

connect **360**

BIBLE TEACHING GUIDE

Going Viral

*The Birth and Advance
of the Church*

A Study of the Book of Acts

Joe Blair • Bob Bunn • John Duncan
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*Going Viral: The Birth and Advance of the Church (Acts)—
Connect 360 Bible Teaching Guide*

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How to Make the Best Use of This *Teaching Guide*

Leading a class in studying the Bible is a sacred trust. This *Teaching Guide* has been prepared to help you as you give your best to this important task.

In each lesson, you will find first “Bible Comments” for teachers, to aid you in your study and preparation. The three sections of “Bible Comments” are “Understanding the Context,” “Interpreting the Scriptures,” and “Focusing on the Meaning.” “Understanding the Context” provides a summary overview of the entire background passage that also sets the passage in the context of the Bible book being studied. “Interpreting the Scriptures” provides verse-by-verse comments on the focal passage. “Focusing on the Meaning” offers help with the meaning and application of the focal text.

The second main part of each lesson is “Teaching Plans.” You’ll find two complete teaching plans in this section. The first is called the “Discovery Plan,” which emphasizes discovery learning techniques; and the second is called the “Discussion Plan,” which provides questions and suggestions for dialogue about the Scriptures. Choose the plan that best fits your class and your style of teaching. You may also use and adapt ideas from both. Each plan is intended to be practical, helpful, and immediately useful as you prepare to teach.

The major headings in each teaching plan are intended to help you sequence how you teach so as to follow the flow of how people tend to learn. The first major heading, “Connect with Life,” provides ideas that will help you begin the class session where your class is and draw your class into the study. The second major heading, “Guide Bible Study,” offers suggestions for helping your class engage the Scriptures actively and develop a greater understanding of this portion of the Bible’s message. The third major heading, “Encourage Application,” is meant to help participants focus on how to respond with their lives to this message.

As you begin the study with your class, be sure to find a way to help your class know the date on which each lesson will be studied. You might use one or more of the following methods:

- In the first session of the study, briefly overview the study by identifying for your class the date on which each lesson will be studied. Lead your class to write the date in the table of contents in their *Study Guides* and on the first page of each lesson.
- Make and post a chart that indicates the date on which each lesson will be studied.
- If all of your class has e-mail, send them an e-mail with the dates the lessons will be studied.
- Provide a bookmark with the lesson dates. You may want to include information about your church and then use the bookmark as an outreach tool, too. A model for a bookmark can be downloaded from www.baptistwaypress.org under the “Teacher Helps” tab.
- Develop a sticker with the lesson dates, and place it on the table of contents or on the back cover.

Here are some steps you can take to help you prepare well to teach each lesson and save time in doing so:

1. Start early in the week before your class meets.
2. If your church’s adult Bible study teachers meet for lesson overview and preparation, plan to participate. If your church’s adult Bible study teachers don’t have this planning time now, look for ways to begin. You, your fellow teachers, and your church will benefit from this mutual encouragement and preparation.
3. Overview the study in the *Study Guide*. Look at the table of contents, and see where this lesson fits in the overall study. Then read or review the study introduction to the book that is being studied.
4. Consider carefully the suggested Main Idea, Question to Explore, and Teaching Aim. These can help you discover the main thrust of this particular lesson.

5. Use your Bible to read and consider prayerfully the Scripture passages for the lesson. Using your Bible in your study and in the class session can provide a positive model to class members to use their own Bibles and give more attention to Bible study themselves. (Each writer of the Bible comments in both the *Teaching Guide* and the *Study Guide* has chosen a favorite translation. You're free to use the Bible translation you prefer and compare it with the translations chosen, of course.)
6. After reading all the Scripture passages in your Bible, then read the Bible comments in the *Study Guide*. The Bible comments are intended to be an aid to your study of the Bible. Read also the small articles—"sidebars"—in each lesson. They are intended to provide additional, enrichment information and inspiration and to encourage thought and application. Try to answer for yourself the questions included in each lesson. They're intended to encourage further thought and application, and you can also use them in the class session itself. Continue your Bible study with the aid of the Bible comments included in this *Teaching Guide*.
7. Review the "Teaching Plans" in this *Teaching Guide*. Consider how these suggestions would help you teach this Bible passage in your class to accomplish the teaching aim.
8. Consider prayerfully the needs of your class, and think about how to teach so you can help your class learn best.
9. Develop and follow a lesson plan based on the suggestions in this *Teaching Guide*, with alterations as needed for your class.
10. Enjoy leading your class in discovering the meaning of the Scripture passages and in applying these passages to their lives.

Premium Commentary. Plan to get the additional Bible study comments available online. Visit our website, call 1-866-249-1799, or e-mail baptistway@texasbaptists.org to order the *Premium Commentary*. It is available only in electronic format (PDF) from our website. The price of these comments is \$5 per person. A church or class that participates in our advance order program for free shipping can receive the *Premium Commentary* free. Call 1-866-249-1799 or see www.baptistwaypress.org for information on participating in our free shipping program for the next study.

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FREE! Downloadable teaching resource items for use in your class are available at www.baptistwaypress.org. Watch for them in the “Teaching Plans” for each lesson. Then go online to www.baptistwaypress.org and click on “Teaching Resource Items” under the “Teacher Helps” tab for this study. These items are selected from the “Teaching Plans.” They are provided online to make lesson preparation easier for handouts and similar items. Permission is granted to download these teaching resource items, print them out, copy them as needed, and use them in your class.

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Going Viral:

The Birth and Advance of the Church

A Study of the Book of Acts

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lesson 1

Phase 1: Mission Instructions

MAIN IDEA

Jesus outlined the mission of his Holy Spirit-empowered witnesses.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How does God want me to fulfill my Acts 1:8 mission?

TEACHING AIM

To lead adults to personalize and embrace God's Acts 1:8 mission for their lives



Bible Comments

Understanding the Context

The Book of Acts is the second of two volumes written by Luke, the physician and traveling companion of the Apostle Paul. Both works share a similar writing style and several common themes. Luke dedicates each volume to Theophilus (Luke 1:1–4; Acts 1:1–2). The Greek term *theophilos* means *lover of God* or *friend of God*. The name may refer to a particular person named Theophilus who provided material support for Luke as he was writing. Such benefactors were common in ancient Greco-Roman culture, and perhaps Luke was offering a customary acknowledgment of this financial aid.

The author, however, may have been using the name in a general sense, addressing all of those who love God and desire to know and serve God. The Book of Acts refers to the Gospel of Luke as the “former book,” which focused on the life and teachings of Jesus, ending with his ascension to heaven. Luke’s second volume begins with the ascension of Jesus and explains how his followers, empowered by the Holy Spirit, serve as witnesses to Jesus and the salvation available through him.

Although this book describes the acts of the apostles, the opening chapter makes clear the Holy Spirit was the power behind these actions. The disciples had to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of God’s Spirit before they could serve as witnesses to the world (Acts 1:8). The primary meaning of the term *apostle* is *one who is sent* and applies to all Christians. In a narrow sense, Luke applied this label to the twelve disciples as the initial group sent out as witnesses. After the replacement of Judas Iscariot with Matthias, these twelve became authoritative witnesses to the earthly ministry of Jesus, his resurrection, and ascension (1:21–22). Nevertheless, God sends out all followers of Jesus to serve as his witnesses to the world (1:8; cf. Matthew 28:19–20).¹

Interpreting the Scriptures

Introduction (1:1–5)

1:1–2. The first two verses of Acts serve as a brief prologue that connects the book with the Gospel of Luke. As previously mentioned, the name “Theophilus” may refer to a particular individual, as well as a general reference to one who loves God. Both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts function as excellent training manuals for those who love God and desire to understand the person and work of Jesus, and how to serve as his witnesses. The stated instructions refer to the post-resurrection teachings of Jesus. He “opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45). These instructions also included how the gospel message would be preached to “all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47).

1:3. Luke used the term *suffering* to reference the passion experience as a whole, including the physical and emotional suffering of Jesus, and his death. Jesus provided proof of his resurrection from the dead by appearing to his disciples repeatedly over a period of time. The Greek term for *proof* means *irrefutable* or *indisputable evidence*, referencing those times when the resurrected Jesus presented himself alive to his followers. Through this summary statement, Luke alluded to post-resurrection appearances that he described in detail in his earlier volume (Luke 24:13–43). He firmly connected the death and resurrection of Jesus. Luke emphasized how both of these events were necessary for salvation, and these two elements became central to the messages the apostles preached (e.g., Acts 2:23–24; 3:13–15; 4:10). Forgiveness of sins comes only through Jesus, the crucified and risen Messiah (Acts 2:36–38).

1:4–5. Jesus instructed his disciples to wait in Jerusalem because God was going to bless them there with the gift of the Holy Spirit. This instruction parallels the command Jesus gave to “stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). This power came through the Holy Spirit. The Greek word for *baptize* means *to immerse*. John’s baptism was an immersion in water to symbolize the washing away of sins for those who had repented of their sins. Christians in Luke’s day continued

this practice of water baptism for those who repented of their sins as they received the message of forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:41), but they also experienced immersion in the Holy Spirit, which meant God's Spirit had come to reside in them (2:38; 8:17; 10:44).

God's Mission for Our Lives (1:6–8)

1:6. Because the outpouring of God's Spirit has a connection to God's kingdom (Joel 2:28–32), the question the disciples asked about restoring the kingdom of Israel made sense. The disciples, however, continued to think of God's kingdom in terms of national identity and restoration. Jesus challenged them to enlarge their view of God's reign to transcend national borders (Acts 1:8) to the provision of forgiveness of sins through the crucified-and-risen Messiah for all nations (Luke 24:47).

1:7. The Second Coming of Christ will be a time of final restoration (Acts 1:11; 3:21), but Jesus warned his disciples not to focus on the dates or times of these climactic events. Only the Father knows when this final restoration will take place. Any human attempt to predict the Second Coming is an effort in futility and represents a misplaced role for people seeking to predict this event. This responsibility belongs to God the Father alone (cf. Matt. 24:36).

1:8. Christians are witnesses to God's kingdom, beginning in Jerusalem and going out to all the different people groups in the world. The commission Jesus gave to all his disciples is recorded in Acts 1:8, but the message also provides an outline of the entire Book of Acts. The gospel spreads throughout Jerusalem (Acts 1–7), then through Judea and Samaria (8:1–25), and finally to different parts of the earth, as seen in the spread of the gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch (8:26–40), Gentiles (Acts 10–11), and various regions of the world including the capital city of the Roman Empire (13–28).

The term *witness* (derived from the Greek word *martyrs*) is a legal term for "one who testifies in a court of law." However, as early Christians began testifying boldly about Jesus, they suffered persecution, and many died. The association between being a witness and being put to death became so close

that this term for “witness” became synonymous with being put to death for one’s faith—a martyr.

The Ascension (1:9–11)

1:9. In this verse, Luke provided a brief description of the ascension, including only the key details. He repeatedly used the same Greek verb, *to take up*, to describe the ascension of Jesus in the Book of Acts (1:2, 11, 22), emphasizing his elevated status. Other New Testament passages likewise refer to the exalted status of Jesus in connection to his ascension (cf. Philippians 2:9; 1 Timothy 3:16; 1 Peter 3:22). Luke’s description that “a cloud received him out of their sight” mirrors previous times when God made himself known to his people in extraordinary ways (cf. Exodus 24:15–18; Luke 9:34–35).

1:10–11. As the followers of Jesus were continuing to look up into the sky, Luke noted the presence of two angelic messengers. In a similar manner, he had described two messengers who appeared to the women who found the tomb of Jesus empty (Luke 24:4). These heavenly messengers, in both cases, offered a slight rebuke and redirection to their awestruck listeners. In Luke, they chided the women for their mistake of looking for the living among the dead. The messengers then reminded the women of how Jesus had predicted his death and his resurrection. The women then became witnesses to the other followers of Jesus (Luke 24:6–9). At the ascension, the two messengers rebuked the apostles for looking in the wrong place as they were staring up at the sky. The angels offered assurance to the disciples by explaining Jesus would return in the same way he was taken up. (This reappearance will be his Second Coming.)

United in Prayer (1:12–14)

1:12. While the Gospel of Luke identifies the vicinity of Bethany as the location of the ascension of Jesus, Acts 1:12 pinpoints the Mount of Olives as the more precise location. Luke previously described the Mount of Olives as being part of the area of Bethany (Luke 19:29) that played a pivotal role in the life of Jesus. Here, the crowds praised him as the Messiah (19:37–38).

The Mount of Olives also served as a customary place for Jesus to spend time (21:37), especially as a place for prayer (22:39–42). It was also the place where his disciples failed to follow his instructions for them to pray (22:40, 46). A “Sabbath day’s journey” is a little over a half mile, highlighting the proximity of the ascension to Jerusalem, which became the location of the outpouring of God’s Spirit and the epicenter for God’s mission to the world.

1:13. Although Luke chose different descriptive Greek terms, the upper room in Jerusalem used for the Passover (Luke 22:11–12), and the place the disciples gathered after the ascension may have been the same location. The connection between this room, the Mount of Olives, and prayer is central to the Book of Acts.

1:14. In contrast to the disciples’ failure to pray at the Mount of Olives, the apostles “joined together constantly in prayer.” Instead of sleeping (Luke 22:46), they were earnestly praying. Many other dedicated followers of Jesus joined them. These included “the women,” Mary the mother of Jesus, and the brothers of Jesus. The Gospel of Luke identifies several of these women who supported his ministry: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and Mary, the mother of James (Luke 8:2–3; 24:10). The half-brothers of Jesus would include James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon (Mark 6:3). This diverse group of believers gathered together in unity and prayer.

Focusing on the Meaning

The risen Christ commissions all his followers to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. Each of these areas represents a different geographical and cultural arena. Jesus calls us to begin in our immediate community, our Jerusalem. The next sphere of testimony is Judea, those who share the same cultural values and language but include a greater diversity of perspectives than found in our local community.

Samaria for us becomes an expanded geographical region that includes somewhat different cultural values and customs, along with a slightly different language or dialect. The fourth area of witness pushes the geographical and cultural boundaries to encompass all areas and peoples of the earth.

This area includes those with radically different languages and cultural perspectives. Crossing these cultural barriers is challenging but necessary.

How do we become witnesses in all these areas? We must get involved both directly and indirectly. Mission work has changed dramatically over the last few decades. The ends of the earth have come to us. Our geographic center includes those who are culturally close to us, as well as those who are culturally distant, having a different primary language and vastly different customs and values. We need the power of the Holy Spirit more than ever to help us combat our fears about others who are different from us.

We cannot do everything, but all of us need to be directly involved in reaching out and witnessing to those around us. Some will be able to serve as witnesses on a short or long-term basis in other geographical regions of the world. All of us can financially support and pray for those reaching across these cultural barriers to share the gospel message.

Teaching Plans

DISCOVERY PLAN

Connect with Life

1. To launch the lesson, write this sentence on the board: *A person with an experience is never at the mercy of a person with an argument.* Encourage class members to discuss the statement's meaning. Point out that the things we see, hear, and feel are real to us—and no one can negate their validity.
2. Direct class members to silently read the "Introduction" section of the *Study Guide*. Ask: *What is the relationship between experience and witnessing?* Discuss responses. Say, *Witnessing is sharing with others our personal experiences with Jesus. Others might argue about our experiences, but that doesn't change what is real for us. Today's lesson begins a study of the Book of Acts that focuses on Jesus' instructions as he outlined the mission of his Holy Spirit-empowered witnesses.*

Guide Bible Study

3. Before class, enlist two volunteers to teach class members how to drive a nail into a board. Direct the first volunteer to tell learners how to do it. Give the second volunteer a hammer, a nail, and a piece of wood. Instruct that volunteer to demonstrate how to complete the task. Ask: *Which method is most effective? Why?* Recruit a class member to read aloud Acts 1:1–11. Say, *Luke emphasized what Jesus did, not just what he said. When it comes to witnessing, explaining what Jesus has done in our lives is crucial. It proves what we say about him is true and lets others know what he can do for them.*
4. Read Acts 1:4–8 aloud. Write the words *Waiting* and *Witnessing* on the board. Encourage class members to think about how those two words work together based on the passage. Ask, *What were the disciples told to wait for?* Affirm that they were supposed to wait for the arrival of the

Holy Spirit. Say, *The Spirit would provide the power mentioned in verse 8. Without the Spirit's power, our witness would just be a bunch of words. It is the fuel for our witness.*

5. Before class, write the following quotes on individual slips of paper and place them in a bag: (A copy of these quotes is available in "Teaching Resource Items" for this study at www.baptistwaypress.org).
 - "I have a terrific headache." Franklin Roosevelt
 - "I'm bored with it all." Winston Churchill
 - "That picture is awful dusty." Jesse James
 - "I die hard, but am not afraid to go." George Washington

During the lesson, enlist a volunteer to draw a slip of paper out of the bag and read the quote without sharing who uttered the statement. Ask: *Who spoke these last words?* Discuss responses. Allow the volunteer to share who said it. Repeat the process with the other three quotes. Say, *Our culture values last words.* Read Acts 1:8 aloud and point out that these were Jesus' final words before returning to heaven. Ask, *What are some important things Jesus wanted to leave with his followers?* Discuss responses. Use information from the *Study Guide* to highlight Jesus' model for witnessing and the command for his followers to witness. Briefly touch on the activities of the disciples in Acts 1:12–14.

Encourage Application

6. Group class members into three teams and give each team one of the following words: *Giving, Praying, Going*. (For large classes, more than one group can have the same word.) Instruct the groups to make a list of ways they can support witnessing through their assigned word. After a few minutes, allow teams to report and write their responses on the board. Challenge class members to choose ways they will give, pray, and go in the coming weeks.
7. As time allows, discuss the "Questions" from the *Study Guide*. Challenge class members to think about what Jesus has done in their lives and to outline how they could communicate that to someone else. Remind them about the power of the Spirit and assure them God will give them opportunities to witness if they are willing.

DISCUSSION PLAN

Connect with Life

1. Before class, enlist a trial attorney to speak to class members about what makes a witness effective in legal cases. Talk about the importance of witnesses speaking the truth about what they have seen, heard, and experienced. Ask, *How could that relate to our lives as Christ-followers?* Discuss responses.
2. Say, *Today's lesson begins a study of the Book of Acts by looking at Jesus' command to be witnesses for him.* Use information from the "Introduction" section of the *Study Guide* to briefly define witnessing. Challenge class members to think about what Jesus has done in their lives and how they might share those experiences with others.

Guide Bible Study

3. Ask, *What are some things you have learned from others? How did they teach you?* Discuss responses. Say, *We usually teach others by telling them how to do something or showing them how.* Instruct a volunteer to read Acts 1:1–11 aloud and encourage the other class members to listen for the teaching method Luke emphasized. After the passage has been read, talk about how Luke focused on what Jesus had done, along with what he had said. Say, *Explaining what Jesus has done can be a great tool when telling others about him.*
4. Place class members into groups of no more than four to five people. Encourage the groups to read Acts 1:4–8 and discuss the following questions: (A copy of these questions is available in "Teaching Resource Items" for this study at www.baptistwaypress.org).
 - Before Jesus departed the earth, what did he command the disciples to do? Why?
 - What did the disciples ask Jesus? What does this question tell you about their understanding of their mission?
 - How did Jesus respond to their question? How does that response apply to us today?

After a few minutes, allow the groups to share their conclusions. Use information from the *Study Guide* to facilitate a conversation about the disciples' responsibility, Jesus' response, and the importance of the Holy Spirit's power.

5. Ask: *What are some things that pull you out of your comfort zone? When was the last time you did something outside your comfort zone?* Discuss responses. Read Acts 1:8 aloud. Show class members a map of the Roman Empire. Highlight the locations of Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the rest of the known world. Ask, *What would the disciples have considered as their comfort zone? Where would they have been least comfortable? Say, The Great Commission moved them from where they were most comfortable to places where they would be least comfortable (Jerusalem/Judea to Samaria, and to the rest of the world).* Encourage class members to think about how they can move past their comfort zones and reach all people with the gospel.

Encourage Application

6. Briefly review the sidebar "A Daily Pre-Witness Checklist." Ask, *How will following these tips help to make us effective witnesses?* Encourage class members to follow through on these tips so they are prepared for the opportunities God gives them to share their faith with others.
7. As time allows, review the "Questions" section of the *Study Guide*. Encourage class members to make a list of people they know who need to hear about Jesus—and to determine how they can share the gospel message with them. Close with prayer.

Notes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in lessons 1–4 are from the New International Version (1984 edition).