

# ***THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST***

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

## **ACTS LESSON 1**

### **The Gospel in Jerusalem—Part 1 (Acts 1-4)**

#### **Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

In Luke 24, Jesus had told His disciples that repentance and remission of sins would be preached in His name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem. He then told those disciples that they would be His witnesses, and that they were to wait in Jerusalem until they were imbued with power from on high. Jesus then ascended into Heaven, which is where the Book of Acts picks up. Jesus made this promise, and Acts is the fulfillment of that promise to His disciples. The Book of Acts is truly a book of the actions of the New Testament church. It is the beginning and foundation of all things related to the church and salvation. Just as Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John teach us about the life of Christ, how He lived, how He died, and what He did for us, the Book of Acts tells us how to become like Jesus—how to become a Christian (a follower of Christ). The Book of Acts is one of the “living messages” that we find in the New Testament that is so relevant to the church today. Remember that the Word of God is living and powerful (Heb. 4:12). It is that Word which is able to save our souls (Jas. 1:21). One of the most amazing things about the Book of Acts is how it deals with salvation. In fact, we find numerous important questions in the Book of Acts. In Acts 2:37, for example, when the Jews realized that they had crucified their own Messiah, they were cut to the heart and cried out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” In Acts 16:30, the Philippian jailer asked one of the most important questions ever asked when he asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

The Book of Acts is uniquely placed in the New Testament. In fact, some would say that everything in the Old Testament, as well as the information found in the Gospel accounts, is leading up to Acts 2:36 where Peter said, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Acts 2 has often been called “the hub of the Bible.” Everything brings us up to the point where salvation is preached as a reality, and where forgiveness of sins is immediate, based upon meeting the conditions set forth. Everything after Acts 2 is predicated upon the Gospel sermon that Peter preached, the doors of the church being opened, and people living and dying faithfully as Christians.

The Book of Acts has a three-fold purpose. First, it is a book of conversions. If you want to learn how to become a Christian, you do not go to the Book of Numbers or to the Book of Lamentations. You do not look in the Old Testament. If you want to become a Christian, you do not look in First and Second Corinthians. When a person wants to know how to become a Christian, he or she must look at the Book of Acts. This is the main purpose of the Book of Acts. The apostles and the first-century converts were taking the message to other people and telling them what God expected them to do. In many chapters within the Book of Acts, we find people who are being converted to the Gospel. And we can look at the example of those people, learn what they did, do the same thing, and become a Christian today.

Second, the book of Acts shows us the establishment of the church. Long ago God had promised (Dan. 2:44) that a new kingdom would be set up during the time of the Roman Empire. It was promised in Isaiah 2:1-4 that the kingdom would be established in Jerusalem. When we open the Bible to Acts 2, we find that during the time of the Roman Empire, in Jerusalem, Peter preaches the first Gospel sermon, people obey it, and “the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). Acts shows us the grand establishment of God’s eternal kingdom, the church.

Third, Acts provides a sort of history lesson relating to the New Testament epistles. If we want to learn about the Book of Ephesians, we need to look in Acts 19 in order to understand the background and establishment of the church in Ephesus. Before we read 1 and 2 Corinthians, we would do well to read Acts 18 so that we can know what happened when the church was established in Corinth. Almost every letter that we find in the New Testament finds its background within the Book of Acts. Thus, it is a “history book” relating to the epistles of the New Testament.

As we begin with Acts 1, we receive an outline of the rest of the book. The key outline of the book is found in Acts 1:8 where Jesus said to His disciples, “You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” This is the type of outline approach that Acts takes. The story begins in Jerusalem, and then spreads to Judea. Eventually, the apostles and disciples move into Samaria. Then, finally, through the missionary journeys of Paul, the Gospel is taken to what was considered “the uttermost parts of the world.”

But along with this command to Christ’s disciples there also is an application for us today. Jesus said, “You shall be my witnesses in these places.” They went and “witnessed.” The idea of witnessing means that a person must have seen what happened. A witness at a car wreck, for example, can tell the police officers what he saw. We today, of course, are not witnesses. We have not literally seen Jesus, since He has not been here with us. Rather, we are evangelists. We tell what others have seen. We tell what the Bible tells to us—which is the message of the Gospel as found within the Scriptures. Although some in the first century were witnesses, we today are evangelists who are spreading the message of the Gospel for Jesus. According to Matthew 28:18, we know that He wants us to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature (Mk. 16:15). So, like these first century disciples, we need to be busy spreading the message of God’s kingdom.

In Acts 1, after Jesus gives His disciples this command, they two angels 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” (vs. 11). The phrase “will so come in like manner” refers to Jesus’ Second Coming, of course. We then learn that the apostles had to replace Judas, who had betrayed the Lord for thirty pieces of silver, as had been prophesied in Zechariah 12:13. When Judas did that, he felt remorse, but not a remorse that led to the right kind of change in his life. Judas went out and hanged himself due to the remorse he felt. As a result, the apostles had to replace Judas. Matthias was the one who was chosen by the selection process to replace Judas. In Acts 1:24 we learn that in the selection process, “they prayed and said, ‘You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen.’” Here we learn a powerful lesson about this selection process. Matthias and Joseph (known as Barsabas) were both put up for selection. But God knew the hearts of these men, and as result Matthias was chosen. There is an important and practical principle that we learn from this selection process: God knows the heart of all people. Just as He knew the heart of Joseph and Matthias, He knows other people’s hearts, too. In Luke 16:15 this point is made even more forcefully. The Lord knows what is in **your** heart—not just in the generic sense that God

knows the hearts of all people, but in the specific sense that He knows what is in your heart. God knows what we are thinking. In John 2:25, we learn that Jesus knew what was within man. This ought to either encourage us or scare us to death. In Proverbs 15:3 we read that “the eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.” If we are doing what is right, and if we are living the way we ought to, it ought to encourage us to know that God sees the good things that we do. He cares for us, and He will provide for us. But if we are not living as we ought to live, it should give us great fear, knowing that God sees all things. Think of the words of Hebrews 4:13—“There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.” We thus learn that all things are open before God’s eyes. Thus, Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 says, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.” There are no “secret things” with God. God knows our hearts, and knows what we are thinking. Thus, we must be right with God. We will not fool God on the Day of Judgment. If we have been living as we should, however, then it ought to encourage us to know that God does indeed know our hearts.

In Acts 2, we find the first Gospel sermon and the establishment of the church. The apostles had been waiting in Jerusalem. Then, the Holy Spirit came upon them “as if in tongues of fire.” Peter stood up with the other eleven and they began to preach. The Bible tells us that every person heard the Gospel in his or her own language. Some of the people did not understand what was going on. So, they said, “These men are drunk!” But Peter assured them that such was not the case since it was only nine o’clock in the morning. Instead, said Peter, “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16). Peter then quoted Joel 2:28-32 about how young men would have dreams, how the older men would have visions, and how God’s Spirit would be brought down upon those people. Peter wanted them to know that the things they had just witnessed were the very things that God had promised in the prophets had said would happen. Peter then preaches about the predetermination of God to send His Son to this world (2:21-23). Jesus was predetermined by God to be seen as His Son through the miracles He worked. And He was predetermined to be the One Who made the supreme sacrifice for humanity’s sins. Peter preached about the death of Jesus, and how Jesus had been selected before time began to die for mankind. Peter preached about Christ’s burial and His resurrection from the grave. But, unlike David (the Jews’ great king, whose body still remained decaying in the grave), Jesus had arisen from the grave as incorruptible. This was why David, in Psalm 16:8-11, called Jesus “Lord.” Once the Jews had heard that Jesus was the One Who had been chosen by God, and how the miracles proved His deity, as Peter preached the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, the people were convicted in their hearts that they had indeed crucified the Messiah. Acts 2:36 leads us right up to the main point of Peter’s sermon. “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” The Holy Spirit chose two very important words here. These people needed to realize first of all that Jesus was their Lord. The idea of “Lord” has to do with Master or Owner. Jesus was the One Who was over them. Then there was the idea of Jesus being “the Christ.” He was the Anointed One, the Chosen One, the Messiah. Jesus was the one Who had been chosen by God, and Who was preached by the prophets. He was the One Who was destined to come to set up a new kingdom so that all nations could flow into it (Is. 2:1-4). These people had now come to the sad realization that the Messiah for Whom they had been searching all of their lives they had now crucified. How heart-rending that must have been for them. In Acts 2:37 the Bible says that they were “cut to the heart.” It was as if a dagger had been run through their hearts. They then cried out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

These people heard the Gospel message—the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Jesus. That is what the Gospel is today for us, too. It is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Jesus died for our sins. He was buried in a grave—a grave that could not contain Him. On the third day, He rose up out of the grave. Christians today go through that same conversion process—of a death, burial, and resurrection. Notice what Peter said in Acts 2:38. These people had asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Peter then said, “Do not do anything. Jesus has done it all for you.” Is **that** what the Bible says that Peter said? No. Listen instead to what Peter **actually** said: “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.” Peter had just answered the question they had asked (“Men and brethren, what shall we do?”). He told them what they needed to do to get right with God and to relieve themselves of their sin problem. He told them to repent. They had already been cut to the heart. They heard the Word, and undoubtedly believed (since they were cut to the heart). Thus, Peter told them to change their ways and to “be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.”

The language of Acts 2:38 suggests that the baptism there was “in order to receive” the forgiveness of their sins. That was the purpose of baptism. It was looking forward to the remission of sins. Some have tried to take Acts 2:38 and say that the “for” means “because of.” But as we look at other passages where the same type of terminology is employed, it is clear that “for” does not mean “because of.” For example, Matthew 26:28 has the same structure. Jesus said, “For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many **for** the remission of sins.” What does that mean? Did Jesus shed His blood “because of the remission of sins”—that is, because our sins had **already** been remitted? Of course not! No one would suggest that such was the case. Why, then, would anyone suggest that “for” in Acts 2:38 means “because of”? The same type of language is used in both instances. We are baptized in order to receive the remission of our sins. Are we “earning” our salvation? Absolutely not! We are simply meeting the conditions that God has set forth. As you look throughout the Bible, you will find that in the New Testament, baptism is something that is essential for salvation. For example, Peter said in 1 Peter 3:21, “Baptism does now also save us.” I do not think that it would be possible to find a clearer statement in the New Testament that teaches the essentiality of baptism. “Baptism does now also save us.” Can anyone read that and say that baptism is not something that is essential for salvation? No one could read that with a proper understanding of the text and suggest such a thing.

Think of Jesus’ words in Mark 16:16—“He who believes **and** is baptized shall be saved. He who does not believe shall be condemned.” Jesus discussed in this passage two conditions of salvation: belief **and** baptism—which lead to salvation. Think about what was said to Saul in Acts 22:16. Saul had asked, “Lord, what would you have me to do?” (Acts 9:4). Jesus then told him to go into the city, where it would be told him what he must do (Acts 9:5-6). We find out in Acts 22:16 what Saul had to do. Ananias, the Lord’s servant, came to Saul and said “Why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Many people suggest today that all a person has to do to be saved is to “call on the name of the Lord” (Acts 2:21—“Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved”). But how do we “call on the name of the Lord” according to the Bible? Acts 22:16 provides the answer. We get up, obey God’s command by being baptized, and wash away our sins. That is how the text instructs us to “call on the name of the Lord.” Do you remember Nicodemus in John 3:5? Nicodemus was told, “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

Acts 2:47 teaches us about the establishment of the church and about what happened when people obeyed the Gospel. They had heard the Word, they had been baptized for the remission of their sins, and “the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” Isn’t it interesting that they did not have to form a council or have the congregation vote on them in order to become members of Christ’s church? They did not have to decide who was or who was not going to be a member of the church. In fact, they **could not** do that—because when people obeyed the Gospel, they automatically became a member of the Lord’s church. Anywhere you go in the world, if you have obeyed the Gospel, you enter God’s family. If you go to Africa and the church is meeting there, you are just a member of that church as anyone else because you are a part of the body of Christ here on this Earth.

As we think a little further about the Book of Acts, we see in Acts 3 more of the actions of the church. An important miracle occurred in Acts 3. Peter and John were going to the temple, where they found a man who could not walk because he had been lame from birth. This man sees Peter and John, holds out his hand, and asked them for alms. Peter said to him, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk” (vs. 6). And although the man had never walked before, he not only got up and walked, but he also leaped and ran. All the people who were there had seen this man on a daily basis. They knew he was lame. And now he was up walking and running. This miracle created a great stir among the people, who wondered what had happened. As a result, this miracle enabled Peter and John to preach about Jesus, the Prince of Life. In Acts 3:15, Peter teaches these people that it was Jesus, the Prince of Life, Who had given them the power to do what they had done. It is an interesting concept to think that Christ is the Prince of Life. He is the King over life. He is the only way that we can enjoy real life. In John 6:66-68, certain disciples of Jesus had heard some of His teachings (like “Eat My flesh and drink My blood”). He had been talking figuratively about taking His whole being and lifestyle and making it their own. But some of them heard what He said and thought that His statements were too difficult. The Bible tells us that those people “walked with Jesus no more.” But Jesus did not say, “Oh, I’m sorry I offended you; let Me rephrase that.” Instead, He looked at those disciples who were left and asked them, “Will you go away, too?” Peter said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” In this life, Jesus is the only One Who can teach us how to live victoriously over death and over sin. In John 8:12, we learn that Jesus is the Way of life and the light of the world. Thus, if we are going to be saved, Jesus is the only One Who can save us. In John 14:6, Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” In Acts 3 then, Peter tells the Jews who have heard the message about the Prince of Life that they need to change their ways and get right with God. In Acts 3:19 we find Peter’s command to those Jews. He said, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” These people needed to change their lives and stop thinking as they had been thinking. Then they would be able to receive God’s blessings. Repentance has always been a part of God’s plan for man. In Luke 3:7-8 when the Jews came out to be baptized by John, he said, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance.”

As the Gospel continues to be taught, much of what happens in Acts 4 is predicated upon the miracle that had taken place in Acts 3. The people had seen the miracle, and there was no denying it. But the people were confused, and wondered, “How did this happen?” In Acts 4:7, the people asked Peter and John, “By what power or by what name have you done this?” The Jewish leaders wondered how **they** could be the religious elite, and how Peter and John were **just fisherman**, yet the Jewish leaders could not perform such

miracles while mere fishermen could. They therefore wanted to know “What is your authority for doing these things?” Peter and John responded by telling them that Jesus was their Authority, and He is the One Who provides salvation. In Acts 4:11-12, Peter preached about how Jesus was the chief cornerstone Whom the Jews had omitted from their spiritual superstructure. Jesus was the “locking unit” that brought everything together—and they had completely left Him out! Notice Acts 4:11-12 where Peter preaches, “This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone. Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Did you notice the word “must” in that last sentence? It is impossible for anyone to be saved outside of Jesus. There is no other way. Buddha cannot save you. Joseph Smith cannot save you. The pope in Rome cannot save you. There is only one way to be saved—by obedience to the will of God. I am not saying these things to be unkind or unloving. Rather, I am saying it because I love your souls. In Matthew 28:18 Jesus said, “All authority has been given unto Me.” Jesus still has “all authority” today. He is still Head of the church (Eph. 1:21-23). And He is still the only way to receive salvation. Hebrews 7:25-26 teaches us that Jesus is able to save “to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” Jesus is the only way for us to be saved. We do not need to go through a mere man or another method. If we will simply go to God through Jesus, obey the Bible, and do what Jesus says, then it will be impossible for us **not** to be saved.

In Acts 4, we see a powerful example. Peter had just told the Jews that they had omitted the chief cornerstone from their spiritual superstructure because they had forgotten to include Jesus. Peter and John spoke boldly about Christ. Then, in verse 13 we read, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. **And they realized that they had been with Jesus.**” I do not think you will find any more impressive statement about the power of the Christian influence than Acts 4:13. The light bulb came on for these religious leaders. They realized that Peter and John “had been with Jesus.” Then they understood why Peter and John had rebuked them and why they (the Jewish leaders) were standing there looking ignorant. It was because of Jesus—the Messiah (the One Who knew all things). Peter and John had been taught by Him. This teaches us today that we can exhibit a powerful example for Christ and His kingdom if we will simply follow the will of God.

Acts 4 continues by showing Christians that if they remain faithful in the face of persecution, they can overcome. In Acts 4:29ff., we see the disciples being put on trial and eventually being put in prison. But instead of giving up and throwing in the towel, these Christians prayed for boldness to continue doing God’s will. When trouble comes our way, if we are not careful we can cower. We can give in and give up. We can think, “God has just left me here all alone and is not going to help me.” But these Christians in Acts 4 did not think like that. When they saw trouble coming, they said in essence, “Bring it on!” They then prayed to God for boldness—and kept right on doing what they should have been doing. That is the same attitude that Christians today need to possess. Our mindset should be that we are going to remain faithful to God. Even if persecution comes, we are going to keep doing what is right and pray to God to help us. Oh that we today had such an attitude. If trouble and difficulties arise, we could say, “Bring it on! God help us!” We know that the Lord will never leave us or forsake us. In fact, Hebrews 13:5-6 tells us that we can say, “We may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’”

In our lesson today on Acts 1-4, we have learned about what people must do to be saved, and about the establishment of the church. If you have never obeyed the Gospel, or if you did something other than what is found in Acts 2, then I want to kindly and loving say that

you have not yet become a New Testament Christian. You have not yet become a follower of Christ. You need to do what the people in the first century did to become a Christian. In Acts 2:38 we read that the people repented and were baptized for the remission of their sins. Have you done that? Have you obeyed the Gospel? Have you done what they did in the first century? If not, why not? We encourage you to change your life today, and to conform it to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

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## **STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “THE GOSPEL IN JERUSALEM—PART 1” (ACTS 1-4)**

1. According to Luke 24, what did Jesus tell His disciples would be “preached unto all nations”?
2. According to Luke 24, where did Jesus say that this preaching would begin?
3. What, according to James 1:21, is able to save our souls?
4. How does Hebrews 4:12 describe the Word of God?
5. What important question (that all people should ask themselves, even today) is found in Acts 16:30?
6. According to Peter’s statements in Acts 2:36, what had the Jews done to Jesus?
7. What two important words did Peter use in Acts 2:36 to describe Jesus?
8. What promise is contained in Daniel 2:44?
9. In what book and chapter of the New Testament do we find the fulfillment of the prophecy contained in Daniel 2:44?
10. According to Acts 1:8 and Mark 16:15, to whom is the Gospel to be carried?
11. What important piece of information is contained in Matthew 28:18 in regard to Christ’s command to His disciples to disseminate the Gospel message?
12. Who, according to Acts 1:26, was chosen to replace Judas as an apostle of Christ?
13. What important piece of information for us today is contained in Hebrews 4:13?
14. Acts 2:21 says that “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” How, according to Acts 22:16, does a person “call on the name of the Lord”?
15. In Acts 2:38, what did Peter tell the Jews (who had crucified Christ) to do in order to get rid of their sins?
16. According to Acts 2:47, who adds people to the Lord’s church?
17. Who, according to Peter’s statement in Acts 3:15, had the Jews murdered?
18. What, according to Peter’s statement in Acts 3:15, did God do as a result of this murder?
19. According to Acts 4:11, what important role does Christ fulfill in an individual’s spiritual life?
20. According to Acts 4:11, in whose name is salvation to be found?