

# THE ONGOING WORK

## ACTS 1



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*A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

The Ongoing Work: Acts 1  
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## Acts: Introduction and Overview

The book of Acts is one of the most important books in the New Testament. It bridges the Old Testament into the New, the Gospels into the Apostolic Age, and the whole of Scripture into the time/space continuum in which we live and move and have our being.

Acts is the story of one kingdom being replaced by another. The Son rises on the Kingdom of Light, and He, working by His Spirit in His Church, drives back the darkness of unbelief, turning the ancient world rightside-up for Jesus Christ.

Acts is the story of the ongoing work of Christ – how He, through His Church began flowing the living waters of His Spirit and the peace and joy of His Kingdom to an Empire in decline and degeneration. And it is also the story of how He continues to do this work in our own day. The Acts of the Apostles are our acts as well, as we take up our cross and follow Jesus in pursuit of His ongoing work.

We're happy to offer a series of brief videos to introduce each portion of this study. You can view the first one, introducing the book of Acts, by [clicking here](#).

We're pleased to provide *Scriptorium* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity with the Lord.

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If you find these studies, or any of our other resources, helpful, we hope you will consider making a contribution to help support our work. You can do so by using the donate button at the website or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

We hope you find this study of Acts instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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## 1 The Beginning of the Ongoing

Be sure to view the video introducing our study of Acts by [clicking here](#).

*Read and meditate on Acts 1.1-3.*

The book of Acts presents the first records of the *ongoing* work of Jesus Christ, what He continues to do from His throne on high (v. 2), by His Spirit, through His Church, and for the sake of His expanding Kingdom and glory. What Jesus “began” to do (v. 1) was to “bring near” the Kingdom of God, invading, investing, and driving back the kingdom of darkness and the works of the devil (Matt. 4.17; 12.22-29; 1 Jn. 2:8), and establishing a beachhead for the fulfillment of such Old Testament visions as Daniel 2.44, 45 and Isaiah 9.6, 7.

*For reflection*

1. What commandments did the Lord, by His Spirit, give to the apostles before He ascended to heaven? Do those commandments apply to us? Explain.
2. And, as if three and a half years of parables and instruction concerning the Kingdom of God were not enough, Jesus takes His disciples through a forty-day intensive seminar, reviewing everything He’d taught them and doubtless much more. How does this lead us to think about the role of the Kingdom in the book of Acts? What is the ongoing work of Christ with respect to His Kingdom? What is our work?
3. “Theophilus” may have been a real person, but it’s as likely that he – Lover of God – is meant to stand for every lover of God, so that we might be called into the ongoing work of Christ with those who first read this wonderful account. How can we know if we fall into this category?
4. The “forty days” is significant here because it recalls the forty years of Moses’ exile and Israel’s wandering in the wilderness, as well as Jesus’ own forty days of temptation (Matt. 4.1-11). These were seasons of preparation, just as these forty days were for Jesus’ disciples. We, the readers, are meant to understand – as they would have – that a great significant new phase of the divine economy is about to unfold. What should be the role of time with Jesus and learning about His Kingdom with others in our own preparations?
5. The ongoing work of Christ consists of replacing one kingdom with another. What are the implications of this for your ongoing walk with the Lord?

*Summary*

The ongoing work of Christ is *by* the Spirit, *in* and *through* His people, and *for the sake of* the Kingdom of God. This should make the book of Acts especially important to us, in and through whom Christ continues to do His work. How do you expect our Lord Jesus to continue His work in and through you today?

*Closing Prayer*

Gird Your sword upon *Your* thigh, O Mighty One,  
With Your glory and Your majesty.  
And in Your majesty ride prosperously because of truth, humility, *and* righteousness;  
And Your right hand shall teach You awesome things.

Your arrows *are* sharp in the heart of the King's enemies;  
The peoples fall under You.  
Your throne, O God, *is* forever and ever;  
A scepter of righteousness *is* the scepter of Your kingdom.

Psalm 45.3-6

## 2 The Promise of the Father

Be sure to view the video introducing our study of Acts by [clicking here](#).

Read and meditate on Acts 1.4, 5.

The mention of “the promise” would have cued up at least two significant ideas in the mind of the disciples. First would have been the promises made to Abraham (Gen. 12.1-3), a people blessed with the favor of God, provided for in every way, and extending the blessings of God to all the earth and every generation. Second would have been the promise of the Spirit, which was prominent in the preaching of such prophets as Joel and Ezekiel. They would still have to *wait* a bit for God to bring these, but Jesus was making it clear: Their time of waiting was nearly at an end.

*For reflection*

1. Jesus was promising that soon God would begin to bring both of these into the possession of His disciples in a new, more powerful, and more permanent way than ever before. And that *spiritual reality* would begin to unfold over all the land (the earth) just as it did in Joshua’s day. Put yourself in their places: How would this have made you feel? What affections and expectations might this have stirred in you?
2. We shall see, in these early parts of Acts, some striking similarities with the book of Joshua, and this is not without reason. What comparisons can you discern between the book of Joshua and the book of Acts? In what ways is that upper room in Jerusalem rather like the plains of Moab, where Israel prepared to cross the Jordan?
3. The baptism of the Spirit will fulfill the promise of Deuteronomy 30.1-10 and Ezekiel 36.26, 27, of a new immersion in the life of the unseen realm, one in which we are indwelt, suffused, instructed, transformed, and empowered from a reality not of this world. How do the promises of God affect the way you live each day?
4. “Not many days” (v. 5). Isn’t that just like Jesus? He holds out these incredible promises, and we take them, as we should, to be certain. But we *cannot* be certain precisely when or how those promises will be ours. That’s in the Lord’s hands. What’s in our hands is to wait. How do you *wait* for God’s promises?
5. How thorough is your understanding of “the promise of the Father” as Jesus suggests it in these verses? Is your own life oriented toward the promises of God? According to Peter, what should we expect as we live toward God’s promises each day (2 Pet. 1.4)? What keeps us from living this way?

*Summary*

Jesus is always pointing us *forward*, based on what has been revealed to us *in the past*. By looking back to God and His Word, and looking forward to what God promises each day, we can fill our *present* with the reality of the Kingdom, which is precisely what Jesus was preparing His apostles to do. Which of God’s promises will give new direction to your life today?

*Closing Prayer*

“The LORD has said to Me,  
‘You *are* My Son,  
Today I have begotten You.  
Ask of Me, and I will give *You*  
The nations *for* Your inheritance,  
And the ends of the earth *for* Your possession.  
You shall break them with a rod of iron;  
You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.’”  
Now therefore, be wise, O kings;  
Be instructed, you judges of the earth.  
Serve the LORD with fear,  
And rejoice with trembling.  
Kiss the Son, lest He be angry,  
And you perish *in* the way,  
When His wrath is kindled but a little.  
Blessed *are* all those who put their trust in Him.

Psalm 2.7-12

### 3 Fusion

Be sure to view the video introducing our study of Acts by [clicking here](#).

Read and meditate on Acts 1.6-8.

See that word, “restore” (v. 6)? The answer to that question, while not given here, is the story of the book of Acts: “No!” and “Yes!” One of the great themes of Scripture is that of Restoration, of God returning His people to Himself, so that they can enjoy all the benefits of the blessed life of His presence and glory. It makes sense that the disciples would ask about the Kingdom, since Jesus had been plying them with instruction on the subject for forty days. They were primed. They were ready. But, no, they weren’t.

*For reflection*

1. The disciples asked about the Old Testament kingdom of David, and no, that was not coming. The Kingdom of David’s greater Son *was* coming, but they weren’t quite ready. They had to wait. And then *power* would come. Meditate on 2 Samuel 7.12-16. How did God teach David to think about his kingdom, and the Kingdom that would come after him?
2. The unseen realm of infinite spiritual power was about to be fused with the temporal domain of men and things, and all heaven would break loose on earth, spreading from Jerusalem to the farthest parts through the *experience of Restoration* borne witness to in the words and deeds of the first believers. Like a nuclear explosion which, when disparate atoms are fused, releases an incredible amount of power; so it is when the Spirit of God comes from the unseen, eternal realm to inhabit the lives of men and women visible in communities and cultures – well, you know. In what ways do you experience this *fusion* of the eternal Spirit into your daily life?
3. “It is not for you to know.” Let’s say that again, shall we? “It is not for you to know.” The specific details of the *when* of the Kingdom’s coming are not within the scope of our portfolio. How is it possible to act on something so portentous as the promises of God, without *knowing* everything we need to know in advance?
4. The details of *when* are not always revealed to us. However, *what* we should be seeking is abundantly clear (the Kingdom and Restoration to the Lord), as well as *how* we should seek it (be witnesses). What does it mean to *seek* the Kingdom of God (Matt. 6.33)? What’s the difference between *being* a witness and *doing* evangelism?
5. How large do the ideas of the Kingdom of God and Restoration feature in your daily walk with and work for the Lord?

*Summary*

Jesus filled His apostles with a vision of the Kingdom and promises of God. They were eager for it, but they still lacked the most important component – the Spirit of God. We can neither enter, know, experience, nor seek the Kingdom apart from the Spirit of God. He is the *power* for God’s new Kingdom to replace our old ways of sin and death with His new ways of light and life. Are you seeking this Kingdom as earnestly and continuously as you should? Explain.

*Closing Prayer*

LORD, remember David  
*And* all his afflictions;  
How he swore to the LORD,  
*And* vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob:  
“Surely I will not go into the chamber of my house,  
Or go up to the comfort of my bed;  
I will not give sleep to my eyes  
*Or* slumber to my eyelids,  
Until I find a place for the LORD,  
A dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.”  
Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah;  
We found it in the fields of the woods.  
Let us go into His tabernacle;  
Let us worship at His footstool.  
Arise, O LORD, to Your resting place,  
You and the ark of Your strength.  
Let Your priests be clothed with righteousness,  
And let Your saints shout for joy.  
For Your servant David’s sake,  
Do not turn away the face of Your Anointed.  
The LORD has sworn *in* truth to David;  
He will not turn from it:  
“I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body.  
If your sons will keep My covenant  
And My testimony which I shall teach them,  
Their sons also shall sit upon your throne forevermore.”

Psalm 132.1-12

## 4 What in the World...?

Be sure to view the video introducing our study of Acts by [clicking here](#).

Read and meditate on Acts 1.9-11.

One of the most neglected teachings of the entire Bible is the ascension and enthronement of Jesus Christ as King of kings. Luke doesn't flesh out the details here, not because they're not important, but because they were well known from the psalms and prophets of the Old Testament. Indeed, the enthronement of Christ provides the unspoken backdrop, overarching agenda, and essential motive force for everything that happens in Acts (and beyond, for that matter).

*For reflection*

1. So what in the world is Jesus *doing* in the world as He pursues the work He began to do while on earth? What do you learn from Hebrews 7.25, Psalm 110, Hebrews 1.3, Matthew 12.22-29, Matthew 16.18, and John 14.1-3 about the present work of our ascended King?
2. The work of Jesus, enthroned at the Father's right hand, is definitely *not* small stuff. Upon His ascension Jesus was *restored* to His eternal throne (Pss. 2, 47, 110) and given absolute dominion over a Kingdom not of this world and literally, *out* of this world. And then – get ready – *He is giving this Kingdom to us!* (cf. Dan. 7.11-27). How are you expecting Jesus to give His Kingdom to you today?
3. Every day Jesus “rides out” conquering and to conquer, by His Word and Spirit, in His people (Rev. 6.1, 2; cf. Ps. 45.1-6), and nothing can stand before Him (Dan. 2.44, 45). How do you experience His conquering presence in and through your life? Is the conquering presence of Christ in you evident to others? Explain.
4. Restored to His glory, Jesus is doing the ongoing work of restoring the world to His gracious rule, a work He will only partially complete during the course of history. The book of Acts provides a *template* or *footprint* of what we should expect as Jesus continues His restorative work in and through us. Do you sense any of your own Kingdom expectations being challenged, expanded, or clarified?
5. If the book of Acts were a baroque cantata, the ascension and enthronement of Christ would be the harpsichord *continuo* running consistently under all the other instruments and voices. Take away that harpsichord, and the piece loses its continuity, consistency, and undergirding energy. Soon enough, we'd all get bored and just give it up. But keep that harpsichord *continually* in motion, and the whole piece moves gloriously, ineluctably forward. Is this how you experience the Kingdom and rule of Jesus? Explain. How much do the ascension and enthronement of Christ feature in your daily meditations? Why does Paul insist that setting our minds on things above is so important (Col. 3.1-3)?

*Summary*

Jesus is even now exalted at the Father's right hand, doing the work only He can do. He is doing an important aspect of that work through those who know, love, and serve Him. So we need to be ready. We need to keep Him exalted in our minds at all times. And we need to wait on Him and His

Word, making ourselves ready for obedience at all times. What will that require of you today?

*Closing Prayer*

God has gone up with a shout,  
The LORD with the sound of a trumpet.  
Sing praises to God, sing praises!  
Sing praises to our King, sing praises!  
For God *is* the King of all the earth;  
Sing praises with understanding.  
God reigns over the nations;  
God sits on His holy throne.  
The princes of the people have gathered together,  
The people of the God of Abraham.  
For the shields of the earth *belong* to God;  
He is greatly exalted.

Psalm 47.5-9

## 5 The Waiting (1)

Be sure to view the video introducing our study of Acts by [clicking here](#).

Read and meditate on Acts 1.12-14.

“OK, guys, let’s head back to Jerusalem and wait.” Is that what Peter said? Maybe. But this is no ordinary waiting – like at the DMV, for your number to be called, sitting around, everybody reading this or that or checking their watches or twiddling their thumbs, *waiting* for *someone* to *do something*. This *waiting* is a form of *servicing* the Lord and His purposes, to be precise.

*For reflection*

1. The verb actually means something like *linger around*. The apostles were lingering around together, all of one accord, thinking about the promise of the Father, the coming of the Spirit, and whatever might follow from that. And they’re doing this, with the other members of their small community, in prayer. Meditate on Psalm 27.13, 14. What can we learn about *waiting* from this psalm?
2. The apostles and the others took up the exhortation of Psalm 27 to wait on the Lord and not to despair, but to keep on waiting until the goodness of the Lord appeared in the land of the living. In your experience, do we wait on the Lord like this in our churches? How about your own life?
3. We note that they waited like this *for ten straight days* (Christ taught them for 40 days, then ascended; Pentecost came 50 days after Passover). Try to put yourself into that upper room. How did they do this? What did this season of waiting look like? Is there anything *prescriptive* in this for us?
4. We grossly underestimate the importance of prayer in the ongoing work of Christ. If Christ exalted in glory is the *continuo* of our Kingdom cantata, prayer is the *composition* in which we all join, taking our separate parts in a single thematic motif, following the notes provided, until the composition reaches its end. Do you see your prayers like this, as part of a Kingdom cantata, organized by the risen Christ and operating according to His themes and motifs? Explain.
5. How important is prayer in your own walk with the Lord? How much does “waiting” like this feature in your faith? Can we expect to know the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom if we refuse to wait for it like the apostles did?

*Summary*

Waiting in prayer is an act of faith and obedience. The Lord commands us to wait. The saints of both the Old and New Testament practiced waiting on the Lord. If we want to know the full benefits of what the Father has promised for us in Jesus, we need to become better at waiting on Him. How might you improve your own practice of waiting on the Lord, beginning today?

*Closing Prayer*

Teach me Your way, O LORD,  
And lead me in a smooth path, because of my enemies.  
Do not deliver me to the will of my adversaries;  
For false witnesses have risen against me,

And such as breathe out violence.  
*I would have lost heart*, unless I had believed  
That I would see the goodness of the LORD  
In the land of the living.  
Wait on the LORD;  
Be of good courage,  
And He shall strengthen your heart;  
Wait, I say, on the LORD!

Psalm 27.11-14

## 6 Don't Know How to Pray?

Be sure to view the video introducing our study of Acts by [clicking here](#).

Read and reflect on Acts 1.15-21.

We've all been in a prayer group or prayer meeting when the leader says, "OK, let's pray." And every other prayer is some variation of, "Lord, we really just praise You." Sincere, no doubt, but insipid. What do you expect? We don't know how to pray as we should (Rom. 8.26), so why should we expect our prayers to be any more profound, moving, or inspiring than that?

*For reflection*

1. I think it's quite possible – we'll see why in chapter 4 – that those folks in that upper room were praying through the psalms, because, after all, they didn't know how to pray as they should any more than *we* do. Have you tried using psalms in your prayer life? Do you pray the closing prayer psalm for each day's study? What advantages might there be for us in learning to pray the psalms?
2. It's interesting to note that Peter quotes from the psalms – in the order they appear – to call a pause in the meeting in order to take care of some business. Psalm 69 may have piqued Peter's thinking as they prayed through it. And when they got to Psalm 109, Peter became convinced that the Lord was speaking to him through His Word. How did praying these psalms direct the disciples during their period of waiting? Is it reasonable to expect that praying the psalms might provide such direction for us? Explain.
3. Something wasn't quite in order. Some further preparations were needed before the promise of the Father would come. What did Peter direct them to do? Note that they didn't head off into this task willy-nilly. They set some standards, and then opened the floor for nominations. Why *these* standards?
4. The Lord speaking through His Word, clearly, so that we know exactly what we ought to do? Is this the way you experience the Word of God, or prayer guided by the Word?
5. Note, too, how Peter assumes the lead role here. We might think he'd be a bit gun-shy after his denial. But Peter took the Word of Christ seriously in John 21, and regardless of what others may have thought, he was not going to fail the Lord again. He stepped up to tend and feed the Lord's lambs, and to set the flock in order for what was about to occur. Is Peter acting presumptuously here? Why not?

*Summary*

As we are waiting on the Lord, He can speak to us about matters that need to be taken care of right away, so the Kingdom can continue its advance through us. But we need to read the Word of God, and listen for His voice as we pray the Word into our lives, fully expecting that He will lead us *this day* into some work of obedience. How can you begin to read the Word and pray more like this?

*Closing Prayer*

Show me Your ways, O LORD;

Teach me Your paths.  
Lead me in Your truth and teach me,  
For You *are* the God of my salvation;  
On You I wait all the day.

Psalm 25.4, 5

## 7 The Waiting (2)

Be sure to view the video introducing our study of Acts by [clicking here](#).

*Read and meditate on Acts 1.24-26.*

Here's a second facet of the waiting which the disciples engaged in for ten days: They took care of the business immediately at hand, as the Word of God directed. There's always something to do in seeking the Kingdom, even if it's some mundane detail like "officer elections." We must not despise the details of obedience. Whatever the Lord shows us to do, we must do it at once, and with excellence.

*For reflection*

1. Casting lots here may have been something like raising your hands. A lot was just a share or portion, and it seems everybody present had one. So they cast theirs, maybe into the hat marked "Joseph" or the one marked "Matthias." How does such a mundane activity fit into the work Jesus is doing at the Father's right hand?
2. Only two men met the qualifications for apostleship which all the other apostles shared in common. Matthias wins, and that's the last we'll hear of him. But this action mattered. The Church has to be "in order" to do its work (Titus 1.5), and that order must follow the prescriptions of the apostles, as they followed the Scriptures and the Lord. How confident are you that your church is "in order" like this?
3. This bit of preparation of the leaders of the people of God nicely parallels what we see in Joshua 1.10-18, where Joshua preps Israel's officers and tribal heads for their entry into the land of promise. I'm struck by how many times Luke does this, creating a kind of "remake" of the conquest of the land in the record of the initial unfolding of the Kingdom of God. Can it be helpful to think of our own lives and callings in such a light? Explain?
4. How attentive are you to the "everyday details" of ordering every aspect of your life for the Kingdom of God? Seeking the Kingdom of God is not the first priority of our lives among many. It's the first priority in everything. Explain
5. What "little things" are facing you today? How do these have potential for displaying and advancing the Kingdom of God? Will you wait on the Lord for His Kingdom to come in and through you today?

*Summary*

The Kingdom of God comes through daily obedience, even – indeed, especially – in areas of our lives that aren't particularly "flashy" or spectacular. The Kingdom comes like light, salt, and leaven. How will it come in and through you today?

*Closing Prayer*

I will wash my hands in innocence;  
So I will go about Your altar, O LORD,

That I may proclaim with the voice of thanksgiving,  
And tell of all Your wondrous works.  
LORD, I have loved the habitation of Your house,  
And the place where Your glory dwells.  
Do not gather my soul with sinners,  
Nor my life with bloodthirsty men,  
In whose hands *is* a sinister scheme,  
And whose right hand is full of bribes.  
But as for me, I will walk in my integrity;  
Redeem me and be merciful to me.  
My foot stands in an even place;  
In the congregations I will bless the LORD.

Psalm 26.6-12

*For reflection or discussion*

1. What is the Kingdom of God? Jesus came to earth to bring the Kingdom *near* or *at hand* or even *within* us. How does life in the Kingdom of God differ from life outside it?
2. Look back, look ahead, look around: This seems to be how Jesus taught us to live. Explain.
3. What does it mean to *wait* on the Lord? Why is it important that we do so? What are we seeking as we wait on Him?
4. The Kingdom of God comes in the daily details of life. What does this suggest about how we should prepare for the coming of the Kingdom each day?
5. What's the most important insight or lesson you've learned from Acts 1?

We are transformed into the image of Jesus Christ *from* the glory we encounter in God's Word to the ways we *live for His glory* in the world (2 Cor. 3.12-18; 1 Cor. 10.31). What have you encountered of God's glory in our reading and meditations in Acts 1? How has this helped you to live more consistently for His glory in the daily details of your life? What have you learned about yourself from Acts 1 to help you better prepare for living in the Kingdom each day?

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Thank you.