

# Acts Bible Study – Session 1

Women's Ministry Conference  
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*“Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”  
He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has  
set by his own authority.  
But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you,  
and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and  
to the ends of the earth. ...  
he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.”  
(Acts 1:6-9)*

With these inspired words, Luke outlines the content of Acts, the second book written for his friend Theophilus. “Empowered to Proclaim. You Will be My Witnesses,” the conference theme, summarizes these passages. This two-session Bible study will be letting Scripture define the Kingdom of God/Heaven and take a closer look at the work of the Holy Spirit in action in the early Christian church during the first session. Session two will look at what witnesses proclaimed throughout Acts, with discussion of how it may look in our lives as Jesus’ witnesses today.

## *The Kingdom of God/Heaven*

Many of us, during our confirmation instruction classes, learned a very fine definition of the Kingdom of God/Heaven. What is that definition?

The Kingdom of God/heaven seems so simple at first glance. Yet, a quick glance at a concordance reveals the coming Kingdom of God/Heaven, which is often referred to as “near” or “at hand” during Jesus’ life here on earth, is a predominant theme throughout the Gospels, especially Matthew and Luke. Jesus himself refers to the Kingdom at hand often during his ministry. Perhaps there’s more to it than we first realize.

***A. "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"***

Jesus' answer to the disciples' question is the subject of the rest of Luke's writing to his friend.

There are two aspects of every kingdom to consider. One aspect is the physical size, shape, possessions, material goods, and the subjects of a kingdom under the leadership/rule of a king. That is the most common understanding of what a kingdom is. **The second aspect of a kingdom to consider is the activity of ruling by the ruler. How does the ruler rule? How does the ruler extend the kingdom?**

Scripture offers many descriptions of God's rule of both physical aspects of kingdom rule and the kingly activity of ruling. **Gaining a deeper understanding of the activity aspect of a king is the focus of this section of this first Bible study session.**

For example, **read one of the following two Scripture sections.** Be ready to discuss which aspects of the breadth of God's kingdom predominate in the selection chosen to read.

**Genesis chapters 1 and 2**

**Psalm 104**

A couple of references for further study at a later time on the same topic:

**Job chapters 38-41**

**Psalm 102**

If the LORD God was already in full control and ruling the universe, with Kingly activity on behalf of his creation, what then is the Kingdom of God/heaven that the Jews, including the apostles and disciples of Jesus, were looking for?

It's necessary to take a look at how the Israelites got themselves into a seemingly hopeless situation about 600 years before Jesus walked the earth. **Psalms 105 and 106**, give a nice summary of the history recorded in the historical books of Scripture, Genesis through 2 Chronicles. **Psalm 105** recounts the LORD's faithful leadership and rule as he cared for his chosen people, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with whom he had made an everlasting covenant. The psalmist chronicles the time from Abraham until they reach the Promised Land, a period of over a 1000 years. **Psalm 106** then records the rebellious and wicked response of God's chosen people to his incredible love and provision for them, from the time he freed them from the slavery of Egypt until they found themselves in captivity in Babylon.

**Read either Psalm 105 or Psalm 106.** Be ready to discuss how Psalms 105 and 106 can apply in our lives.

The LORD was always faithful to his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to have descendants more numerous than the stars. The LORD spoke to his people through the prophets he sent to guide, warn, and comfort them with his very own words. At the time of the Babylonian captivity, the LORD had Daniel taken to Babylon with others of Jerusalem's best and brightest young men to be politically converted in the "training school for captives" of Babylon leadership's upper echelon. The prophet Ezekiel was among the exiles by the Kebar river. The LORD had Jeremiah in Jerusalem warning the rebellious people and comforting the faithful.

The situation during this time couldn't have looked worse for God's people who had been promised an everlasting kingdom under a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and later promised a king greater than King David. About 500 years after the time of King David, the Israelites who were once the most powerful nation in the Mideast under King David, are captive in Babylon because of their rebellion against God. The LORD comforts the exiles through Ezekiel's prophecies. He is promising a restoration of their former relationship with him in days to come. The LORD is explaining how that is going to happen. The LORD comforts the exiles with a letter Jeremiah writes to them. Recordings of 2 Kings 24:14 and Jeremiah 52:27b-30, state the number of captives in Babylon was somewhere between 4,600 and 10,000 depending on whether only men were counted, or if men, women, and children were all counted. Virtually all the rest of the Israelites had been carried off by the Assyrians or had been destroyed when Babylon fell. The survivors of Jerusalem who tried to flee to Egypt for protection afterwards, in opposition to what the LORD told them to do through Jeremiah, were destroyed in subsequent battles between Egypt and Babylon. By comparison, when the Israelites were rescued from slavery in Egypt, close to 1000 years before the Babylon captivity, they numbered around 2 million. How could the LORD, who promised them an everlasting kingdom, ever restore this small group of captives in a foreign land to what they once were? Not only that, the temple which was where they came to offer sacrifices, be cleansed, and where the High Priest could come into the LORD's presence once a year before the Ark of the Covenant to sprinkle blood on the Ark first for his own sins and then for the sins of the people, had been totally destroyed. The Ark of the Covenant was gone forever.

Read one of the following references and be ready to discuss why the LORD had allowed them to be so utterly destroyed and what he was promising through his prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

**Jeremiah 29:1-19**

**Ezekiel 36**

**Ezekiel 37:15-28**

A couple of references to fulfillment of the prophecies for future study on the same topic:

**Ephesians 2:19-22**

**1 Peter 2:4-9**

The Jews, including the disciples, at the time of Jesus were looking for a kingdom defined by borders, material wealth, and a king who would overthrow Rome to make it happen. The kingdom of heaven/God is not that type of kingdom. What then defines the Kingdom of heaven/God?

Read one of the passages from Matthew and one from Luke's first book written for his friend. Be ready to discuss what defines the Kingdom of God/heaven.

**Matthew 3:1-3, 4:23-25**

**Luke 9:1-11, 57-62**

**Matthew 13**

**Luke 11:14-20**

**Matthew 18:1-4, 21-35**

**Luke 13:18-30**

**Matthew 20:1-28**

**Luke 18:15-30**

**Matthew 21:28- 22:14**

**Luke 23:42-43**

**Matthew 25:1-13**

A couple of references for future study on the same topic:

**Mark 14:24-25**

**John 18:33-37**

There are many more passages about the Kingdom of God/heaven in the Gospels, especially in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Look for them sometime. Take time to ponder them.

**Your definition of the Kingdom of God/heaven now:**

*B. ...he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight."*

Jesus ascended to the throne on Ascension Day right after he commissioned his disciples to "*be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*"

At a later time, read the following passages which confirm Jesus' ascension to rule the kingdom.

**Psalm 68** David's inspired and poetic description of God leading his people from Mount Sinai to the place where his temple would be built and his presence would fill the temple. The LORD God would fight for them, he would conquer their enemies, he would rule over all in splendor and with power.

**Ephesians 1:15-23** Paul's prayer for the Ephesian congregation.

**Ephesians 4:3-13** where Paul quotes Psalm 68 and ascribes the rule of the church and the head of the church to Jesus.

**Colossians 1:3-20** Paul's prayer that the believers are filled with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding and explanation of the fullness of Christ and his rule.

## *The Work of the Holy Spirit*

*C. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you,*

We know the Holy Spirit brings us to life spiritually. Ezekiel records a vivid picture of the work of the Holy Spirit in **Ezekiel 37:1-14**, the Valley of dry bones. **Read Ezekiel 37:1-14**. Be ready to discuss the magnitude of the Spirit's work. Note: the words translated as breath, wind, and spirit are all the same word in Hebrew. Keep that in mind as you read.

After Jesus had celebrated the preparation for the Passover meal with his disciples, instituted the new covenant in his blood, and was continuing on the way to Gethsemane, he instructed, encouraged, and comforted them. Jesus was preparing them not only for the coming days, but also for the days coming shortly thereafter when he wouldn't be seen walking with them here on earth anymore. John begins this account with the words, ***“Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.”*** John chapters 13-17 are devoted to Jesus' last words of instruction, encouragement, and comfort before Jesus begins his suffering and crucifixion to pay for our sins, to redeem us to be in his kingdom. It's in these chapters that we find a wonderful description of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Read two of the following references that describe the work of the Holy Spirit. Be ready to discuss the extent and specifics of what the Holy Spirit does today in our lives and in the spread of the Kingdom of God/heaven.

**John 14:1-4**

**John 14:15-21**

**John 14:25-31**

**John 15:26-27**

**John 16:5-16**

**John 17:13-23**

***D. He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ... and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. ...”***

What grace and privilege has Jesus given to us to serve in the kingdom of God/heaven as his ***“witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”***?

*See you all in session two ☺!*