RADICAL ACTS

The Fire of the Spirit Erupting through Believers

An 11-Lesson Study of the Book of Acts

with Podcasts

MELANIE NEWTON
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Using This Study Guide

This study guide consists of 11 lessons arranged chronologically according to the Book of Acts. You will read through the complete book though not covering every detail. If you cannot do the entire lesson one week, please read the Bible passage for the lesson.

**THE BASIC STUDY**

Each lesson includes core questions covering the passage narrative. These core questions will take you through the process of inductive Bible study—observation, interpretation, and application. The process is more easily understood in the context of answering these questions:

- What does the passage say? (Observation: what's actually there) **Discover the Facts** questions will help you to notice all the information that is given in the text.
- What does it mean? (Interpretation: the author’s intended meaning)
- How does this apply to me today? (Application: making it personal) **Your Life Adventure** questions lead you to introspection and application of a specific truth to your life.

**STUDY ENHANCEMENTS**

*Deeper Discoveries (optional)*: Embedded within the sections are optional questions for research of subjects we don't have time to cover adequately in the lessons or contain information that significantly enhance the basic study. If you are meeting with a small group, your leader may give you the opportunity to share your "discoveries."

**Study Aids**: To aid in proper interpretation and application of the study, six additional study aids are located where appropriate in the lesson:

- Historical Insights
- Scriptural Insights
- From the Greek (definitions of Greek words)
- Focus on the Meaning
- Think About It (thoughtful reflection)

*Hot Spots*: Volcanoes form over “hot spots” in the earth’s crust where a crack allows molten lava to flow to the surface. The Holy Spirit’s work in your life becomes your own “hot spot.” These hot spots are anything you learned in the lesson or from reading the verses that sparked in you a longing and expectation for the Holy Spirit’s work in your life. Where did the Spirit grab your attention especially? What will you ask God to do in your life to get you fired up for adventure with Him?

**PODCASTS**

Find podcasts coordinating with these lessons at melanienewton.com/podcasts and most other podcast channels. Follow along with the “Podcast Listener Guides” for each lesson.

“The times are urgent, God is on the move, now is the moment to ask God to ignite His fire in your soul!” (Jim Cymbala, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, front flap)
NEW TESTAMENT SUMMARY

The New Testament opens with the births of John (the Baptist) and Jesus. About 30 years later, John challenged the Jews to indicate their repentance (turning from sin and toward God) by submitting to water baptism—a familiar Old Testament practice used for repentance as well as when a Gentile (non-Jew) converted to Judaism (to be washed clean of idolatry).

Jesus, God’s incarnate Son, publicly showed the world what God is like and taught His perfect ways for 3 – 3½ years. After preparing 12 disciples to continue Christ’s earthly work, He died voluntarily on a cross for mankind’s sin, rose from the dead, and returned to heaven. The account of His earthly life is recorded in 4 books known as the Gospels (the biblical books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John named after the compiler of each account).

After Jesus’ return to heaven, the followers of Christ were then empowered by the Holy Spirit and spread God’s salvation message among the Jews, a number of whom believed in Christ. The apostle Paul and others carried the good news to the Gentiles during 3 missionary journeys (much of this recorded in the book of Acts). Paul wrote 13 New Testament letters to churches & individuals (Romans through Philemon). The section in our Bible from Hebrews to Jude contains 8 additional letters penned by five men, including two apostles (Peter and John) and two of Jesus’ half-brothers (James and Jude). The author of Hebrews is unknown. The apostle John also recorded Revelation, which summarizes God’s final program for the world. The Bible ends as it began—with a new, sinless creation.

TIMELINE OF ACTS

The following are generally accepted dates although slight variations can be found in various commentaries and study Bibles. This timeline is based on Jesus’ death and resurrection occurring in 30 AD. Most of the dates up to James being executed are best guesses.

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<td>68</td>
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DISCUSSION GROUP GUIDELINES

1. **Attend consistently** whether your lesson is done or not. You’ll learn from the other women, and they want to get to know you.

2. **Set aside time** to work through the study questions. The goal of Bible study is to **get to know** Jesus. He will change your life.

3. **Share your insights** from your personal study time. As you spend time in the Bible, Jesus will teach you truth through His Spirit inside you.

4. **Respect each other’s insights.** Listen thoughtfully. Encourage each other as you interact. Refrain from dominating the discussion if you have a tendency to be talkative. 😊

5. **Celebrate our unity** in Christ. Avoid bringing up controversial subjects such as politics, divisive issues, and denominational differences.

6. **Maintain confidentiality.** Remember that anything shared during the group time is not to leave the group (unless permission is granted by the one sharing).

7. **Pray for one another** as sisters in Christ.

8. **Get to know the women** in your group. Please do not use your small group members for solicitation purposes for home businesses, though.

*Enjoy your Joyful Walk Bible Study!*
The radical blessing of the Holy Spirit

- On the day of Pentecost around 30 AD, the power of God poured forth on the followers of Jesus gathered in Jerusalem. The church of Jesus Christ was born—a radically new creation on Earth that never existed before.

- The Holy Spirit is a radical blessing to us. The definition of radical is "having a profound or far-reaching effect." Through the Spirit’s transforming power in our lives, He changes the world immeasurably and irreversibly.

3 Reasons why you should study the book of Acts

**Reason to study Acts #1. To understand how to live out your life in Christ.**

- Acts is a book of history. The Spirit of God selected what He wanted us to know. The book of Acts is really the acts of Jesus Christ by His Spirit through His Church.

- Acts is a book of theology. You will see how theology is lived out, evidence for the inspiration of scripture, and proof that the gospel message has never changed.

- Acts is a book of biography and human relationships. You will see the fire of the Spirit erupting in the lives of people who are touched by the Spirit and changed forever.

**Reason to study Acts #2. To connect with your spiritual heritage**

- Gain a connection and appreciation for those who obeyed Jesus by spreading the gospel everywhere they went to reach people like you who never saw Jesus face-to-face but learned to believe in Him as Savior and Lord.

**Reason to study Acts #3. Because you need spiritual adventure.**

- Acts is a book of adventure. Within the history, theology, biography, and relationships, this marvelous book introduces us to adventure with Jesus Christ.

Adventure with the Spirit of God

- According to the dictionary, adventure is "an unusual or exciting, typically hazardous, experience or activity." Our English word *adventure* comes from the Latin for "about to happen." What a way to look at life following Jesus—something's about to happen!
• In Acts, the adventure definitely includes the unexpected. Adventure rarely means easy. But, it never means alone. The Holy Spirit is with you and me every day, forever.

**WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?**

We can know these truths about the Holy Spirit.

• *The Holy Spirit is the breath of God.* We can’t see Him. But, the Bible confirms that He lives inside every believer.

• *The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity.* Our God is one God but three persons. The Spirit is a personal being just as the Father and the Son are persons.

• *The Holy Spirit is central to salvation.* He convicts the unbeliever of sin and makes believers into new creations the moment we believe. He enters our spirits and seals us with Himself so our salvation is secure. He unites us with Christ and places us into the universal Body of Christ.

• *The Holy Spirit is the One who makes the Christian life possible.* He is the first gift we receive from God when we trust in Jesus for salvation. And, all those wonderful spiritual treasures Paul writes about in Ephesians and his other letters are wrapped up and delivered by the Holy Spirit to us in a package deal the moment we are saved.

• *The Holy Spirit is the power for spiritual growth.* He enables us to understand the Bible and takes our prayer needs to God the Father, even when we can’t. He fills us with Himself and transforms us from the inside out so that our character looks more like Jesus and our lifestyle glorifies God more and more.

• This firepower is inside us. Yet, we must choose to cooperate, consciously depending on the Holy Spirit when making decisions, facing temptations, in our relationships, and in how we respond to the Spirit’s leading us.

**GETTING FIRED UP FOR ADVENTURE**

• Volcanoes form over hot spots in the earth’s crust where a crack allows molten lava to flow to the surface. The Holy Spirit’s work in our lives becomes our own “hot spots.”

• Open your eyes to the evidence around you of the firepower of the Holy Spirit—your own Holy Spirit hot spots. We hope that this study will also spark in you a longing and expectation for the Holy Spirit’s transforming power in your life as you learn what it means to live in daily dependence upon Jesus Christ. God’s Spirit will get you fired up and ready for adventure as you follow Jesus daily.

*Let Jesus satisfy your heart with His Spirit’s transforming power. And say yes to a life of adventure with Him!*
Lesson 1: Getting Fired Up for Adventure

Acts 1:1-26
A.D. 30

Like the power of a volcano pouring forth fiery lava, the power of God poured forth on the followers of Jesus gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost around 33 A.D. Born that day was a radically new creation on earth that never existed before—the Church—born not by natural power but by supernatural power. And, the power behind its existence is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a radical blessing to every believer and to the world.

Radical = “having a profound or far-reaching effect”

That word “radical” is an interesting word. It is often associated with something bad, such as free radicals, radical groups, but if radical is used to mean a profound and far-reaching effect, that certainly describes the Holy Spirit. And, that’s good! Through the Spirit’s transforming power in our lives, He changes the world immeasurably and irreversibly. We will see that Radical Acts is an appropriate name for our study of the book of Acts.

One of the biblical symbols for the Holy Spirit is “fire.” And, just as fiery lava and ash erupt from a volcano and flow out to build new land, the Holy Spirit’s fire erupts through the lives of believers to build Jesus’ Church. Within a few years, it was well established on planet Earth because men and women got fired up for adventure with the Spirit of God.

DAY ONE STUDY

Adventure with the Spirit

The book of Acts introduces us to adventure with the Spirit of God.

Adventure = “an unusual or exciting, typically hazardous, experience or activity”

What comes to mind when you think of adventure? How adventurous are you? You might not be naturally adventurous, especially the “typically hazardous” part.

Our English word “adventure” comes from the Latin for “about to happen.” Yep. What a way to look at life following Jesus—something’s about to happen! And, it’s usually not what you expect. I can verify that!

In Acts, the adventure definitely includes the unexpected. Miracles occur in strange places and strange ways. The Gentiles are included as equals to the Jews in the Church. An earthquake selectively releases prison chains. Unselfish behavior just springs forth in surprising ways. Add to that executions, beatings, riots, and a shipwreck—happening to the good guys! Adventure rarely means safe. But, it never means alone. The Holy Spirit is with you and me every day, forever.

Who is the Holy Spirit?

But, who is this Holy Spirit? Most Christians have only a vague idea about Him. The older translations called Him the Holy Ghost. The word “ghost” doesn’t inspire appreciation or curiosity in me! In Greek, He is called the pneuma, meaning “the breath” of God. He’s been called the transparent one because we can’t see Him. The Bible confirms that He lives inside every believer. By faith, I know He lives in me. Sometimes, I feel His presence. Maybe you do, too.
The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. Our God is one God but three persons. The Spirit is not an impersonal “it” or simply an influence but a personal being just as the Father and the Son are persons.

The Holy Spirit is central to salvation. He convicts the unbeliever of sin and makes believers into new creations the moment we believe. He seals us with Himself so our salvation is secure, and He indwells us forever. He unites us with Christ, placing us into the universal Body of Christ. We are all part of the one Church since Pentecost. That includes those who are already in heaven as well as every Christian alive at this moment.

The Holy Spirit is the One who makes the Christian life possible. He is the first gift we receive from God when we trust in Jesus for salvation. And, all those wonderful treasures Paul writes about in Ephesians and his other letters are wrapped up and delivered by the Holy Spirit to us in a package deal the moment we are saved.

The Holy Spirit is the power for spiritual growth. He enables us to understand the Bible and prays for us, even when we can’t. He fills us with Himself and transforms us from the inside out so that our character looks more like Jesus and our lifestyle glorifies God more and more. This firepower is inside us. Yet, we must choose to cooperate. That means living our lives with a conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit—when facing temptations, making decisions, in our relationships, and in how we respond to the Spirit’s leading us. Trusting God in ways that you never did in the past, that’s the adventure. You’ll learn all about this in Radical Acts.

For a more detailed discussion of the Holy Spirit, including verses that support the above statements, see “Who Is the Holy Spirit?” in the RESOURCES section at the back of the book.

1. What did you learn about the Holy Spirit that you did not already know or appreciate?

The ABCs of Acts—Author, Background, and Context

Like any book you read, it always helps to know a bit about the author, the background setting for the story (i.e., past, present, future), and where the book fits into a series (that’s the context). The same is true of Bible books.

Author

Although the author does not name himself, evidence from the text leads to the conclusion that the author was Luke, the physician and traveling companion of Paul (Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24). Certain passages using the pronoun “we” indicate the author includes himself as Paul’s companion on his journeys. Some word choices in both Luke and Acts suggest that a medical man was the author of these books (Acts 28:6). The abrupt close indicates that Acts must have been finished around A.D. 62.
BACKGROUND

The book of Acts is a fast-paced, action adventure book that chronicles the birth and growth of the early church from the Jewish center of Jerusalem to the Gentile nations surrounding her. It’s a rich and fascinating book with something for everyone.

- Acts is a book of history. But, it’s not a complete history of the early church or the apostles but a selective history of early Christianity from Jesus’ ascension through two years of Paul’s Roman imprisonment. Some call it the Acts of the Apostles. But, it’s really the acts of Jesus Christ by His Spirit through His Church.

- Acts is a book of theology. Through His messengers, the Holy Spirit teaches people the truth about God and displays God’s reality and power through miracles. You will see evidence for the inspiration of scripture and how the gospel message taught from the very beginning has never changed.

- Acts is a book of biography. It tells about the fire of the Spirit erupting in the lives of Peter, Paul, and their companions as well as many others whose lives were touched by the Spirit and changed forever.

- Acts is also a book about human relationships influenced by the transforming fire power of the Spirit. Conflicts occur and are resolved, friendships are made and tested, old prejudices surface and are removed, persecutions are shared, hospitality is extended, generosity is displayed, and opportunity taken to share the gospel with whomever would listen. Men and women got fired up and not only ready for adventure, but living the adventure with God.

CONTEXT

As a second volume to Luke’s Gospel, the book of Acts provides a bridge for the writings of the New Testament, joining what Jesus “began to do and to teach” (Acts 1:1) as told in the Gospels with what he continued to do and teach through the apostles’ preaching and the establishment of the church. It links the Gospel narratives with the apostolic letters that follow. It supplies an account of Paul’s life from which we learn the settings for his letters. Geographically its story spans the lands between Jerusalem (where the church began) and Rome (the political center of the empire). Historically it recounts the first 30 years of the church. Within it are references to historical events occurring in the Roman Empire known from outside sources. It is also a bridge that ties the church in its beginning with each succeeding age.

2. What information did you learn from the ABC’s of Acts that you did not already know?

Think About It: Acts is a tribute to the transforming power of God, as seen in the Apostles’ lives. Observing the changes in their lives from fearful weaklings to irrepressible dynamos gives us hope and encouragement today.” (Sue Edwards, Acts of the Holy Spirit, p. 2)
**Get Fired Up for Adventure**

Our hope is that this study will spark in you a longing and expectation for the Holy Spirit's work in your life. We call those "hot spots." Through these lessons, you will discover who the Holy Spirit is, His intended role in your life, and what it means to live in daily dependence upon Him. He is the one who will work through that "hot spot" in your life and get you fired up for adventure as you follow Jesus daily.

**Think About It:** “The work of God can only be carried on by the power of God. The church is a spiritual organism fighting spiritual battles. Only spiritual power can make it function as God ordained. The key is not money, organization, cleverness, or education. No matter the society or culture, the city or town, God has never lacked the power to work through available people to glorify His name ... The times are urgent, God is on the move, now is the moment to ask God to ignite His fire in your soul!” (Jim Cymbala, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*)

3. **Your Life Adventure:** Are you ready to get fired up for adventure with Jesus? What are you hoping to learn from this study?

**Day Two Study**

*Recommended: Read Acts 1:1-26 to get the whole picture.*

**Read Luke 1:1-4.**

4. **Discover the Facts:**
   
   Who handed down the information (v. 2)?

   What did Luke do (v. 3)?

   For what purpose (v. 4)?

**Focus on the Meaning:** "Theophilus" means lover of God. Some interpreters have suggested that Theophilus was not an actual person and that Luke was writing to all lovers of God whom he personified by using this name (cf. Luke 1:3). All things considered, it seems more likely that Theophilus was a real person. There is no reason he could not have been. Such is the implication of the address, and Theophilus was a fairly common Greek proper name. (*Dr. Constable’s Notes on Acts 2017 Edition*, p. 12)
5. Since Luke wrote the book of Acts, what confidence do you have that what you will be studying in Acts is trustworthy information?

Read Acts 1:1-3.

6. **Discover the Facts:**

   What does the author say in vv. 1-2?

   After His suffering, what did Jesus do (v. 3)?

   *From the Greek:* The Greek word *tekmeriois*, translated "proofs," occurs only here in the New Testament. It refers to proof by incontrovertible evidence as contrasted with the proof claimed by a witness. Luke asserted that Jesus Christ's resurrection was beyond dispute. (*Dr. Constable’s Notes on Acts 2017 Edition*, p. 13)

7. To what convincing proofs were the disciples a witness?
   - See Matthew 28:8-10—
   - Luke 24:36-42—
   - 1 Corinthians 15:5-7—

8. **Your Life Adventure:** Read John 20:26-29. What did Jesus say about those who have not seen Him in bodily form and still believe? Why should you count yourself as one of those “blessed” ones?
DAY THREE STUDY

Read Acts 1:1-11.

9. **Discover the Facts**: Focus now on vv. 4-11.
   - What was Jesus doing with them (v. 4)?
   - Why were they to wait in Jerusalem (v. 4)?
   - What would happen in a few days (v. 5)?
   - What question did they ask Jesus (v. 6)?
   - What is Jesus’ answer in v. 7?
   - What would they receive (v. 8 first part)?
   - What would they then become (v. 8 second part)?
   - What happened next (v. 9)?
   - Who suddenly stood beside them (v. 10)?
   - What did they promise (v. 11)?

**Focus on the Meaning**: The word translated “baptized” came from the process for “dyeing” cloth. It didn’t matter if the cloth was sprayed, dipped, or immersed. The significance was taking on the identity of the dye. For us, the Spirit does the dyeing—with Jesus. We are dyed with Christ. Water baptism is a picture of what the Spirit does to us. John baptized with water; Jesus baptizes with the Spirit—much more significant and with far greater effects. See Romans 6.
10. Read the following verses to see what Jesus had promised them about the Spirit.
   - John 14:15-17—
   - John 16:12-15—

11. **Your Life Adventure:** What grabbed your attention in this passage? Reflect and respond to what the Holy Spirit pointed out for you to notice.

**Day Four Study**

Read Acts 1:12-26.

12. **Discover the Facts:**
   - Where did they go after Jesus left them?
   - Who was present there (vv. 13-14)?
   - What were they doing (v. 14)?
   - How many believers were there (v. 15)?
   - What were the qualifications for filling Judas's vacant place (vv. 21-22)?
   - Whom did they propose (v. 23)?
   - What did they pray (vv. 24-25)?
Who was added to the Eleven (v. 26)?

**Historical Insight:** The practice of “casting lots” was common in the Old Testament (Proverbs 16:33), but this is the only recorded time the Apostles did this in the New Testament. Each candidate’s name was written on a stone that was placed in a vessel and shaken. The first to fall out obtained the office. (Sue Edwards, *Acts of the Holy Spirit*, p. 6)

13. What did Peter already see as the set purpose for the apostles (v. 22)?

14. Whereas men and women were usually segregated in the synagogue, what were men and women doing together in this upper room (v. 14)?

**Scriptural Insight:** The women possibly included the wives of the apostles (1 Co 9:5) and those listed as ministering to Jesus (Mt 27:55; Lk 8:2-3; 24:22). (NIV Study Bible, p. 1644)

15. **Your Life Adventure:** The believers were joined together learning how to live dependently on Jesus for guidance. What did they do that you can also do?

**Think About It:** In this first chapter, three key elements of the book of Acts are introduced: 1) the emphasis on the many witnesses to Jesus’ life, death and resurrection; 2) the Holy Spirit’s guidance and empowering of believers, and 3) the dependent hearts of those same believers as they prayed. Keep these elements in mind as you work through the study.

**Get Fired Up for Adventure:**

16. **Hot Spot:** Where in this lesson did the Spirit grab your attention especially? What did you see Him do in your life this week?

**Recommended:** Listen to the podcast “Trusting Jesus When Making Decisions” at melanienewton.com/podcasts after doing this lesson to reinforce what you have learned. Use the listener guide on the next page.
Trusting Jesus When Making Decisions

**Making Decisions is Part of Life.**
- Making decisions is part of daily life. We can't get away from it.
- What we have to learn is how to make those decisions in a way that maintains our dependence on Jesus Christ in the process. Jesus’ followers had to learn that as well.

**Casting Lots Was a Cultural Tool Not a Formula.**
- The practice of “casting lots” was common in the Old Testament. And, God even used it to give direction to His people. This is the only record of its New Testament use.
- Casting lots as a cultural tool that God used with His people sometimes. He also used prophets and counsellors. *Proverbs 16:33*
- Casting lots was not a formula then nor is it a formula today. What we read in Acts is simply a description of what they did not a prescription for how to make decisions today.

**Descriptive Versus Prescriptive**
- Much of the Bible is written in narrative form. Narrative is usually descriptive not prescriptive.
  - *Descriptive* means it is observation of what actually happened, how people lived and the choices they made about how to do life at the time.
  - *Prescriptive* refers to commands from God about how to live or do something that applies to all believers, all people groups, and all time periods.
- We can’t look at this passage in Acts chapter 1 about casting lots and create a formula for making decisions with God’s blessing on the result.
- We also know that the Holy Spirit now lives inside every believer and can give us direction from the inside of our own hearts and minds for making decisions.
- From our study of Acts 1, we can look at the process the apostolic leaders used and see that the same process applies to us.
THE PROCESS FOR MAKING DECISIONS

Step 1. They aligned themselves with the purposes of God.
- Since Jesus had originally chosen 12 to represent the tribes of Israel, they would fill that 12th spot for the purpose that Jesus had set before them. It was a position of leadership to fill. They aligned themselves with the purposes of God.

Step 2. They considered options who were also aligned with the purposes of God.
- They used their own observations and mental acuity to evaluate the choices. Two men were equally good choices, and both were aligned with the purposes of God.

Step 3. They asked the Lord Jesus for His direction and for Him to show them the best choice.
- In the New Testament writings after the gospels, whenever you see “the Lord,” that refers to Jesus. God is God the Father, Lord is the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Spirit is the Holy Spirit.
- The disciples submitted their options to their Lord Jesus and asked for Him to show them which to choose. “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen (Acts 1:24)
- This is living dependently on God. God the Father who is also your Creator has given you a brain to use. He wants you to use your mind and heart to evaluate the options and then remove the options that are not lined up with His way of doing life. Once you have done that, ask the Lord to show you which good option to choose. It is an act of faith.

Step 4. They submitted to Jesus’ direction for them.
- They asked for God to show them, and God did. Then, they submitted to that. Matthias became the 12th apostle and joined the leader team.

DECISION-MAKING AS PART OF DEPENDENT LIVING
- Decision-making is a huge part of dependent living. What decision do you need to make this week? Follow those guidelines I just gave you, trusting Jesus with your decision-making.

Let Jesus satisfy your heart with His Spirit’s transforming power. And say yes to a life of adventure with Him!