

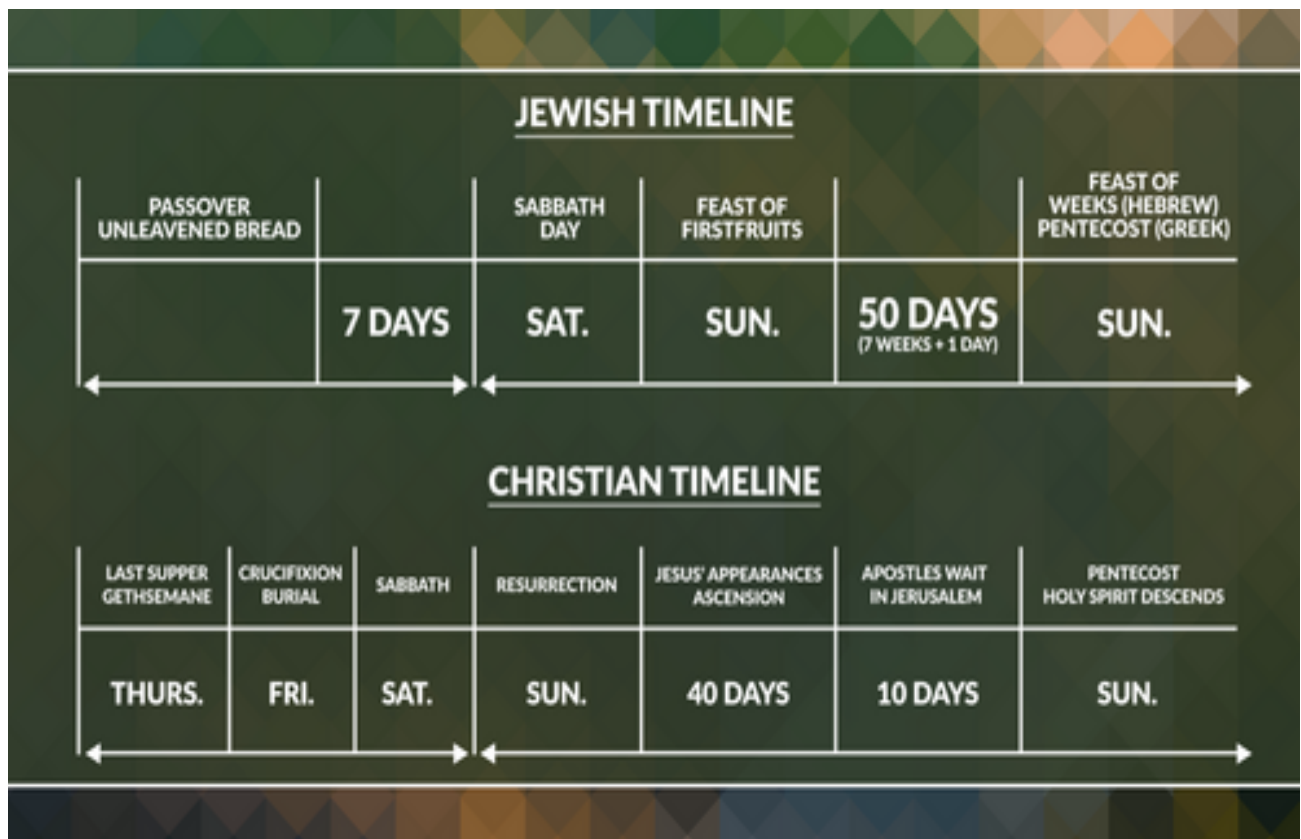
Luke's first letter to Theophilus is normally found in the gospel section of the New Testament along with Matthew, Mark and John because in this letter Luke describes the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus as do the other gospel writers. The book of Acts (Luke's second letter to this Gentile official written somewhere between 60-68 AD), which comes after the four gospels, stands alone as a history book and is followed by the rest of the New Testament made up of letters (epistles) from the Apostles Paul, Peter and other contributors to the canon. In this second letter to Theophilus, Luke describes the people and events that contributed to the establishment and development of the church which began on Pentecost Sunday (Pentecost is a Greek translation of the Hebrew word "weeks").

The timing for the feast of Pentecost was as follows:

Immediately after the Passover (on a Friday) there was a period of seven days where no leaven was to be eaten or kept in the house. That seven days led to another Sabbath day (Saturday) when this feast was completed. On the following day (Sunday) the Jews celebrated the Feast of First Fruits where they brought

in the first part of their spring crop (usually barley) and made an offering to the Lord before they themselves ate from this yield (Leviticus 23:10-11).

The next feast on the Jewish religious calendar was the Feast of Weeks (Greek - Pentecost) where the people counted seven weeks (seven Sabbaths) plus one day (totaling 50 days) and gave thanks for the much greater harvest that occurred at that time of year (late summer).



It is against this backdrop of a yearly Jewish celebration taking place in Jerusalem (Luke, as always, is interested in providing historical and cultural markers) that the writer of Acts begins to instruct his audience of one concerning the establishment, growth and spread of the Christian church throughout the Roman Empire.

Outline - Acts

1. The Ministry of Peter – Acts 1:1-12:25

- g. Peter's First Sermon – Acts 1:1-2:47
- h. Peter's Post-Pentecost Ministry – Acts 3:1-4:37
- i. Persecution of Peter and the Apostles – Acts 5:1-42
- j. Persecution of the Church I – Acts 6:1-7:60
- k. Persecution of the Church II – Acts 8:1-9:43
- l. Peter Preaches to the Gentiles – Acts 10:1-12:25

2. The Ministry of Paul – Acts 13:1-28:31

- g. Paul's First Missionary Journey – Acts 13:1-15:35
- h. Paul's Second Missionary Journey – Acts 15:36-18:22
- i. Paul's Third Missionary Journey – Acts 18:23-21:14
- j. Paul's Arrest and Imprisonment I – Acts 21:15-23:11
- k. Paul's Arrest and Imprisonment II – Acts 23:12-25:22
- l. Paul's Arrest and Imprisonment III – Acts 25:23-26:32
- m. Paul's Journey to Rome – Acts 27:1-28:31

The book of Acts is easy to outline because it details the ministry of Peter and Paul in a straightforward narrative style. This is why it is called the "Acts" of the Apostles, and not the thoughts or theology of the Apostles. Luke records many teachings by Peter, Paul and others (e.g. Stephen) in his letter, but these sections are subordinate and in service to the "actions" of the Apostles and other early church characters who, against great odds, spread the gospel and planted the church in the pagan world of the first century.

Luke begins with Peter's ministry as he is the first to preach the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. We see him proclaiming a resurrected Jesus to the Jews and converts to Judaism who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost. Later on, Peter is directed by God to bring the gospel to non-Jews as well. Luke then moves on seamlessly to describe the dynamic conversion of the most unlikely Apostle, Saul of Tarsus. This man was a Jewish Pharisee bent on destroying what he believed was a heretical sect of Judaism that worshipped Jesus as the divine Messiah. Luke completes his letter by detailing the incredible

ministry of Saul, now Paul the Apostle, as he takes the gospel beyond Judea and Samaria to every corner of the Roman Empire and beyond.

The Ministry of Peter – Acts 1:1-12:25

Peter's First Sermon (Acts 1:1-2:27)

Review and Ascension

The first account I composed, Theophilus,

- Acts 1:1a

The fact that Luke refers to his reader by his name, Theophilus, and not his title (Most Excellent) suggests that this man had been converted since the writing of Luke's first letter. In that society it would have been highly improper to omit his reader's title unless their relationship had changed somehow. In the same way, it would have been unusual for Luke to use a formal title when

speaking to a brother in Christ because these were set aside when believers addressed one another in the church.

¹about all that Jesus began to do and teach, ²until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. ³To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. ⁴Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; ⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

- Acts 1:1b-5

Luke summarizes Jesus' life and ministry with just a few words and focuses on events that took place between His resurrection and ascension:

- His dynamic appearances during a 40 day period.
- His teachings concerning the kingdom.
- His instructions to the Apostles to remain in Jerusalem and not return home to Galilee as they had done after His crucifixion.
- His promise that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit in the near future.

There is often confusion about the nature of what Jesus is referring to here so let us briefly review the topic of baptism with the Holy Spirit by establishing and reviewing two particular terms:

Empower: When the Holy Spirit grants supernatural ability.

For example: The Holy Spirit enables someone to perform great or complex tasks.

¹Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²"See, I have called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. ³**I have filled him with the Spirit of God** in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship, ⁴to make artistic designs for work in gold, in silver, and in bronze, ⁵and in the cutting of stones for settings, and in the carving of wood, that he may work in all kinds of craftsmanship.

- Exodus 31:1-5

Or, the Holy Spirit empowers someone to perform miracles (e.g. Moses). Or, the Holy Spirit empowers someone to see visions or speak from God.

¹Now **the Spirit of God came on Azariah** the son of Oded, ²and he went out to meet Asa and said to him, "Listen to me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: the Lord is with you when you are with Him. And if you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you.

- II Chronicles 15:1-2

In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw **the Lord sitting on a throne**, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple.

- Isaiah 6:1

Or, the Holy Spirit empowers someone for leadership (e.g. David).

Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and **the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David** from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah.

- I Samuel 16:13

The Bible refers to this "empowering" work of the Holy Spirit in different ways. For example, "filled with the Spirit" (Exodus 31:3 - craftsmen who built the tabernacle); "Perform [...] all the miracles I have given you the power to do." (Exodus 4:21 - Moses); "The Spirit of God came upon..." (II Chronicles 15:1 -

Azariah); "The Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon..." (I Samuel 16:13 - David).

This empowering was given only to certain ones for a time, enabling them to carry out a task or mission from God. For example, David asks God not to remove the Spirit from him (Psalms 51:11), and Samson was empowered by God with great strength but lost it because of sin (Judges 16). The Spirit empowered some people for certain tasks, but it was always temporary. The great promise of the Old Testament was that when the Messiah would come, He would usher in a time when all of God's people would have a portion of the Holy Spirit, not only a few like prophets and kings as was the case in the Old Testament. Peter quotes the prophet Joel who spoke of this some eight centuries before Christ came.

²⁸"It will come about after this

That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind;

And your sons and daughters will prophesy,

Your old men will dream dreams,

Your young men will see visions.

²⁹"Even on the male and female servants

I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

- Joel 2:28-29

This promise of the Spirit was going to be different somehow. Everyone would have it, both men and women, as well as old and young would know and speak God's word and see the vision of heaven described there, not just the prophets. Most important, the Spirit would always be with you. This measure of the Spirit would not be empowerment, it would be called **indwelling**.

Indwelling: The Holy Spirit dwelling within each believer.

The Holy Spirit living within the believer not simply enabling him to do, see or say something in service to God, but existing within a person in order to transform that individual into the image of Christ. Empowering enabled certain people to do great things and the Old Testament is filled with stories of what these people did in service to God (Moses, Joshua, David, the Prophets,

as well as the Apostles and certain individuals in the early church for a short time). Indwelling, on the other hand, enabled people to become Christlike, to become living sacrifices, to become eternal beings. Paul describes in detail what the indwelling does for the Christian in Romans 8. Indwelling is also referred to in a variety of ways:

And when He had said this, He breathed on them (the Apostles) and said to them, **"Receive the Holy Spirit."**

- John 20:22

This event does not refer to empowering because the Apostles do not speak in tongues as a result. The miraculous ability to speak in tongues only came on Pentecost Sunday when they were empowered to do so by the Holy Spirit. What John describes here is the moment when the Apostles received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and **you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**

- Acts 2:38

In this passage Luke is describing when the people received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (when repentant believers were baptized in Jesus' name). Peter was not promising the "empowering" of those who responded to the gospel because none of the 3000 baptized that day exhibited any miraculous power.

The confusion between the two occurs because the Bible uses the same term when referring to both empowering or indwelling. We have to examine carefully the context in which the term is used in order to understand if the writer is referring to empowerment or indwelling. Here are a few examples to show the difference.

"As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.**

-Matthew 3:11

When John the Baptist used the term (baptized with the Holy Spirit) he was referring to the indwelling of the Spirit that Jesus, as the Messiah, would bring.

for John baptized with water, **but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit** not many days from now."

- Acts 1:5

When, however, Jesus uses the term in Acts 1:5 in reference to what would happen to His Apostles, He is speaking of the empowerment they were to receive in order to preach, to speak in tongues, to do great miracles (e.g. Peter raising the dead), to plant and grow the church while enduring great persecution. The Lord is not promising indwelling here because He has already given them the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in John 20:22.

Let us, therefore, keep these two definitions in mind as we go on because they will help us understand the passages in Acts that deal with the Holy Spirit.

6So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" 7He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; 8but you will 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."

⁹And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. ¹⁰And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. ¹¹They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

- Acts 1:6-11

Their question about the restoration of the kingdom shows that they are still under the false notion of a glorious restoration of the Jewish state (and their place in it). Jesus does not bother to point out their error, instead He does two other things:

1. He states that the knowledge of when the end of the Jewish kingdom will take place, or the end of the world for that matter, is beyond man's grasp, only God knows when these things will happen and they were to stop speculating and questioning Him about these things.
2. He outlines and reviews their mission. They will receive empowerment ("Holy Spirit will come upon you"). They are to witness what they have seen to the world beginning in Jerusalem.

Luke repeats the description of Jesus' s ascension, this time adding the information about the angels who prophecy concerning His return.

The Upper Room (Acts 1:12-26)

The book of Acts provides an intimate look at the activity that took place among the Apostles and disciples between the time of Jesus' ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday.

1. The Apostles (11) gathered with the women who had supported and followed Jesus, Mary His mother, His brothers and other disciples. Luke notes that they begin devoting themselves to prayer and waiting.
2. Peter takes the lead by putting into Scriptural context the actions and death of Judas, otherwise this could have become a reason for doubt and a point of discouragement. Peter's comment explains that what Judas did and how his life ended served God's purpose and was spoken of by the prophets. It was not a failure on their part or a mark on Jesus' mission.
3. They, through prayer, put forward two qualified men who had been faithful disciples from Jesus' baptism to His ascension. After casting lots, Matthias is chosen to replace Judas.

The Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-12)

¹When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. ⁴**And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues**, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

⁵Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷They were amazed and astonished, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?"

- Acts 2:1-8

They were "filled with the Holy Spirit" meaning that they received empowerment and the visible signs of this were the "tongues of fire" appearing over their heads and the sudden miraculous ability to speak languages that were previously

unknown to them. They were from Galilee and spoke Aramaic in their daily lives, and Hebrew for their religious practices.

Pentecost was an important feast that brought Jews from all over the world to Jerusalem for this event. Luke records over a dozen language groups gathered and each heard the Apostles speaking in their native tongues. I mention this because there is the effort by charismatic groups to claim that they have reproduced this miracle in the modern age, however, the sounds they make (which they claim are "tongues") are unintelligible and make no sense. The usual explanation is that only God understands what they are saying or that they are speaking in the tongues of angels. This, of course, is contrary to the grammar and context of the passage.

1. **Grammar:** Tongue ("glossa" in Greek) refers to the physical tongue and by extension a known language.
2. **Context:** In verse 8 the crowd says that they heard the Apostles speak in their own language, and Luke names over a dozen languages that were used.

To summarize, the Apostles receive empowerment and that power is seen (tongues of fire) and heard (Jewish men

miraculously preaching in languages they did not know). This phenomenon done in fulfillment of a prophecy concerning the time when the Messiah would come.

In the Law it is written, "By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I will speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to Me," says the Lord.

- I Corinthians 14:21

Peter's Sermon (Acts 2:13-42)

But others were mocking and saying, "They are full of sweet wine."

- Acts 2:13

Luke sets the stage for Peter's first sermon by describing a reaction that some had to the miracle just witnessed: "The Apostles are drunk." Peter draws the crowd's attention by answering this charge with his powerful Pentecost sermon. This sermon can be divided into three sections:

Witness of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:14-21)

Peter begins his sermon by crediting the Spirit of God for the miracle of tongues they have just witnessed. He declares that what they have both seen and heard is the phenomenon that would accompany the coming of the Messiah according to the prophets, and he quotes the prophet Joel 2:28-32 to make his point.

Witness of the Gospel (Acts 2:22-41)

²²"Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—
²³this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. ²⁴But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

- Acts 2:22-24

Peter proclaimed the simple facts of the gospel message: Jesus, proven to be God's anointed One through miracles, wonders and signs; Jesus, crucified unjustly by sinful men, all done according to God's foreknowledge and plan; Jesus, resurrected by God,

according to prophecy about Him (and Peter quotes David, Psalms 16:8-11, again to make the point that all of this was according to God's will and foretold by the prophets).

²⁹"Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰And so, because he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants on his throne, ³¹he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay. ³²This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. ³³Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. ³⁴For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says:

'The Lord said to my Lord,

"Sit at My right hand,

³⁵Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."

³⁶Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified."

- Acts 2:29-36

Peter fortifies his gospel message with a deeper explanation concerning the resurrection, for this was a new element (they understood the idea of substitutionary death as an atonement for sin), however the idea, not to mention the possibility, of resurrection was new to them. None of the animals they had sacrificed over the centuries ever came back to life.

Peter explains that David prophesied about this very event and corrects their understanding of two passages where the Jews thought that David was referring to himself but in reality was referring to Jesus:

1. Psalms 16:8-11, where David speaks of the promise of his resurrection. Peter says that this actually points to Christ who will make David's resurrection possible with His own.
2. Psalms 110:1, which Jews saw as a promise God made to David concerning his reign and power over his enemies. Jesus Himself corrected them of this idea when He asked the Pharisees a question about this passage that they could not answer, "If David calls Him Lord, how is He his Son?" (Matthew 22:45). Peter provides the answer by explaining that in this passage the Father is talking to the Son (Jesus), not David. God said to Jesus, sit at my right hand (power) and I will make your enemies your footstool (you will win

over the Devil, death and unbelieving Jews through resurrection).

He summarizes his argument with a damning conclusion: This Jesus, anointed by God, spoken of by the prophets, witnessed by miracles, seen resurrected by us, ascended to heaven and who has sent the Holy Spirit to do what you have heard and seen today, who has now been declared Lord and Christ by God: **You killed Him!**

³⁷Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" ³⁸Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." ⁴⁰And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" ⁴¹So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

-Acts 2:37-41

Those who accept/believe the witness of the Spirit and the message of the gospel respond. Peter, according to the

instructions given him and the other Apostles in Matthew 28:18-19 and Mark 16:15-16, tells them how they are to obey the gospel.

¹⁸And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

- Matthew 28:18-19

¹⁵And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. ¹⁶He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.

- Mark 16:15-16

They express their faith in Jesus as Lord and Christ by repenting of their sins and being baptized (immersed in water - the Pool of Siloam nearby as well as the water basin near the Pilgrim Gate where pilgrims purified themselves before entering the holy city of Jerusalem). Peter teaches that at their baptism these people would receive both the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (indwelling). Luke does not provide details as to how the

indwelling Spirit affects the believer. Much of this information is contained in Paul's epistles to the Romans (chapter 8) and Galatians (chapter 5).

Three thousand people were baptized by the 12 on that day (Acts 2:41) and since then we continue to preach the same gospel message with the same instructions to those who believe (repent and be baptized in Jesus' name for the forgiveness of sin and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit).

Witness of the Church

⁴²They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

⁴³Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. ⁴⁴And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. ⁴⁶Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, ⁴⁷praising God and having favor with all the people.

- Acts 2:42-47a

Luke summarizes the early activity, organization and enthusiasm of the first Christian church. Note carefully the outline of and inspired biblical pattern laid out for church ministry, organization and growth in these few lines of Scripture. If you look carefully you will note five different ministries begin and develop, as well as a compact summary of the relationship between ministry and church growth.

1. **Evangelism** (Acts 2:12-41): They were preaching the gospel of Christ to the lost and baptizing repentant believers.
2. **Education** (Acts 2:42a): They were teaching the converts to know and obey the words of Christ.
3. **Fellowship** (Acts 2:42b): They were integrating these new Christians into the body of Christ.
4. **Worship** (Acts 2:42c): They were organizing the church for Christian worship (Lord's Supper, etc.).
5. **Service** (Acts 2:43-47a): The church began to pool its resources to care for the needs of the brethren and the community in the name of Christ.

Luke does not provide details on how all of this was done, only a brief overall sketch of the early church's five areas of ministry. In

the final verse of this section the inspired writer reveals the biblical approach to church growth.

And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

- Acts 2:47b

When you take the entire section together you see that when the church is active in preaching to the lost, teaching the saved, practicing fellowship, worship and service, Jesus then adds to His church. In other words, when the church ministers, the Lord adds to its number.

Lessons

1. Pray while you wait.

The Apostles remained in prayer while they waited for the Holy Spirit, and this kept them focused and ready when they were empowered. Waiting on the Lord is not a passive thing. Positive, productive waiting is accomplished through prayer, worship and service so that we can stay spiritually focused and avoid foolish complaining or premature surrender.

2. Some people need more encouragement than others.

Three thousand were baptized on Pentecost Sunday but there were more than 3000 people there. In the face of disbelief and rejection from people who may understand the gospel but refuse to respond, do what Peter did ("he kept on exhorting them" - verse 40), keep proclaiming the message, some will eventually respond.

3. Focus on ministry, not growth.

Our task is to be active in the five areas of ministry, learn how to carry these out more effectively and keep these ministries operating simultaneously. Jesus' task is adding to the church. More effective ministry equals more growth.

READING ASSIGNMENT

Acts 3:1-4:37

Discussion Questions

1. What two ways was the promise of the Holy Spirit fulfilled on Pentecost Sunday and why is there often confusion about these blessings?
2. How would you demonstrate from Acts chapter 2 that the gift of tongues given to the Apostles is different from what charismatics claim today as speaking in tongues?
3. Summarize Peter's use of David's Psalms in his argument to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah.