

Lesson 1

New Beginnings

Do you know when your congregation began? Who were some of the people involved in organizing your congregation? Was your family part of that group? Where did they first meet for worship?

The very first congregation was a small group of Christian believers who gathered together in Jerusalem in about 30 A.D. as Jesus had instructed them (Acts 1:4). Many of them had followed Jesus throughout His ministry. Now Jesus had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, so instead of being followers, these believers would now become the leaders of the Christian church, spreading the Gospel to the entire world.

The book of Acts is sometimes called “The Acts of the Apostles.” Really it could be called “The Acts of the Holy Spirit” because that is the focus of the book. There are stories about Peter and Paul and stories about crippled men and jailers and storekeepers and miracles. But all the stories have something in common—in every single one, God the Holy Spirit is acting to heal the sick, free prisoners from jail, and protect the men who were chosen by God to spread the Word.

A doctor named Luke, who wrote the Gospel of Luke, is the author of the Book of Acts. Because he traveled with Paul on some of his missionary journeys, Luke witnessed many of the events recorded in the book. Written in about 63 A.D., Acts records the history of the Early Church beginning with Jesus’ return to heaven in about 30 A.D.

The believers who had followed Jesus were mostly Jews, but that was about to change. From that small group, the Christian church exploded into a huge number of believers who were mostly non-Jewish, or Gentiles. The few who gathered together in Jerusalem at the beginning of the Book of Acts in 30 A.D. grew to thousands and thousands throughout Israel, Asia Minor and parts of Europe.

Looking Back . . .

What an incredible journey it had been for the disciples! They had given up everything to follow Jesus. For three years, He had taught them, prayed with them, and sometimes scolded them. Then He had been arrested, executed, and buried. They didn’t know what to do.

But on the morning of the third day after Jesus’ death, a miracle occurred. He rose from the dead! His tomb was now empty. An angel announced, “He is not here, but He has risen” (Luke 24:6).

	<u>Jesus appeared to:</u>	<u>When and/or Where?</u>
John 20:19-20	<i>The disciples (minus Thomas)</i>	<i>Easter Sunday evening; a locked room</i>
John 21:1, 4-6	<i>The disciples</i>	<i>The shores of the Sea of Tiberias</i>
I Corinthians 15:6	<i>More than 500 believers</i>	<i>“After that”</i>

Many people saw Jesus after He rose from the dead. This proved to them and to us that He really is alive.

Into the Word: Acts 1:1-11

1. Using Acts 1:1-5, fill in the blanks:

In my first letter I told you what Jesus began to *do* and *teach* until the day He was *taken up*. Many times, He proved He was alive by often appearing to the apostles over a period of 40 days. He told them to wait in *Jerusalem* for the baptism of the *Holy Spirit*.

2. Jesus gave the disciples some instructions before He left them. What were they? v.4

- *Stay in Jerusalem*
- *Wait for what the Father had promised*

3. What did Jesus promise would happen to them?

v.5 *They would be baptized with the Holy Spirit*

v.8 *They would receive power and become witnesses of Jesus*

4. At this time, Israel was not a self-governing nation. What foreign power was ruling over it? John 11:48
The Romans

5. The disciples, like many other Jews, wanted freedom from Rome's power. But God's plan was to give them a greater power. Where would that power come from? Acts 1:8 *The Holy Spirit*

6. Up until this time, the disciples had been students and followers of Christ. What would they become after God gave them the Holy Spirit? v.8 *Witnesses of Christ throughout the whole world. The word used for "witnesses" in the original Greek text is "martyres," which originally meant someone who testifies in court, especially in reference to what that person has seen or heard. Our English word "martyrs" has its roots in that Greek word. We commonly use "martyrs" today to refer to people who have died for their faith.*

7. Where would Jesus' followers be witnesses? *Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the remotest parts of the earth.*

They would spread the Word in their own town, in the nearby country, and finally in every part of the world.

8. Christ's work on earth was finished. What happened to Him in verse 9? *He was lifted up into Heaven.*

9. Jesus was gone. Imagine the disciples craning their necks and staring at the clouds, trying to understand what was happening. They had some visitors. Who were they? v.10 *Two men in white clothing--Angels from heaven*

10. What did they promise about Jesus in verse 11? *He would return to earth the same way He had left.*

Optional TM discussion:

Jesus Christ is coming again. Using Acts 1:9-11, Matthew 24:30-31, and I Thessalonians 4:14-17, describe what His return will be like.

Wording will vary, but should include at least some of the following: Jesus will come down to earth from heaven, appearing from a cloud; when Jesus comes again mankind will mourn; everyone on earth will see Him coming with power and great glory; He will send His angels with a great trumpet to gather believers to Him; God will raise those who died believing in Him; those who are believers when Jesus comes again will also be lifted up to heaven with Him; Jesus will come down from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trumpet call of God.

Memory Verse

“...but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

Acts 1:8

Extra Memory Challenge:

Luke 24:46-47

“and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

New Ideas:

Apostles and Witnesses

Apostle: someone sent on a mission; an authorized messenger.

Witness: someone who has seen something; someone who provides evidence

Discussion Questions

Each teacher should encourage, as much as time permits, discussion and inquiry on the part of students. Not every aspect of the following questions is addressed here, and students may have thoughts related to but not mentioned in this guide. The obligation of the teacher, then, is to understand as deeply as possible the Scriptures that are being discussed, in order to answer as well as possible any questions a student might have.

1. The Book of Acts is about the apostles, yet the book begins with the account of Jesus leaving His followers and ascending into heaven. Based on what you have learned in this lesson, what do you see as the significance of this account in relation to the rest of the book? What did Jesus’ ascension mean for the disciples?

Sets the stage for the rest of the book of Acts. If the message of salvation through Christ’s work on the cross was to continue the disciples were going to have to take up the work. Christ had told the disciples He was leaving them and that He would send the Holy Spirit (John 16: 5-12) and this was fulfillment of what He had told them. As the disciples witnessed this, they knew that Christ would send the Holy Spirit to them- They would be equipped to carry on the work of spreading the Gospel. They did not know how this would come about but they could rest in the promise that they would not be alone.

2. Jesus was talking in verse 8 to believers from Jerusalem. *Read that verse again.* If Jesus was speaking these words today, who would be His witnesses? What would be your Jerusalem, your Judea, your Samaria, your uttermost part of the earth?

Jesus’ statement “You shall be my witnesses” was not only an exhortation to the apostles but also a statement of fact, as if to say, “You know me and you know my work. You are witnesses of what I have done.” In today’s world a witness of Christ would be anyone who, by his or her words or actions, reflects the Spirit of God. This has many applications in everyday living. Encourage your students to think of specific examples.

(It may be helpful to have available not only a map of the holy land during the time of Christ, but also a local map for the students to use.) Jesus and the apostles were in Jerusalem, and He told them to stay there for the time being. The regions He referred to- Judea and Samaria- were provinces nearest the city of Jerusalem. His statement reflects to the apostles that their work of spreading the Gospel would take place at home, in the surrounding area, and across the known world. This isn’t only geographical, but also refers to the “Jews first and also to the Gentiles” (Romans 1:16).

3. Read John 16:7-14. In verse 7, Jesus says that it is an advantage for His followers to have the Holy Spirit with them. What are the benefits of having the Holy Spirit? Why?

The Holy Spirit would be sent to believers, but not until Jesus had returned to heaven. Jesus’ work on earth was done, and the work of the Spirit would begin: to guide believers in the truth of God. Refer to Luther’s Small Catechism for more on the work of the Holy Spirit (The Third Article of the Creed and its meaning). Lesson Three will deal more with the Holy

Spirit.

TM optional questions:

Using these verses, tell what we know about Luke.

Acts 16:8-10

Colossians 4:14; II Timothy 4:9-11

Luke 1:1-4

Luke traveled with the Apostle Paul on some of his journeys, including his trip to Macedonia. Luke was a doctor, a dear friend of Paul's, and was faithful to stay with Paul when it seemed everyone else had deserted him. Luke was well educated enough to carefully research and record an orderly account of Jesus' life.

Why would Luke start a book about the apostles by talking about Jesus?

The apostles' lives were centered around Jesus. In a practical way, to begin the book of Acts with no mention of Christ would be to ignore the central figure in their lives. In a more spiritual sense, Jesus is the beginning and end of their faith, their work, and their motivation. All the activity recorded in the book of Acts had its source and beginning in the final words Jesus spoke to them on the mountain: "You shall receive power... and you shall be my witness..."

What job does an apostle have? *An apostle is on a mission, and is sent from some authority or source*

What is the purpose of a witness? *A witness's job is to tell of an event or person*

Daily Devotions

Monday	Luke 24:1-12
Tuesday	Luke 24:13-21
Wednesday	Luke 24:22-27
Thursday	Luke 24:28-35
Friday	Luke 24:26-43
Saturday	Luke 24:44-49
Sunday	Luke 24:50-53

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH AND ITS CONFESSIONS, CREED, AND CATECHISM

*** Lesson 1: History and Content of the Apostles Creed**

A creed is a statement of personal belief. The Apostles' Creed is a simple statement of what Christians believe about the nature and work of God. The Apostles' Creed has three articles:

1. The Article of Creation describes the work of God the Father.
2. The Article of Redemption describes the work of God the Son.
3. The Article of Sanctification describes the work of God the Holy Spirit.

The Apostles' Creed grew to its present form and was accepted by the Church around 750 A.D.

1. What is a creed?

A creed is a statement of personal belief.

2. A credal statement has always been a part of the Christian Church. Why are credal statements necessary? (Hebrews 10:23)

They help us to hold on to the hope we have in God's promises. Because there are many false teachings about the nature and work of God, credal statements help us hold fast to the truth. Because of the old nature, which believes falsely about God and man's ability, credal statements keep us from straying from God's word.