 3:16; Rom 5:5; Eph 1:13.)
9. What do we know about the content of the message being proclaimed by those who were speaking in tongues (2:11)?

**Day 4**

10. How does the speaking in tongues described here (2:4-13) differ from the “tongues” Paul writes about? (See 1 Cor 14:1-11.)
11. How does Peter explain the group’s strange behavior (2:15-21)? (See Joel 3:1-5.)
12. What are the essential details about Jesus that Peter chooses to proclaim to “you who are Israelites” (2:22-36)?

SAMPLE

**Day 5**

13. a) What message about Jesus does Peter find in Psalm 16:8-11 (Acts 2:25-33)?  
b) What is the message about Jesus in Psalm 110:1 (Acts 2:34-36)?
14. In what way does Peter's speech to his fellow Israelites hint that the Gentiles might also come to share in the gift of the Holy Spirit (2:39)?
15. a) What does Peter say is required of those who would receive the Holy Spirit (2:37-38)? (See 10:48; Rom 6:3; 1 Cor 1:13.)  
b) Is there any other way? (See 10:44-48.)

**Day 6**

16. a) How does Luke describe the way of life of the new believers (2:42-47)?  
b) How might the Holy Spirit be leading modern believers to live more as these early believers did?
17. What did the apostles and the early believers in Christ do to preserve their identity as Jews (2:46)? (See 3:2-3.)
18. Have you experienced the excitement in the Holy Spirit described of the first Christians (2:11-13, 46-47)? (See Gal 5:22-23; Eph 3:16-19; Col 1:11-12.)

SAMPLE



VOLUME 5

NEW TESTAMENT

THE NEW COLLEGEVILLE  
BIBLE COMMENTARY

# THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

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LITURGICAL PRESS  
Collegeville, Minnesota

[www.litpress.org](http://www.litpress.org)





## TEXT AND COMMENTARY

# The Acts of the Apostles

## I. The Preparation for the Christian Mission

- ◀ 1 **The Promise of the Spirit.** <sup>1</sup>In the first book, Theophilus, I dealt with all that Jesus did and taught <sup>2</sup>until the day he was taken up, after giving instructions through the holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. <sup>3</sup>He presented himself alive to them by many proofs after he had suffered, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup>While meeting with them, he enjoined them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for “the promise of the Father about which you have heard me speak; <sup>5</sup>for John

## THE RISEN CHRIST AND THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL IN JERUSALEM

### Acts 1:1–8:3

Luke shows how Jesus’ mission to initiate the end-time restoration of Israel finds expression in the emergent, Spirit-filled Christian community in Jerusalem.

### 1:1-5 Introduction: “As I was saying, Theophilus . . .”

Luke introduces this sequel to his Gospel by addressing Theophilus, as he did in the prologue to his Gospel (Luke 1:1-4), indicating that this is a continuation of the same project described there. Literally, the Greek of verse 1 says, “I dealt with all that Jesus *began* to do and teach,” implying that Acts will treat what Jesus *continues* to do and teach through the apostolic church. And the phrase “through the holy Spirit” more naturally modifies “chosen”—that is, “after giving instructions to the apostles whom he had chosen through the holy Spirit.” For Luke, alone among the Synoptic writers, notes that Jesus chose the Twelve after spending the night in prayer (Luke 6:12-13), which for Luke often precedes a special

► This symbol indicates a cross reference number in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. See page 130 for number citations.

*Acts 1:6-11*

baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the holy Spirit."

- ◀ **The Ascension of Jesus.** <sup>6</sup>When they had gathered together they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup>He answered them, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has established by his own authority. <sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you,

and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." <sup>9</sup>When he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight. <sup>10</sup>While they were looking intently at the sky as he was going, suddenly two men dressed in white garments stood beside them. <sup>11</sup>They said, "Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from

empowerment by the Spirit (see Luke 3:21, leading to 4:18; Acts 1:14, leading to 2:1-4; and Acts 4:23-31).

As in the Gospel, the centerpiece of Jesus' teaching remains the kingdom of God. Jesus' reference to "the promise of the Father" alludes to at least three passages in the Third Gospel: (1) Luke 11:13: "If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the holy Spirit to those who ask him?"; (2) Luke 12:32: "Do not be afraid any longer, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom"; (3) Luke 24:49: "And [behold] I am sending the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." The gift of the Spirit at Pentecost will also signal a further manifestation of the kingdom of God already inaugurated in the ministry of Jesus (see Luke 11:20 and 17:21).

Linking this blessing with John the Baptist's prophecy about being "baptiz[ed in] the holy Spirit" (Luke 3:16) also ties this promise to Ezekiel's promise of a cleansing restoration of the people of Israel that will accompany the gift of the divine Spirit (Ezek 36:24-27).

**1:6-12 The ascension of Jesus**

Since the disciples are Jews who have identified Jesus as their long-awaited Messiah, it is reasonable for them to ask if Jesus will now restore the kingdom to Israel (v. 6). After all, he has been speaking to them for forty days about the kingdom of God, which, in the common expectation of the day, is supposed to be a restoration of the nation to what it was when David reigned a millennium before. Jesus does not deny the appropriateness of the question; he simply refuses to reveal to them the divinely decreed schedule (v. 7). Jesus also reinterprets their implied notion of the kingdom; it is not going to be a matter of nationalism but a new kind of

you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven.”<sup>12</sup>Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away.

**The First Community in Jerusalem.**

<sup>13</sup>When they entered the city they went to the upper room where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of

unity empowered by the holy Spirit, as foreshadowed by the new “family” portrayed in Luke 8:1-21.

In this, Jesus echoes what he had said to them on Easter Sunday (Luke 24:49). When he tells them that the Spirit’s power will enable them to be his witnesses from Jerusalem “to the ends of the earth” (v. 8), he alludes to Isaiah 49:6, where the Lord tells his Servant that he will not only restore the tribes of Jacob but will also be a light to the nations, “that my salvation will reach to the ends of the earth.”

Although the traditional word for the withdrawal of Jesus’ physical presence from the apostles is “the ascension,” it might be more accurate to describe Luke’s description of this event as an “assumption,” since the author portrays it as an act of the Father. To describe this departure, Luke draws upon the biblical traditions about the assumptions of Enoch (Gen 5:23-24; Sir 49:14b) and Elijah (2 Kgs 2:9-11; Sir 48:9). To interpret the event, he adds what have been called “apocalyptic stage props”—the movement upward into the heavens, a cloud as vehicle, and the interpreting angels.

This is Luke’s second account of the ascension. The first account, given at the end of Luke’s Gospel (24:50-51), sets the event on Easter Sunday and describes Jesus in details that recall the description of the high priest Simon II in Sirach 50:1-24. Like Simon, Jesus’ presence occasions worship (Sir 50:17, 22); he raises his hands and pronounces a blessing (Sir 50:20), and this is followed by references to the community’s blessing God and rejoicing in the temple (Sir 50:22-23). In so doing, Jesus is acting like the temple priest at the end of the daily Whole-Offering (also called the Tamid, or “regular,” service; Exod 29:38-42; Num 2:1-10). And within the Gospel narrative, Jesus is doing what the priest Zechariah was unable to do at the end of the Tamid service, whose incense ritual is the scenario briefly portrayed at the beginning of Luke’s Gospel. By alluding in this manner to Sirach 50, Luke was celebrating Jesus the way Ben Sira celebrated Simon II as the climax of his Praise of the Ancestors (Sirach 44–50). For Luke, it is Jesus, not Simon II, who is the climax of Israel’s history; and so Luke chooses to end his first volume by portraying Jesus’ departure on Easter Sunday with those overtones.

Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. <sup>14</sup>All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

**The Choice of Judas's Successor.**

<sup>15</sup>During those days Peter stood up in the midst of the brothers (there was a group of about one hundred and twenty persons in the one place). He said, <sup>16</sup>"My brothers, the scripture had

to be fulfilled which the holy Spirit spoke beforehand through the mouth of David, concerning Judas, who was the guide for those who arrested Jesus. <sup>17</sup>He was numbered among us and was allotted a share in this ministry. <sup>18</sup>He bought a parcel of land with the wages of his iniquity, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle, and all his insides spilled out. <sup>19</sup>This became known to everyone who lived in Jerusalem, so

Why, then, does Luke take the liberty to narrate this event so differently as he begins his second volume? Some scholars suggest that in Acts Luke has expanded the time frame of Luke 24 to the round (and biblically symbolic) number forty, in order to associate the ascension closely with the outpouring of the Spirit on the fiftieth day, Pentecost (the Jewish feast of the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai). The apocalyptic stage props serve four purposes: (1) to recall the transfiguration (Luke 9:18-36, another mountain episode, when the disciples could not pray, as now they can); (2) to look forward to the outpouring of the Spirit and the mission that follows; (3) to recount the departure of Jesus in a way that recalls 2 Kings 2:9-12 (another narrative about the transmission of spirit for prophetic succession); and (4) to point toward the final coming (described already in Luke 21:27 as coming "in a cloud," alluding to the cloud imagery of Daniel 7:13, but in the singular, to prepare for Acts 1:9). Thus Luke is able to speak of one reality, the final departure of Jesus from his assembled followers, from two interpretive points of view. Luke 24 alludes to the ascension as a fitting ending of the story of Jesus; Acts 1 narrates the same event as the beginning of the story of the mission of the Church, initiated by the risen Lord and empowered by the gift of the Spirit.

**1:13-26 The community gathers to restore "the Twelve" by electing Matthias**

The apostles (minus Judas Iscariot) whom Luke had carefully called "the eleven" at Luke 24:33 gather with the "women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers" (v. 14). This group, numbered at 120 in verse 15 (notice the multiple of 12), comprises the nucleus of the church that will become the heart of restored Israel in chapter 2.

"The women" no doubt included Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and Mary the mother of James, and the many other women who had ac-

that the parcel of land was called in their language 'Akeldama,' that is, Field of Blood. <sup>20</sup>For it is written in the Book of Psalms:

'Let his encampment become  
desolate,  
and may no one dwell in it.'

And:

'May another take his office.'

<sup>21</sup>Therefore, it is necessary that one of the men who accompanied us the whole time the Lord Jesus came and

went among us, <sup>22</sup>beginning from the baptism of John until the day on which he was taken up from us, become with us a witness to his resurrection." <sup>23</sup>So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. <sup>24</sup>Then they prayed, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen <sup>25</sup>to take the place in this apostolic ministry from which Judas turned away to go to his own place." <sup>26</sup>Then

accompanied Jesus and the Twelve and had "provided for them out of their resources" (Luke 8:3). They are the ones "who had come from Galilee with him" (Luke 23:55) and, coming to anoint the body of Jesus in the tomb, discovered it empty and became the first witnesses to the resurrection (Luke 24:10, 22-23).

His "brothers" are the very ones who, together with Jesus' mother, were last seen in Luke 8:19-21, standing at the edge of a crowd around Jesus when he said, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it" (v. 21). Whatever the ambiguity of their status then, now they are at the center of the believing community. Like Jesus after the water immersion by John and before his special anointing by the Spirit (Luke 3:21), the community is immersed in prayer.

Jesus' prayer that Simon Peter, even after denying Jesus, will turn back and strengthen his brothers (Luke 22:32) begins to be fulfilled, as Peter now asserts his leadership (Acts 1:15).

The first agenda item to be addressed by the community is the replacement of Judas Iscariot, who had been "numbered" among the core group (v. 17). Because of the symbolic meaning of Jesus' choice of twelve, indicating the restoration of the twelve tribes of the people of God, "the eleven" (Luke 24:33) must again become the Twelve.

The importance of the number twelve becomes clear when one recalls the words of Jesus at the Last Supper: "And I confer a kingdom on you, just as my Father has conferred one on me, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom; and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:29-30). Whatever Matthew's parallel saying may mean in the context of his Gospel (Matt 19:28), for Luke this is a reference to the leadership of the Twelve in the Jerusalem church after Pentecost.

they gave lots to them, and the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was counted with the eleven apostles.

◀ **2 The Coming of the Spirit.** <sup>1</sup>When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. <sup>2</sup>And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. <sup>3</sup>Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. <sup>4</sup>And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.

<sup>5</sup>Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup>At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. <sup>7</sup>They were astounded, and in amazement they asked, "Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans?" Then how does each of us hear them in his own native language? <sup>9</sup>We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup>Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya

"Judging" here has the sense it has in the book of Judges, which features twelve charismatic leaders who led the tribes of Israel before the time of the monarchy. The reconstituted Twelve will similarly "judge" (that is, exert Spirit-filled leadership among) the reconstituted people of Israel after Pentecost.

The way the words of Peter (1:16-20) and the prayer of the community (1:24-25) speak of Judas's death is full of irony. Abandoning a community that will soon express its unity and detachment from material possessions by selling fields, with no one calling anything his own, Judas invested his blood money in a field ("turned away . . . to his own place," v. 25) and died there in a horrible, isolated death. Whereas Matthew's account of Judas's death (Matt 27:5) parallels the suicide-by-hanging of David's betrayer Ahithophel (2 Sam 17:23), Luke's version reflects the punitive death-by-falling that was Antiochus IV's end (2 Macc 9:12-14).

The community makes sure that Judas's replacement will be a qualified witness to the resurrection by choosing two candidates who were present with Jesus from the baptism of John through the ascension. Then, having done their human best, they put the final choice out of their hands, leaving it up to God through the device of casting lots. Thus Matthias is chosen to restore the Twelve.

### 2:1-13 The coming of the Spirit

*Pentēcostēs* (literally "fiftieth") is the Greek name for the Israelite feast of Weeks (*Shavu'ot* in Hebrew). The second of the three classical pilgrim feasts of Israel—Unleavened Bread/Passover, Weeks, and Booths (see





Acts 2:11-14

near Cyrene, as well as travelers from Rome, <sup>11</sup>both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs, yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God.” <sup>12</sup>They were all astounded and bewildered, and said to one another, “What does this mean?”

<sup>13</sup>But others said, scoffing, “They have had too much new wine.”

## II. The Mission in Jerusalem

**Peter’s Speech at Pentecost.** <sup>14</sup>Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed to them,

Exod 23:14-17; 34:22; Deut 16:16)—the feast of Weeks was called “Fiftieth” in Greek because it occurred seven weeks, or fifty days, after the feast of Unleavened Bread/Passover. Originally an agricultural feast celebrating the end of the grain harvest, Pentecost eventually came to be associated with the giving of the Law at Sinai.

Luke narrates the Pentecost events in words and images that evoke the revelation at Mount Sinai. The reconstituted Twelve (among the 120) are gathered like the twelve tribes at Sinai. The sounds from heaven, the filling of the *whole* house (like the shaking of the *whole* mountain in Exodus 19:18), and the fire recall the theophany (appearance of God) at Sinai. The tongues of fire symbolize the reality that the powerful presence of God (like fire) will find expression in human words, the prophetic ministry of the disciples. The appearance of fire also corresponds to John the Baptist’s prediction that Jesus would baptize “with the holy Spirit and fire” (Luke 3:16). In the fuller sweep of the narrative, the parallel between Jesus and Moses is evident in that Jesus ascends with a cloud (1:9) and then mediates the gift of the prophetic word of God to the people (2:4, 11, 18, 33). Thus Luke underscores the fact that on the feast of the giving of the Law (the privileged communication of God’s word) comes the end-time gift of the holy Spirit to empower a fresh expression of the divine word in the ministry of the apostles.

The list of nations from which the Jewish pilgrims and converts come symbolizes the future implications of what is happening here. By highlighting this inclusive gathering, Luke proclaims that this is in fact the fulfillment of the expected end-time ingathering of Israel. The Pentecostal gift is destined for Jews first, but then also for the “ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8), “those far off” (2:39; see Isa 57:19).

When Luke says that they “were *confused* because each one heard them speaking in his own language” (v. 6, emphasis added), he appears to be alluding to the story of the tower of Babel (in its Septuagint version, that is, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament). Whereas Genesis 11 tells of a sinful people who wish to make a name for themselves and



"You who are Jews, indeed all of you staying in Jerusalem. Let this be known to you, and listen to my words. <sup>15</sup>These people are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup>No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

◀ <sup>17</sup>It will come to pass in the last days,' God says,  
'that I will pour out a portion of my spirit upon all flesh.

Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
your young men shall see visions,  
your old men shall dream dreams.

<sup>18</sup>Indeed, upon my servants and my handmaids

I will pour out a portion of my spirit in those days,  
and they shall prophesy.

<sup>19</sup>And I will work wonders in the heavens above

are scattered in confusion and lose their ability to communicate (literally "to hear one another"), Acts 2 tells of a people of many languages who gather, are "confused" by a new ability to "hear," and are empowered to become a new community as they repent of their sins and call upon the name of the Lord. The likelihood of the allusion becomes even stronger when one notes that the name Babel is rendered *Syngchysis* ("Confusion") in the Septuagint.

## **2:14-36 Peter explains: the Spirit of God is restoring end-time Israel, and the crucified Jesus is its risen Messiah and Lord!**

In this speech of Peter to the festival crowd, Luke employs a kind of biblical interpretation that the Dead Sea Scrolls have taught us to call a *peshet*. The word *peshet* is simply Aramaic for "interpretation." But in the hands of the Essenes, an ascetical community that lived at Qumran, a *peshet* meant understanding a biblical passage as fulfilled in the present or recent history of their own community. Luke now has Peter explain the significance of the Pentecost events in a series of such *peshets*.

After a deft and humorous remark about the enthusiastic behavior of the community (they are not drunk; it's only nine in the morning, v. 15), Peter quotes Joel 3:1-5, joining it with a crucial phrase from the Greek version of Isaiah 2:2 ("in the last days"). He says, in effect, that what has been happening in Jerusalem is the fulfillment of these end-time prophecies. Whereas Israel had experienced a special infusion of God's spirit on an occasional king or prophet, now "in the last days" the gift of the prophetic spirit has been made available in a surprisingly inclusive way, transcending gender ("your sons and daughters," "my servants and my handmaids") and age ("young," "old," v. 17).

In true *peshet* fashion, Peter proceeds to apply specific phrases to recent and current events. He interprets the phrase "wonders . . . and signs" of verse 19 as the wondrous deeds God had done through Jesus. As

Acts 2:20-28

and signs on the earth below:  
blood, fire, and a cloud of  
smoke.

<sup>20</sup>The sun shall be turned to  
darkness,  
and the moon to blood,  
before the coming of the  
great and splendid  
day of the Lord,

<sup>21</sup>and it shall be that everyone shall  
be saved who calls on  
the name of the Lord.'

◀ <sup>22</sup>You who are Israelites, hear these  
words. Jesus the Nazorean was a man  
commended to you by God with  
mighty deeds, wonders, and signs,  
which God worked through him in  
your midst, as you yourselves know.

◀ <sup>23</sup>This man, delivered up by the set plan  
and foreknowledge of God, you killed,

using lawless men to crucify him. <sup>24</sup>But ▶  
God raised him up, releasing him from  
the throes of death, because it was im-  
possible for him to be held by it. <sup>25</sup>For  
David says of him:

'I saw the Lord ever before me,  
with him at my right hand I  
shall not be disturbed.

<sup>26</sup>Therefore my heart has been glad ▶  
and my tongue has exulted;  
my flesh, too, will dwell in  
hope,

<sup>27</sup>because you will not abandon my  
soul to the netherworld,  
nor will you suffer your holy  
one to see corruption.

<sup>28</sup>You have made known to me the  
paths of life;  
you will fill me with joy in your  
presence.'

his story continues to unfold, it will become clear that Joel's reference to those "who calls on the name of the Lord" will be applied to those who call upon the name of the Lord *Jesus* in Christian faith (see 9:14, 21; 22:16). And so the quotation from Joel 3, fortified by Isaiah 2:2, interprets *what time it is*: it is the inauguration of the long-awaited end-time, begun by God in Jesus and continued by God through the church.

But this outpouring of the Spirit on the community of believers is more than a sign of the end times; it is also a sign of the resurrection and enthronement of Jesus. To make this point, Luke (through Peter) enlists the last third of Psalm 16, which contains the clause " . . . you will not abandon my soul to the nether world, / nor will you suffer your holy one to undergo corruption" (1970 version). With the traditional understanding that all the psalms come from David, Peter argues that since David himself died and therefore *his* flesh obviously "saw corruption," the words must apply to someone else. Add to this the prophecy of Psalm 132:11 that God would set one of David's descendants on his throne, and these texts turn out to apply to the Messiah *in his resurrection*. It is in this sense, as risen king of restored Israel, that Jesus can be called "the Anointed One" ("Messiah" in Hebrew, "Christ" in Greek).

Then, to show how the risen Jesus is entitled also to the name "Lord" (used in the quotation from Joel 3 in Acts 2:21), Peter enlists the first verse

- <sup>29</sup>My brothers, one can confidently say to you about the patriarch David that he died and was buried, and his tomb is in our midst to this day. <sup>30</sup>But since he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, <sup>31</sup>he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that neither was he abandoned to the netherworld nor did his flesh see corruption. <sup>32</sup>God raised this Jesus; of this we are all witnesses.
- ◀ <sup>33</sup>Exalted at the right hand of God, he received the promise of the holy Spirit from the Father and poured it forth, as
  - ◀ you [both] see and hear. <sup>34</sup>For David did not go up into heaven, but he himself said:
- ‘The Lord said to my Lord,  
“Sit at my right hand  
<sup>35</sup>until I make your enemies  
your footstool.” ‘
- <sup>36</sup>Therefore let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.”
- ◀ <sup>37</sup>Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and they asked Peter and the other apostles, “What are we to do, my brothers?” <sup>38</sup>Peter [said] to them, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup>For the promise is made to you and to your children and to all those far

of Psalm 110: “The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand / till I make your enemies your footstool’” (1970 version). The final verse of the speech (2:36) summarizes the whole speech succinctly.

#### **2:37-41 The response to the proclamation**

When the people ask Peter what they should do, he invites them to repent and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (which, in the light of the preceding speech, means belief in the resurrection of Jesus). And when Peter promises that they will receive the “gift of the holy Spirit,” we now understand that the events of Acts 2 are the fulfillment of John the Baptist’s promise that one mightier than he would baptize “in the holy Spirit and fire” (Luke 3:16; see also Acts 1:5). Mission to the Gentiles is already glimpsed when Peter joins “you and . . . your children” with “and to all *those far off*” (Isaiah’s phrase for Gentiles in Isaiah 57:19, emphasis added). Jewish and Gentile Christians alike will qualify as those “. . . whom the LORD shall call” (Joel 3:5).

#### **2:42-47 The first Christian community**

Although the portrait of the *koinōnia*, or communal life, of the Jerusalem Christian community (vv. 42-47) has often been used to illustrate the ideals of vowed religious life, Luke clearly means it to portray the Christian community of Jerusalem as restored Israel. Each of the details is powerfully suggestive, describing who they are and what they are about.

off, whomever the Lord our God will call.”<sup>40</sup>He testified with many other arguments, and was exhorting them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”<sup>41</sup>Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand persons were added that day.

◀ **Communal Life.**<sup>42</sup>They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.<sup>43</sup>Awe came upon everyone,

and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.<sup>44</sup>All who believed were together and had all things in common;<sup>45</sup>they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one’s need.<sup>46</sup>Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart,<sup>47</sup>praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord

Christian community of Jerusalem as restored Israel. Each of the details is powerfully suggestive, describing who they are and what they are about.

The “teaching of the apostles” to which they devote themselves no doubt refers to the teaching of Jesus and the kind of biblical interpretation regarding Jesus just displayed in Peter’s Pentecost speech. Since “the breaking of the bread” (v. 42) refers to the practice of the Lord’s Supper, “the prayers” are likely the traditional prayers of Jewish life, such as the *Shema* (Deut 6:4-9; note the reference to the Christians regularly gathering in the temple area in verse 46, presumably for prayer, as in 3:1). That the apostles are said to perform “wonders and signs” (v. 43) reinforces the continuity between their ministry and that of Jesus, just described as commended by God with “wonders and signs” in verse 22. Their sense of mutual service (see Luke 22:25-27) leads them spontaneously to share their possessions, even to sell property to meet one another’s needs (v. 45). That they continue to meet in the temple area is consistent with the description, at the end of Luke’s Gospel, that “they were continually [or regularly] in the temple praising God” (Luke 24:53). The Jewish Christians’ allegiance to Jesus as Lord and Messiah has not meant severance from the life of the temple.

Finally, notice that verse 47b describes this Christian communal life as “being saved”—an explication of a phrase from Joel quoted in verse 21 (“everyone *shall be saved* who calls on the name of the Lord”; emphasis added). The awe (*phobos*, literally “fear”) that comes upon everyone is reminiscent of the fear that God sent upon the nations as they witnessed the progress of the Exodus and Conquest (Exod 15:16; 23:27; Deut 2:25; 11:25; 32:25; Josh 2:9). This awe is a continuation of the people’s response

added to their number those who were being saved.

◀ **3 Cure of a Crippled Beggar.** <sup>1</sup>Now Peter and John were going up to the temple area for the three o'clock hour of prayer. <sup>2</sup>And a man crippled from birth was carried and placed at the gate of the temple called "the Beautiful Gate" every day to beg for alms from the people who entered the temple. <sup>3</sup>When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked for alms. <sup>4</sup>But Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." <sup>5</sup>He paid attention to them, expecting to receive something from them. <sup>6</sup>Peter said, "I have neither silver nor

gold, but what I do have I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean, [rise and] walk." <sup>7</sup>Then Peter took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles grew strong. <sup>8</sup>He leaped up, stood, and walked around, and went into the temple with them, walking and jumping and praising God. <sup>9</sup>When all the people saw him walking and praising God, <sup>10</sup>they recognized him as the one who used to sit begging at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, and they were filled with amazement and astonishment at what had happened to him.

▶ **Peter's Speech.** <sup>11</sup>As he clung to Peter and John, all the people hurried in

to the new Exodus already begun in the story of Jesus (see Luke 1:12, 65; 2:9; 5:26; 7:16; 8:37; 21:26).

This cameo picture of the life of the Jerusalem Christian community reflects the fulfillment of the jubilee theme struck in the quotation of Isaiah 61:2 at Luke 4:19.

### **3:1-26 The healing of the man born lame and Peter's explanation**

Having referred to "many wonders and signs worked through the apostles" (2:43), Luke now describes in detail one such sign—the healing of the lame man at the temple gate. As in the case of the Pentecost events, he also provides a speech that interprets the significance of that sign.

Consistent with the statements that the disciples, after the resurrection, were regularly in the temple (Luke 24:53) and that they continued to meet in the temple precincts (Acts 2:46), Luke shows Peter and John going up to the temple "at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer," that is, at the time of the regular afternoon Tamid service (see Luke 1:10 and Acts 10:30), what we call 3 p.m.

Why Luke foregrounds this particular healing becomes evident when we attend to the details. What unfolds here interrupts routine. The friends of the beggar carry the immobile man and prop him up at the gate, a daily drill for them. And Peter and John are entering the temple precincts for their customary participation in the mid-afternoon liturgy (see Luke 24:53). When the beggar, apparently without looking, begs for alms