

Jesus Farewells His Disciples

Key Verse:
“This is the word of the Lord... ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord Almighty.’ “

Zechariah 4:6

Extra: How do you think Jesus' followers felt after they returned from the Mount of Olives?

Level 5 lesson 1

Read: Acts 1

Further Reading: Matthew 28:16-20

Happy New Year to you all! We begin our lessons this year by looking at one of the most thrilling books in the whole New Testament, the Book of Acts. There are many helpful lessons for all of us in this book, as we look at how the Gospel message of salvation through faith in Christ alone spread (from very small beginnings) throughout the entire world! This of course, meant warfare against Satan and his hosts, who fiercely opposed the preaching of the Gospel and the growth of the infant church. If you ever thought Christianity was for ‘wimps’ then you’re in for a surprise in the Book of Acts!

THE RISEN SAVIOUR

In our reading today, we find Jesus giving instructions to His chosen followers. They were unaware, of course, that these would be His final words to them! He had joined them earlier in Jerusalem (v4) and later walked out with them to the Mount of Olives. There, He commanded them specifically to remain in Jerusalem and to wait for the fulfilment of a promise - the baptism with God’s Holy Spirit which Jesus had spoken to them about (see John 14.15-17). The indwelling Holy Spirit would empower them for the great work that lay ahead. Without His vital power and presence within them, there would be no hope of success. Remember how insignificant they were? They were just a few men with neither wealth nor position, and they had the whole world against them. So it was vital to wait for the Holy Spirit’s baptism before commencing their witnessing.

At this point, they asked Jesus about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel (v6). They had been expecting this before the crucifixion, but now realised that the Lord had to die first. Yes, the Lord had died and risen again, so now they thought that perhaps “at this time” the kingdom might be set up. Our Lord simply told them that the “times and seasons” are at the Father’s discretion and it was not for them to know. We should always remember this. The time will certainly come when Christ’s kingdom will be established on earth, but no one knows the exact date.

THE ASCENDED LORD

Suddenly, as Jesus finished talking with them, an amazing thing happened. Before their very eyes He simply rose up into the air toward the heavens until finally a cloud hid Him from view (v9). This is what is called “Christ’s Ascension” and the Scriptures tell us that He is now seated at “the right hand of God.” While the disciples were still straining their eyes upwards, perhaps expecting Him to appear again, two men (angels dressed in white clothes) suddenly appeared beside them. “Why are you standing here looking into the sky?” they asked. “This same Jesus” - who has been taken from you into Heaven - will come back in the same way!”

This was really a confirmation of the Lord’s own words to the disciples earlier, that “If I go, I will come again and take you to be with Me, that you may be where I am!” (John 14:3) These wonderful promises have sustained Christians down through the ages, and though some have mocked and continue to mock even today, we have the sure Word of God that, “the Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, but is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9) God’s promise has not yet been fulfilled, but it surely will be! Are you ready to meet Jesus when He returns?

THE WAITING DISCIPLES

Following this wonderful experience, the disciples returned from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem, to await the promised “power from on high,” the coming of God’s Holy Spirit. They didn’t wait idly, but spent much of their time in prayer in an Upper Room in the city. The eleven apostles and certain women were present, including Mary, the mother of Jesus. Incidentally, this is the last mention of Mary in the Scriptures.

In the verses 15-26 we see where Peter pointed out the deficiency in their ranks through the tragic suicide of Judas Iscariot, following his treacherous betrayal of Jesus. Peter quoted Scripture to warrant their filling the position, and so they prayed and cast lots, with the result that Matthias was chosen to fill the vacant office. This man was well-fitted for the position because he had been with the others during the whole of the Lord’s earthly ministry (v21).

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why were the Apostles instructed to remain in Jerusalem?	.....
2. What happened while Jesus was talking to the disciples on Mt Olivet?	.....
3. What did the two angels tell the Apostles?	.....
4. What did the Apostles do while they waited for the promise of the Holy Spirit?	.....
5. Because Jesus is coming again, how should we live?	.....

My Name is Age

Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Key Verse:

“And they sang a new song: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll... because You were slain, and with Your blood You purchased men for God from every... nation.’ “

Revelation 5:9

Extra: What was remarkable about this particular day of Pentecost?

Level 5 lesson 2

Read Acts 2:1-13

Further reading: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

The Twelve Apostles and many other disciples (making a total of about 120 disciples) waited in Jerusalem for the promised coming of the Holy Spirit - just as Jesus had commanded. After Jesus had ascended back to Heaven, they only had to wait 10 days until Pentecost. Pentecost (which means fifty) was an important feast day mentioned in Leviticus 23:15-22, and took place 50 days after the Passover (and of course, Christ’s crucifixion).

People came in their thousands from all points of the globe, to celebrate this feast in Jerusalem! In addition to these visitors, devout men from every known nation were already living in Jerusalem (v5). The places they all originally came from are mentioned in verses 9-11. A quick look at this list reveals that some came from as far East as the Persian Gulf (“Parthians”), as far North as the Black Sea (“residents of Pontus”), as far West as Italy (“visitors from Rome”), and as far South as Africa (“residents of Egypt”). So from North, South, East, and West, an enormous multitude was gathered in Jerusalem for this Pentecost celebration. The place was literally ‘jam-packed’ with people!

THE HOLY SPIRIT’S COMING

We may well wonder what hope these few, feeble, timid disciples had amidst this great throng. How could they possibly tell the crowds about Jesus? However, the coming of the Holy Spirit (one of the greatest events in human history) made all the difference as we’ll see!

As the disciples quietly sat waiting and praying together in the ‘upper room’ of a house somewhere in Jerusalem, they suddenly heard a strange noise. We read in verse 2, “there came a sound from Heaven like a violent wind, and the sound filled the whole house where they were sitting.” There was no actual storm or even a breath of wind, but it sounded as though there was a hurricane blowing. It no doubt filled the disciples with awe and wonder!

Next, to their astonishment, they saw tongues of fire resting on the head of each one in the room. The sound and the tongues of fire were the signs of the coming and presence of the Holy Spirit. At this point another remarkable miracle took place: the disciples “began to speak in other tongues (or languages) as the Spirit enabled them.” Now, as anyone who has ever learnt another language can tell you, it takes a long time to learn a foreign language fluently! Yet here, without any tuition whatever, the Bible records for us the fact that the disciples were supernaturally empowered to speak foreign languages fluently. Naturally, news of this amazing phenomenon soon spread! In verse 6 we read, “the crowd came together, in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.”

THE GOSPEL FOR ALL

The fact that this gift of ‘tongues’ was given right at the beginning of Christianity, shows that the Gospel was for the whole world and not just for one nation. It was also given as a sign to the people, to clearly confirm that God was at work, and to validate the Apostle’s claims that they were speaking on His behalf. These simple men were not a sect or fraudsters, trying to establish their own following. Rather, they brought God’s message of ‘salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone’ to the whole of mankind. This was a critical point at a crucial time and marked the establishing the Christian Church.

The crowds of course, were completely amazed and bewildered by these incredible events. “How is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?” they asked (v8). “We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” (v11) But sadly, some cynically mocked them, claiming that the disciples were simply raving drunk (v13). Of course, this is obviously the most ridiculous of all explanations! Whoever heard of strong drink teaching anyone foreign languages? We all know very well, that drunkenness takes away a person’s ability to speak, even their own language! However, we will see in the next lesson how Peter refutes this silly assertion and gives the true explanation.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. How long after the crucifixion was the day of Pentecost?

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2. Mention two things (one heard and one seen) which marked the coming of the Holy Spirit.

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3. What difference did the Holy Spirit’s coming make to the disciples?

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4. What do you think this gift of speaking foreign languages shows?

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5. How does the Holy Spirit help us today?

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Peter's Great Sermon

Key Verse:
"...Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures... He was buried... He was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures."

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

Extra: What was so great about this sermon?

Level 5 lesson 3

Read Acts 2:14-47

Further reading: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

What an interesting lesson we have before us today, containing as it does, the very first Christian sermon ever preached. The Apostle Peter (yes, the very man who had so recently denied the Lord Jesus!) was graciously chosen by God to preach this first sermon and in so doing, began God's wondrous plan to spread the good news of salvation throughout the world. And what a transformation we see in Peter and the other Apostles! No longer are they timid and afraid. With the Holy Spirit indwelling them, their fear has been overcome. Now, Peter boldly stands before the huge crowd and in a loud voice calls for their attention.

THE EXPLANATION

As the crowd quietsens, Peter begins by explaining the gift of tongues and the strange happenings the crowd had just witnessed (v15-21). He reminded those who claimed the Apostles were simply drunk that it was still only 9 o'clock in the morning - a time prior to which none began drinking in the East. This claim was not only malicious, but obviously stupid. No, the truth of the matter was that this was a partial fulfilment of what the Prophet Joel had foretold centuries before. God's Spirit would be poured out on God's servants and they would prophesy under His power (i.e. preach God's message to the people). Joel's prophecy also speaks of other signs in the Heavens and earth, but these will be fulfilled in the future. The sign about the 'outpouring of the Spirit' had occurred though, and it explains what they had seen and heard.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT

Having established that this was truly the work of God, Peter made a bold announcement concerning Jesus of Nazareth and what had happened to Him (v23-32). Peter realised full well that what he was about to say would anger the religious leaders, who wanted Jesus forgotten. However, he boldly accused them of their sin: "You, with the help of wicked men, put Him to death; but God raised Him up!" Here is the very crux of the Christian message in a nutshell: the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

The Jewish leaders could not deny His crucifixion, but if His resurrection were true, then they had committed a terrible crime against their Messiah! Ever since Jesus had died, there had been a lot of talk about the disappearance of His body from the tomb. The soldiers and religious leaders had tried to circulate a story about His body being stolen (see Matthew 28:11-15). But here, Peter tells them the truth concerning the empty tomb: God had raised Jesus from the dead!

Peter reminded them that this was also the fulfilment of Scripture. David had foretold the resurrection of the Christ when he wrote, "You will not abandon Me to the grave (also called 'Hades,' which means 'place of departed spirits'), nor will You let Your Holy One see decay" (Psalm 16:8-11). King David (although a great man himself) was clearly not God's "Holy One" because his body remained in his tomb. Instead, the prophecy refers to Jesus, whose tomb (as the people of Jerusalem all knew) was empty!

THE APPLICATION

So what did all this really mean? Peter reminded them of the sequence of events and the implications for each person gathered (v32-48). God had resurrected Jesus and exalted Him to His throne. Jesus had sent the Spirit on the people - the results of which they had seen and heard. "Therefore" declared Peter, "let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ!" What were they to say about this! Well, we see that many were convicted when they realised their terrible sin and could only exclaim, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Peter then gave them the best news possible: if they would repent of their sinful unbelief and believe in Jesus Christ (while also being baptised in His name as a sign of their faith) then their sins would be forgiven and they too would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit! How wonderful! "Save yourselves" (in this way) cried Peter, "from this corrupt generation" (i.e. those who continued in mocking unbelief). Verse 41 tells us that about 3,000 people believed Peter's message and were baptised in obedience, publicly joining the small company of believers. And what a happy company it was!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What do you think of Peter being chosen to preach this message?	.....
2. What charge did Peter make against the rulers concerning the Lord Jesus?	.....
3. What is the truth about Jesus and His body?	.....
4. What should be our response when convicted of sin?	.....
5. If you had been present that day, what would you have done?	.....

Peter's 1st Miracle and 2nd Sermon

Key Verse:

“I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.”

Deuteronomy 30:19

Extra: How is the key verse related to this study?

Level 5 lesson 4

Read Acts 3:1-26

Further Reading: 2 Peter 1:3-12

The apostles' miraculous 'gift of tongues' (a God-enabled and unlearned ability to speak foreign languages) presented the unbelieving rulers with a very real problem. They could not deny that before His death, Jesus had performed literally thousands of miracles, and had even given His disciples the power to work miracles since they couldn't do them alone. So if Jesus was dead, and His body was hidden somewhere, how could they explain the miracles that the Apostles now worked in His Name? There was only one real solution, which they didn't like. It meant admitting that they were wrong about Jesus!

A 'CRIPPLE' HEALED

This was again highlighted soon afterwards when Peter and John went up into the temple to pray at three o'clock one afternoon. Lying on a mat outside the gate called 'Beautiful' was a poor cripple begging for money from those who were entering the temple. On seeing our two friends approaching, he immediately asked them for money (v1-3).

Peter and John, unlike the majority who looked away from him, looked straight at him. "Look at us!" said Peter. Surprised, the poor man looked up at them, probably thinking he was going to receive a large gift of money. However, in terms of money, Peter and John were just about as 'hard up' as he was! "I haven't got silver or gold," said Peter, "But what I do have, I give to you." The unfortunate man's initial disappointment turned to curiosity. What was he about to receive? He could not have dared to imagine - even in his wildest dreams!

Then Peter reached out and took him by the hand. "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" he commanded. Immediately, new life entered the cripple's limbs, and we read, "He jumped up to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping and praising God!" Instead of a little donation, Peter had, in God's power, healed him completely! In future, he would be able to work for his own living and never have to beg again.

No wonder this man was jubilant and full of praise and gratitude to God! I'm sure every one of us would react the same way. Now of course, this healing caused a great stir as the man and his condition were well-known. People came running from everywhere, as they no doubt heard the man's cries of joy and thankfulness. They were amazed and quite naturally, wanted to know what had happened.

PETER'S SECOND SERMON

So Peter had the opportunity to preach his second sermon. "Men of Israel," he said. "Why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us, as if we, by our own power or godliness, have performed this miracle?" he asked. "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, our fathers," had sent His Son Jesus, Peter continued, "But you disowned Him and desired a murderer in preference to Him." He even laid the blame on them for killing "the Prince of Life." Finally, he added the disciples' own personal testimony: "but God raised Him from the dead, and we are witnesses of that!" In conclusion Peter stated plainly, "By faith, in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through Him, that has given complete healing to him" (v.16)!

Having seized the opportunity to present the truth to the audience, Peter graciously and kindly appealed to them to repent and receive Jesus as their Messiah. "Repent," he urged them, "and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out." Then he told them that if they did this, God would send Jesus back again to them (v.20) and they would receive the blessings of His kingdom. On the other hand, he warned them by quoting Moses that, "Those who resisted (refused to repent) would be destroyed" (v23).

So there were the two alternatives: salvation or destruction. It had to be one or the other. Friends, it is still the same today: life or death. Either you must choose to repent and believe in Jesus as your Saviour and Lord, or to resist and reject Him. Peter gave the people a great opportunity to receive Christ and honour Him as God and Saviour, but sadly, the majority chose to reject Him. We too are given that opportunity today. What have **YOU** done with Jesus?

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What did the continuance of the miracles after the ascension prove?	.....
2. What did the crippled man ask for and what did he get?	.....
3. What had the men of Israel done to Jesus?	.....
4. What does this miracle show us about Jesus?
5. What alternatives are set before us today?

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