

## SESSION 1

Unit 1

# Experiencing Power: Stories from the Early Church

### Session Outcome

To live confidently because God will empower us to be Christ's representatives in any circumstance.

### Customize:

is the password to access expanded teaching helps at [SundayTeacher.com](http://SundayTeacher.com). [Sunday Teacher is expanding to become part of Foundry Leader. To learn more go to [FoundryLeader.com](http://FoundryLeader.com)]

### Discover:

See *Illustrated Bible Life* for an insightful look at Jesus' ascension, and verse-by-verse commentary on the Scripture passage.

September

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## PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT

*God promises the power of the Spirit to enable the church to witness.*

### THE WORD

#### ACTS 1:1-11

In my former book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach <sup>2</sup>until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. <sup>3</sup>After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup>On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. <sup>5</sup>For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

<sup>6</sup>Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

<sup>7</sup>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.**"

<sup>9</sup>After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

<sup>10</sup>They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. <sup>11</sup>"Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? 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."

### Last Week:

We looked at God’s call for all believers to minister to the poor.

### This Week:

We will see that Jesus taught the apostles that they were to be baptized with the Holy Spirit and empowered by Him.

### Notes:

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### ENGAGE THE WORD

As I write these words, my daughter is in labor to give birth to her first child and our first grandchild. As the contractions have set in, we find ourselves in a familiar pattern: Waiting! Waiting is typically not one of our favorite pastimes. And yet there are many times in life when all we can do is wait.

This week, we find the disciples receiving their first command from the risen Lord: Wait. Waiting is hard. But as the events of Acts begin to unfold, we will find that Jesus’ promise is worth the wait.

### THE SEQUEL TO JESUS’ MINISTRY

#### Acts 1:1-3

Acts is the sequel to Luke’s gospel. Luke carefully pointed out that this is not a new story; it is a continuation of what Jesus “began to do and to teach” (v. 1). The actions and words of Jesus were not done. The followers of Jesus were going to continue doing and teaching what Jesus had begun. Acts tells the story of this continuation.

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His followers to prove He was alive. Luke does not tell us specifically what kind of “convincing proofs” Jesus gave, but Jesus’ own resurrection appearances would have been a very compelling demonstration.

Jesus appeared to His followers for 40 days, and He taught them about the kingdom of God. Jesus often taught about the kingdom of God during His earthly ministry (see Luke 4:43). One can only imagine how much more significant the teaching of Jesus must have been to the disciples, now that Jesus had been raised from the dead!

### THE COMMAND TO WAIT

#### Acts 1:4-5

When they were eating together, Jesus gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised.” Jesus had already told His disciples in Luke 24:49 He was going to send them what God had promised. Jerusalem was appointed



**Watch:**

Dr. Richard Thompson introduces this quarter’s focus on stories from the book of Acts.



**Listen:**

The significance of Jesus’ ascension into heaven is the focus of this week’s *Illustrated Bible Life* podcast on SundayTeacher.com.

**Notes:**

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**Did You Know?**

The Greek word for “angel” (*angelos*) means literally, “messenger.” The “two men dressed in white” are not identified as angels, but as messengers from heaven, they fulfill the role of angels.

as the place where the promise would be fulfilled. It seems only right that the people of Jerusalem who had witnessed the passion and death of Jesus would be the first ones to hear the good news of Jesus’ resurrection in the power of the Holy Spirit’s presence.

The promised gift of the Father would be their baptism with the Holy Spirit. The disciples were already familiar with John’s baptism with water. As John himself declared, his baptism was a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Luke 3:3). But unlike John’s baptism, Jesus promised they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit, becoming “clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). But first, they had to wait in Jerusalem.

**SPIRIT-FILLED POWER AND WITNESSING**

**Acts 1:6-8**

After hearing Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom of God, the disciples asked about the earthly kingdom of Israel. “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” The risen Lord was teaching about heavenly principles, but the disciples could only think about political logistics.

Jesus did not scold the disciples, although He must have been disappointed. Instead, He refocused their attention on the imminent fulfilment of the promise of the Father. Jesus told them to not worry about the times and dates of the distant future. Rather, they should focus on what God was about to do for them right now in the immediate future. They were on the threshold of receiving the greatest power on earth, the infilling of God’s Holy Spirit. As a result of this Spirit baptism, they would become witnesses to the ends of the earth.

Acts 1:8 is a precise foreshadowing or outline of how the Spirit would lead the followers to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. First, they would witness in Jerusalem (Acts 2-7), then they would witness for Christ in Judea and Samaria (Acts 8-12), finally, they would be witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 13-

 **Discover:**

The ascension of Christ is one of the great acts of God in Christ. Each of these acts is vital to the overall agenda of God in Christ; however, the entire sequence pivots on the ascension. Learn more about the significance of "The Ascension" in this week's *Illustrated Bible Life* article.

**Notes:**

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**Think About It**

It has been estimated that one out of every 25 verses in the New Testament has to do with the second coming of Jesus. The promise of Jesus' second coming is one of the most prominent teachings of the Bible.

**HE'S COMING BACK!**

28). After the Spirit was poured out on the disciples on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), they never again asked a question about the political kingdom of Israel. The power of the Holy Spirit transformed their vision from human political goals to divine spiritual goals. When Jesus said, "You will be my witnesses," this was not only a prediction of what they would do. It was also a command and commission to take the salvation message to the ends of the earth.

**Acts 1:9-11**

After Jesus commissioned them to spread the gospel message, He was taken up into heaven until the clouds hid Him from their sight. The disciples were staring up at the clouds when two men in white appeared beside them. Luke did not specifically say these men were angels, but they were certainly heavenly messengers.

The white-clothed messengers gave the apostles a wonderful promise that believers today are still anxiously anticipating. In the same way Jesus ascended into heaven, He will one day come back. This is one of the numerous promises in the Bible about Jesus' second coming. On that marvelous day, Jesus will come back, riding on the clouds of glory. It is easy to become distracted by the speculation of the "times and dates" the Father has set up for the future. But one thing is for certain: Jesus is coming again. What a glorious day that will be!

**REFLECT**

**W**e are called to be God's witnesses in our world. In what ways can you be a witness for Christ this week?

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# Discussion Guide



## Connect to My Experience

“And the winner of the \$100,000 grand prize, along with a brand new record deal is . . . WE WILL LET YOU KNOW AS SOON AS WE RETURN FROM THIS COMMERCIAL BREAK!” We chuckle because we all know how frustrating and difficult waiting can be. Sometimes the waiting is over smaller and more trivial things, like the winner of a television singing competition or having to wait behind the person who brought 17 items into the “12 and under” express lane at the supermarket. Other times we find ourselves waiting for much more significant things—like the surgeon to walk through the doors and tell us how the operation went on a close family member, or the results of a recent job interview.

- Can you recall a time in your life when you found it especially difficult to wait for something? Share about that experience.
- Has there ever been a time when you waited for something and found that it was worth the wait? If so, in what ways was it worth the waiting?

## Transition:

In today’s session, we are going to be talking about how the apostles waited in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to empower them to preach and proclaim the gospel. The power they would receive would be well worth the waiting.



## Connect to the Word

At the beginning of the book of Acts we learn that the mission and calling that the disciples have been given is not brand new. In fact, it is a continuation of what Jesus had already been doing and teaching all throughout the Gospels.

- Finish this sentence: “The church is faithfully fulfilling its mission and calling when it is. . .”

*Invite someone to read Acts 1:1-3, then discuss the following,*

Jesus gave them “convincing proof” of His resurrection. In fact, He spoke to them over a period of 40 days.

- Why do you think the convincing proof, reinforcing their faith, was so important to these early believers?
- Why is the resurrection a key belief in the Christian faith?
- How might we be able to help someone who has difficulty believing Jesus rose from the dead?

*Invite someone to read Acts 1:4-5, then discuss the following,*

Acts 1:4-5 reads, “On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’”

- As you recall the gospels, what are some names and titles that Jesus attributed to the Holy Spirit? What do these titles tell us about the Holy Spirit?
- How would the Holy Spirit help the disciples to continue the work of Jesus in the world?
- Have you ever witnessed and/or experienced the work of the Holy Spirit in your own life? What about in the life of others? If so, how?
- Try to envision yourself as one of the disciples in the passage. What do you

## Insight

The power of the Holy Spirit working in the lives of the disciples compelled them to take the message of Christ's resurrection to their world. Religious bigots opposed them. Merchants rented mobs to beat them. Skeptics laughed at them. Rulers arrested them. Yet, many heard and believed.

*Invite someone to read Acts 1:6-8, then discuss the following,*

think that time of waiting was like? What thoughts and emotions do you think they might have experienced?

It's interesting that even after everything that the disciples have been through with Jesus (His life, teachings, death, and resurrection), they still ask Him a question that seems to indicate that they don't fully grasp what Jesus has come to do or what His central goal is.

- **What does the disciple's question tell us about them? What does Jesus' response teach us?**

If there was an All-Star team called, "Those most likely to be used by God to impact the world," it doesn't seem like anyone would have picked the disciples to make the cut.

- **What does this tell us about the Holy Spirit? How can this encourage us today?**

*Invite someone to read Acts 1:9-11, then discuss the following,*

In verse 8, Jesus says that when they receive the Holy Spirit, they will be His witnesses.

- **When we are witnesses for God, where is our Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth? (Jerusalem was their religious center; Judea, their home and familiar people; Samaria, a nearby neighborhood filled with people they distrusted; Ends of the earth, everywhere.)**

After Jesus ascended, the men stood there looking up.

- **What might be the two-fold message the men in white were giving these believers? (Jesus is coming back someday and there is no time for standing around, but work to be done in the kingdom of God until He returns.)**
- **What does the angel's message say to us today? (Jesus is coming back, but we must be actively working in the kingdom of God in the meantime.)**



## Connect to My Life and the World

At first it seems strange that the very first words (and the very first command) of Jesus in the book of Acts is the instruction to "wait." It's not, "Hurry up and get going!" Instead, it's "Wait." And yet, the instruction to wait seems strangely appropriate. It's in the stopping and waiting where we are reminded once again that we can't do much at all for the kingdom of God apart from the empowering work of the Holy Spirit. .

- **How can we make sure that we are faithfully yielding our lives to the Holy Spirit?**
- **What are some ways that God might want to use you to do His work in the world? What about your church?**

As group members are praying silently, consider playing the song "Holy Spirit Be My Guide" in the background.

*Sessions 1-7 are written by Jason McPherson*

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