

## YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES

Acts 1:1-26  
Key Verse: 1:8

Lesson 1

Dr. Luke was an evangelist and a historian. He wrote the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. The Gospel of Luke is about Jesus birth, his life of disciple making and loving service, his death and resurrection. It is about what Jesus did on earth. Acts is about the continuing work of Jesus through the Holy Spirit. Luke was not an eye witness of the events of Jesus' life, but, according to his own statement, he did careful research. He interviewed eye witnesses and made sure that his facts were correct. (Luke 1:1-4) He was a traveling companion of the Apostle Paul. So his gospel faith and his world mission vision were like Paul's. Both Luke and Acts are addressed to someone named "Theophilus," "Lover of God." Perhaps this includes all of us who love God and seek to know him better. These books go together. The Gospel of Luke begins in Jerusalem and ends in Jerusalem. Acts begins in Jerusalem, but ends with Paul in Rome, the Capital of the world, living in a manger-like rented room, but planting a seed the gospel, that would grow and produce fruit and eventually conquer Rome and change the face of the world.

First, the ministry of the Risen Jesus (1-5)

When Jesus died on the cross an era ended. The new era would begin with the coming of the Holy Spirit. By his death and resurrection Jesus fulfilled the promises of God and opened the way of forgiveness and life for sinful mankind. He opened the way back to God. He died to take away the sins of the world. He rose to give life and victory. The risen Jesus spent 40 days ministering to his disciples. He showed them many convincing proofs to show that he was alive. He spoke with them. He ate with them. He wanted his disciples to believe the resurrection, to have resurrection faith, for this is the core of the gospel. We serve a risen Savior. He is alive, not dead. He is the life-giver.

He spoke to them about the Kingdom of God. This had been his message from the beginning of his ministry: "the Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news." (Mk 1:15) He told parables of the kingdom. He prayed, "Your kingdom come; your will be done." The Kingdom of God is wherever the King reigns. God wants his kingdom extended in the hearts of the people of the world. He wants everyone to know who Jesus is. He wants everyone to have the chance to welcome him and worship him. Jesus' work was done. He purchased salvation for all people with his blood. But the disciples work was just beginning. They must take the good news of the gospel of forgiveness and salvation to all the people of the world, to the end of time, until Jesus comes again.

Jesus gave them a command: Wait in Jerusalem for the gift God promised—the Holy

Spirit. He promised that in a few days they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works through the power of him who raised Jesus from the dead. He gives new life, eternal life. He changes us from cowards to courageous people. He changes us from slaves of our sinful natures to men and women filled with love, faith, joy, peace, kindness, goodness and self-control. We need the Holy Spirit to empower us to do the mission God gives us. The disciples could only be witnesses to Jesus' resurrection when they were filled with the Spirit.

Second, the work of disciples (6-11)

Jesus' disciples still did not understand. They were thinking of the restoration of their country, Israel. This was their hope. They thought that Jesus would do it by a great miracle, using resurrection power. They wanted to know when this would happen. Some people today also think that the physical restoration of Israel has an important place in God's ultimate plan for world salvation. I do not think so. Israel will be restored when all Israelites come to Jesus, repent and accept him as king. God' kingdom is a spiritual kingdom. The disciples thought that Jesus, with his risen power, had come back to do everything. They did not realize that they must now be apostles. Jesus had come to send them out to complete the task he had begun. He accomplished salvation. But he had come as the Savior of the whole world. They must tell the world and extend his kingdom in the hearts of men. Jesus had a word of promise and a command for them. The Father God is working out his own plan for world redemption. Only he knows his plan. But Jesus disciples have work to do. "But you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

1. You will be my witnesses. The establishment of an authoritative source—a "New Testament" was essential. Many people would say many things about Jesus, but the Bible is the final authority on the life and teachings of Jesus. The authoritative witnesses are the source of accurate and real truth about Jesus. Verses 21-22 set forth the criteria for apostolic witness: some one who had been with Jesus "the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us." They are the witnesses of the resurrection. They are the source of the Bible. Their testimony is the New Testament.

2. In Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

These words set the direction for the Acts of the Apostles. This is also the direction for the task of Christians in every age. First the witness to Jesus is at home—in Jerusalem. This means that the witness is not only a witness of words; it must be a witness of changed lives. Among those who know us, a changed life is the best testimony. For the Apostles, to witness to the risen Jesus in Jerusalem was dangerous. They would be testifying to the very people who had crucified him. They must do this with the spirit of martyrdom. This is why they must wait for the Holy Spirit. He would come with power to change cowards into men of courage; slaves of passion and pride into holy men of God. Acts 1-7 records the witness of the Apostles in Jerusalem. It is climaxed by the

martyrdom of Stephen in Jerusalem. Acts 8-11 records the witness of the Apostles in Samaria and Judea. The conversion of Paul in Acts 9, and Peter's encounter with Cornelius in 10-11 are two events that are the precursors to the task to come. Third, the witness to the end of the earth. Most of the apostles traveled. Tradition says that Andrew went to Russia, James to England, Mark to Egypt, John to Ephesus in Turkey, etc. But in Acts, the Apostle Paul was the man of the hour. He went to the Gentile world. He went to Asia Minor and to Europe and to the ends of the earth. Luke's account of the spread of the Gospel focuses on Paul.

After Jesus had given them this final word, "You will be my witnesses..." he was taken up into heaven out of their sight. They stood in speechless awe. Then two angels dressed in white planted in their hearts the glorious hope of his second coming. "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

### 3. The apostles prepare for the task—a holy nation.

They returned to Jerusalem, as he had commanded. They gathered together in an upstairs room and began to pray. They must wait for the gift the Father promised, the Holy Spirit. They could do nothing in their own strength.

First, united prayer. Jesus had prayed for his disciples, that they might all be one. He had given them a clear command to love one another. The 11 disciples were there in the room where they had eaten the last supper with Jesus. The women, Mary, Jesus' mother, Mary Magdalene and all the other women were there. Jesus' brothers, sons of Mary, were there. All those who followed Jesus were there. About 120 people were together to pray with one heart and mind. They prayed for the world mission task Jesus had given them. They prayed for the promised Holy Spirit. Their unity in Jesus was made real as they united with one mind and heart in prayer. As they prayed the problem which broke their unity surfaced.

Second, mending the vessel of the Holy Spirit. Peter stood up and began to speak. He voiced the problem that was on the hearts of many. He talked about Judas, the betrayer. It is so painful and discouraging to be betrayed by one we had trusted. Judas had been trusted by Jesus and by all of them. He was "one of our number and shared in this ministry." He had been put in charge of the meager finances of the disciples. But something happened. He did not accept Jesus' words (Jn 6). He loved money. But he came to a miserable end. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about it. Peter turned to the Bible to understand this event. He found a verse that told them to put Judas behind them. "It is written in the Psalms, 'May his place be deserted, let there be no one to dwell in it.'" He found another verse that gave them direction. "May another take his place of leadership." It was time for someone to fill up the number of the disciples. Jesus had chosen 12. Perhaps he was thinking about the 12 tribes of Israel. These men would be the pillars of the new Israel. The one they chose must be one who is qualified to be a witness of the resurrection. He must be one who has been with them from the

beginning. Two men were nominated. They prayed to God who knows every man's heart, then they cast lots and Matthias was chosen. The ranks of the Apostles was closed. The vessel was mended. They were ready to receive what God would give them.