

The Book of Acts, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 1: The Promise and the Ascension

Acts 1:1-11

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Acts 1:1-11 sets the doctrinal trajectory for the entire book, and a great deal is at stake in these eleven verses. Here Luke grounds the faith in the bodily, evidenced resurrection of Christ, sets the kingdom of God as the governing theme, and records the ascension by which Jesus is enthroned at God's right hand. This passage, read alongside Acts 2, is where we must guard against premillennialism and teach that the kingdom is the present reign of the risen Christ, not a future earthly political empire. The promise of His personal, visible return (v. 11) anchors Christian hope without postponing His reign to some later age.

Yet this passage was never meant merely to inform. Jesus is preparing frightened followers to become bold witnesses, and every truth here is aimed at the heart. The call to wait on the Spirit, to be witnesses beginning at home, to trust the Father with times and seasons, and to live ready for Christ's return is a call to be formed, not just taught. Help students feel the weight of living between the ascension and the return.

So aim at both targets. Send students home with a firmer grasp of the resurrection, the kingdom, the ascension, and the second coming, and with a softened, surrendered heart that is ready to witness, ready to wait, and ready to place every locked room under the reign of the risen King.

Question 1

Student Question:

Luke says that after His suffering Jesus presented Himself alive to the apostles by many proofs, appearing over forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God (vv. 3). Why does Luke stress the physical, evidenced reality of the resurrection, and how does the resurrection function as the foundation of everything that follows in Acts?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Luke is a careful historian, and he wants Theophilus (and us) to know that the Christian faith does not rest on a feeling or a legend but on a fact that can be examined. The phrase many proofs translates a word used for compelling, convincing evidence. Jesus did not flicker in and out as a ghost. He ate, He taught, He let Himself be touched, and He did this over a period of forty days in front of many witnesses. The resurrection is presented as public, bodily, and verifiable.

This matters because the entire book of Acts is built on it. Every sermon the apostles preach comes back to one claim: the Jesus you crucified, God raised up, and we are witnesses of it (Acts 2:32; 3:15; 4:33; 10:40-41). If the resurrection did not happen, the church is a tragic mistake. If it did happen, then everything Jesus said about Himself is vindicated and the world has a new King.

Notice too what Jesus spoke about during those forty days: the kingdom of God. This is the theme He will leave ringing in their ears. The kingdom is not a distant earthly empire to be set up someday; as the rest of Acts will show, it is the reign of the risen Christ that breaks into the world at Pentecost. Help students see that resurrection and kingdom belong together. Because Jesus is alive, He reigns.

For the believer, the resurrection is not just an item to defend but a foundation to stand on. The same power that raised Jesus is the power at work in those who are baptized into Him (Romans 6:4). Our hope is not wishful thinking; it is anchored to an empty tomb.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The bodily resurrection of Christ as a historical, evidenced event, not a myth or vision
- The resurrection as the foundation of apostolic preaching and Christian hope (1 Corinthians 15:14-20)
- The kingdom of God as the central message Jesus left with the apostles
- The reliability of Scripture, written by careful witnesses such as Luke
- The link between Christ's resurrection and the new life of the believer (Romans 6:4)

Discussion Prompts

- If a friend asked you why you believe Jesus actually rose, how would you answer from the evidence Luke gives?
- Why does it matter that the resurrection was bodily and not merely spiritual?
- How does the certainty of the resurrection change the way you face hard things this week?

Question 2

Student Question:

Jesus told the apostles to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father rather than scattering to do the work in their own strength (vv. 4). Think about your own tendency to run ahead of God. Where in your life are you tempted to act on your own power instead of waiting on Him, and what would it look like to wait well?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

There is a holy patience that most of us find very hard. The apostles were ready to act. The mission was urgent and the world was lost. Yet Jesus tells them, in effect, do nothing yet. Wait. The work of God must be done in the power of God, and that power had not yet been given.

Help students feel how counterintuitive this is. We tend to measure our spiritual life by activity. But Jesus teaches that fruitfulness flows from dependence, not from frantic effort. The same lesson runs all through Scripture: the apostles wait for the Spirit, Israel waits at the Red Sea, David waits for the throne. Waiting is not wasted time; it is the soil where trust grows.

This is a deeply formational question, so let students get specific. Many of us run ahead of God in our finances, our relationships, our decisions, our ministries, grabbing control because waiting feels like weakness. Invite honesty here. Where am I striving in the flesh instead of resting in God?

Waiting well is not passive. The disciples waited in prayer and unity (Acts 1:14). To wait on God is to keep praying, keep gathering, keep trusting, and refuse to force the door He has not yet opened.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Dependence on God rather than self-reliance in the Christian life
- The role of prayerful waiting in spiritual fruitfulness
- The difference between working for God and working in God's power
- Patience and trust as marks of mature faith

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between godly waiting and mere passivity?
- Where have you seen running ahead of God create problems in your life?
- What practices help you wait on God instead of forcing your own timing?

Question 3

Student Question:

Jesus promised, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses (v. 8). What did Jesus promise the apostles here, and what was the purpose of the power they would receive?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The promise is power, but it is power for a purpose: witness. The Greek word for witness is *martyr*, the word that eventually gave us martyr. A witness simply tells what he has seen and heard, and these men had seen the risen Christ. The Spirit would give them boldness, clarity, and confirming signs so that their testimony would carry across the world.

It is important to teach this carefully. The baptism in the Holy Spirit and the miraculous power that came at Pentecost were given first to the apostles to equip them as the authoritative, inspired witnesses of Christ (John 14:26; 16:13). Their message was confirmed by signs (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3-4). This was a specific, foundational moment, not a template promising every Christian today the same miraculous gifts.

At the same time, the heartbeat of the verse reaches every believer. We are all called to be witnesses, to tell what Christ has done. We may not work miracles, but we have the same gospel and the same Lord, and the indwelling Spirit still strengthens God's people for faithful living and witness (Acts 2:38; Ephesians 3:16).

Notice the geography: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the ends of the earth. The gospel moves outward in widening circles, crossing every barrier of race and region. This single verse is the table of contents for the whole book of Acts.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The baptism in the Holy Spirit as a promise given to equip the apostles as inspired witnesses
- The purpose of Spirit-given power as gospel witness, not personal display
- The confirming role of miraculous signs for the apostolic message (Hebrews 2:3-4)
- The universal call of every Christian to bear witness to Christ
- The outward, all-nations movement of the gospel mapped in Acts 1:8

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it significant that the power Jesus promised was tied to witness rather than comfort or success?
- How should we understand the difference between the apostles' miraculous equipping and the Spirit's work in believers today?
- Who are the people in your Jerusalem who most need to hear your testimony?

Question 4

Student Question:

Jesus mapped the mission from Jerusalem outward to the ends of the earth (v. 8), starting right where the disciples already were. Where is your Jerusalem, the people closest to you who most need Christ, and what holds you back from being a witness to them?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

It is striking that the mission began in Jerusalem, the very city where Jesus had been crucified, among the people who knew the disciples best. Witness starts at home, in the hardest and most familiar place, before it goes to the ends of the earth.

Many of us would rather be a witness far away than next door. It is easier to support missions on another continent than to speak honestly about Christ to a coworker, a neighbor, or a family member who knows our flaws. Press gently on this. Our Jerusalem is usually the place we most avoid.

Invite students to name actual people, not categories. The mission becomes real when it has faces attached to it. Ask what specifically holds them back: fear of rejection, not knowing what to say, worry about damaging a relationship, or simply being too busy to notice.

Then offer hope. The disciples felt unqualified too, but the same Lord who sent them sends us, and He does not ask us to be impressive, only to be honest about what He has done in us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The personal responsibility of every Christian to bear witness
- Evangelism that begins in the ordinary relationships closest to us
- Honest self-examination about the fears that silence our witness
- The gospel as good news meant to be shared, not hoarded

Discussion Prompts

- Who are three specific people in your Jerusalem right now?
- What is the real fear underneath your hesitation to speak about Christ?
- What is one small, honest step you could take this week toward one of them?

Question 5

Student Question:

When the apostles asked whether Jesus would now restore the kingdom to Israel, He answered that it is not for them to know times or seasons fixed by the Father (vv. 6-7). What does Jesus' answer correct about their expectations, and what does it teach us about speculation regarding God's timing and an earthly kingdom?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The apostles still carried a common hope of their day, that the Messiah would restore a political, national kingdom to Israel and throw off Roman rule. Jesus does not rebuke the hope of a kingdom; He redirects it. The kingdom He is bringing is not a restored earthly Israel but the reign of God that is about to break in at Pentecost and spread to all nations.

Notice that Jesus refuses to feed their appetite for dates and timetables. It is not for you to know times or seasons. This is a permanent guardrail. Every generation faces the temptation to predict the timing of the kingdom, the end, or Christ's return. Jesus plainly says that information is not ours to have, and chasing it distracts us from the mission He actually gave.

This is a good place to teach gently against premillennial speculation. Scripture presents the kingdom as already established, not as a future earthly political reign yet to come. Jesus said the kingdom was at hand and would come with power in that generation (Mark 1:15; 9:1). Daniel said God would set up His kingdom in the days of the Roman empire and it would never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44). Colossians 1:13 says believers have already been transferred into the kingdom of God's beloved Son. The kingdom is the reign of the risen Christ, and we enter it now through the new birth.

The application is freeing. We are not called to decode the calendar but to live faithfully under our reigning King and to take His gospel to the world. Curiosity about timing is replaced by commission to witness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The kingdom of God as a spiritual reign, not a restored national or political Israel
- Jesus' refusal to give timetables, correcting all date-setting and end-times speculation
- The established kingdom foretold in Daniel 2:44 and announced as near in Mark 1:15; 9:1
- The danger of premillennial expectations of a future earthly political reign
- Mission as the believer's calling rather than calendar-watching

Discussion Prompts

- Why do you think people are so drawn to predicting dates and end-times timelines?
- How does seeing the kingdom as Christ's present reign change the way you read the news?
- What does Jesus want us doing instead of speculating about times and seasons?

Question 6

Student Question:

Jesus turned the disciples' eyes away from speculation about the future and toward the work in front of them (vv. 7-8). Are there ways you spend energy worrying about or trying to control the future that distract you from being faithful today? What would change if you trusted God with the timeline?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The disciples wanted to know when. Jesus essentially answered, that is My Father's business; your business is to be My witnesses. There is great freedom in that handoff. We are responsible for faithfulness today; God is responsible for the outcome and the timing.

Many believers carry a low hum of anxiety about the future, their health, their children, their finances, the state of the world. That worry can quietly crowd out present obedience. Help students notice the trade: hours given to fretting about what we cannot control are hours not given to what God has actually placed in front of us.

Encourage specific reflection. What future am I trying to control right now? What would it look like to entrust that timeline to the Father and turn my attention to the person and the task in front of me today?

This is not a call to be careless about the future but to be faithful in the present. Jesus consistently calls us to seek first the kingdom today and let tomorrow rest in the Father's hands (Matthew 6:33-34).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Trust in God's sovereign control over times and outcomes
- Present faithfulness as the believer's responsibility
- Freedom from anxiety through entrusting the future to God
- The danger of letting worry crowd out obedience

Discussion Prompts

- What part of your future are you most tempted to try to control?
- How does worry about tomorrow steal from your obedience today?
- What would trusting God with the timeline free you to do right now?

Question 7

Student Question:

As the disciples watched, Jesus was lifted up and a cloud took Him out of their sight (v. 9). What is the significance of the ascension, and where is the risen Christ now according to the rest of the New Testament?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The ascension is not Jesus simply disappearing; it is His enthronement. He is lifted up and received into heaven to take His place at the right hand of God. Peter will preach exactly this a few days later: being exalted at the right hand of God, Jesus has received the promise and poured out the Spirit, so that God has made Him both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:33-36).

The cloud is a familiar biblical sign of God's presence and glory. The same Jesus who was mocked and crucified is now openly glorified. Daniel 7:13-14 had pictured one like a son of man coming with the clouds to the Ancient of Days and receiving an everlasting kingdom. The ascension is the fulfillment of that vision.

This is the doctrinal heart of why we are not waiting for the kingdom to begin: Christ is already reigning. He sat down at God's right hand and rules now over all things for the church (Ephesians 1:20-22; Hebrews 10:12-13). The present age is the age of His reign, not an interruption before it.

For the believer, the ascension means our Lord is not absent but enthroned, interceding for us (Hebrews 7:25) and ruling over every circumstance we face. The One who loves us holds all authority.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The ascension as the enthronement of Christ at God's right hand
- Christ reigning now as Lord and King (Acts 2:33-36; Ephesians 1:20-22)
- The fulfillment of Daniel 7:13-14 in the exalted Son of Man
- Christ's present intercession for His people (Hebrews 7:25)
- The present age as the age of Christ's reign, guarding against premillennialism

Discussion Prompts

- How does knowing Christ is enthroned now, not merely someday, change your view of His authority?
- What comfort is there in knowing your Lord is interceding for you at God's right hand?
- How should Christ's present reign shape the way you live under earthly authorities and troubles?

Question 8

Student Question:

If Jesus is truly reigning right now at the right hand of God, that lordship has a claim on every part of life. Where in your daily life are you living as though Jesus is reigning, and where are you still holding back an area from His rule?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Doctrine becomes personal here. If Christ is enthroned over all things, then there is no neutral corner of my life. His lordship reaches my schedule, my money, my temper, my relationships, my private thoughts.

Most of us happily confess Jesus as Lord in general while quietly keeping a few rooms locked. Help students identify the locked rooms. Where do I act as though I am still on the throne, where my will and not His sets the terms?

This is meant to be hopeful, not crushing. Surrendering an area to the reigning Christ is not loss but freedom, because He rules in love and for our good. The King who died for us can be trusted with everything.

Encourage one concrete surrender. Naming a single area, the bank account, the resentment, the habit, and consciously placing it under Christ's rule this week is more transforming than a vague wish to do better.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The practical lordship of Christ over every area of life
- The danger of confessing Christ as Lord in word while withholding in practice
- Surrender to Christ as freedom rather than loss
- Daily discipleship as living under the reign of the risen King

Discussion Prompts

- What is one area of your life you have not fully surrendered to Christ's rule?
- Why do we find it so easy to keep certain rooms locked from the Lord?
- What would change this week if you placed that area under His reign?

Question 9

Student Question:

The two men in white said, this Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven (v. 11). What does this promise teach about the return of Christ, and how does the New Testament hope of His coming differ from the idea of a future earthly political kingdom?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal moment of the lesson, so give it room. The angels redirect the disciples from gazing into the sky to living in light of a promise: the same Jesus will come again, personally, visibly, and bodily, in the same way He left. The Christian hope is not a vague spiritual influence but the literal return of our reigning Lord.

Teach the shape of that hope from the broader New Testament. When Christ returns it will be sudden and universal, every eye will see Him (Revelation 1:7), the dead will be raised, the living changed, and we will be caught up to be with the Lord forever (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). That day brings judgment and the handing over of the kingdom to the Father, and the renewal of all things (1 Corinthians 15:23-26; 2 Peter 3:10-13).

Now draw the contrast carefully. Some teach that Christ will return to set up a thousand-year earthly political kingdom, reigning from an earthly throne in Jerusalem. But Scripture presents the kingdom as already established and Christ as already reigning from heaven (Acts 2:30-36; Colossians 1:13). His return does not begin His reign; it ends this age. There is no second chance, no earthly political empire, no rebuilt Jewish kingdom to anticipate. The next great event is judgment and eternity.

Hold both truths together: Christ reigns now, and Christ is coming again. This keeps us from two errors, despairing as though He were absent, and speculating as though His kingdom were still future. We live as people who serve a reigning King and watch for a returning Lord.

Pastorally, this promise is pure comfort for the watching disciple. The story is not drifting; it is heading toward a certain, glorious homecoming. Live ready.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The personal, visible, bodily return of Christ (Acts 1:11; Revelation 1:7)
- The resurrection of the dead and gathering of the saints at His coming (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)
- Christ's return as the end of this age and the day of judgment, not the start of an earthly reign
- The kingdom already established and Christ already reigning, guarding against premillennialism
- Watchful, ready living as the proper response to the promise of His coming
- The hope of Christ's return as comfort for the faithful

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it important that Christ's return will be personal and visible, not merely symbolic?
- How does the truth that Christ already reigns correct the idea of a future earthly political kingdom?
- How would living each day ready for Christ's return change your priorities?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across this whole passage. Jesus rose, commissioned His followers, ascended to reign, and promised to return. Of everything you have seen in Acts 1:1-11, name one specific way the risen and reigning Christ is calling you to follow Him more closely, and what is one step you will take this week in response.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question asks students to move from study to surrender. The passage is not merely information about the early church; it is a summons to live as witnesses of a living, reigning, returning Lord.

Invite each person to name one specific thing, not a general resolution. Perhaps it is to begin praying for a person in their Jerusalem, to surrender a locked room to Christ's lordship, to trade anxiety about the future for present faithfulness, or to live more readily in light of His return.

The goal of this study is transformation, not just knowledge. Encourage students to put their step into words and, if the group is comfortable, to share it so the body can pray and follow up. Truth that is named and acted on is truth that forms us.

Close by reminding them that the same Christ who empowered ordinary disciples to turn the world upside down is at work in them. We do not follow a distant teacher but a present King.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The call to respond personally to the risen and reigning Christ
- Discipleship as ongoing transformation, not mere knowledge
- The Christian life lived between Christ's ascension and His return
- The empowering presence of Christ in His people for the mission

Discussion Prompts

- What one truth from this passage most challenged you?
- What specific step will you take this week in response?
- How can this group pray for and encourage you in that step?