

WEEK 7—Acts 1-12

Acts is 'part 2' of Luke's story about Jesus and the Church that emerges in response to His teaching and gifts. The book opens with a final look at Jesus, who gathers His disciples and promises that they will "receive power to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). It's like He's drawing concentric circles of activity, and the rest of *Acts* shows how the Gospel spreads through these regions as disciples go out with the good news of Christ's kingdom.

In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit arrives in dramatic fashion. This Spirit is known in the Old Testament, too—but in those books, the Spirit tends to come on a rather small handful of people for particular purposes and a limited amount of time. In *Acts*, this Spirit falls on many: young & old, male & female. It won't be long before Luke describes the Spirit filling Gentiles, too—which is another powerful indicator that something new is happening!

As the Spirit takes up residence in people, lives change. Luke offers examples of how this makes an impact on the young Church and the surrounding community (see Acts 2:42-47). There is evidence of great power among these disciples, and we see them performing miracles like those for which Jesus was known. We also hear of persecution endured by these believers.

The first half of *Acts* tells stories about a number of people, but this is not simply a book of biographies. We note, for example, how Peter gets special attention in several places—which we might expect—but then, fades from the scene. It's an indication that Luke's primary concern lies with tracking activity of the Spirit and the spread of the Gospel.

We meet Paul in this first half of *Acts*, too—although he is introduced as Saul (he's one of several Biblical characters who go by more than one name...). That introduction is important as it sets us up to see how one who is strongly opposed to the way of Jesus meets the loving Lord and undergoes a radical transformation. Paul's story is both inspiring and hopeful!

