

# Things of the Kingdom and of Jesus the Christ - 1

## Preaching the Gospel

*The things of the kingdom and Jesus the Christ are preached throughout Acts: from the third verse to the last verse of the book. This series of articles on Acts explores these 'things'.*

The Acts of the Apostles is a dynamic book – as dramatic as any novel! It is the inspired record of the words and activities of the apostles soon after the ascension of Jesus. These men were eyewitnesses of the things they believed (especially the risen Christ). Furthermore, Jesus had instructed them (Acts 1:2) and the Holy Spirit empowered them to speak the truth (John 14:26, Acts 1:8). They were utterly persuaded of the truth of their message, fearless before the hostile Jewish authorities and even prepared to risk their lives. This was an amazing transformation from having been terrified and lost (Mark 14:50).

The introduction sets the scene. Jesus gave the apostles *'infallible proof'* of his resurrection, and spoke about the *'kingdom of God'* (1:3). He told them to be witnesses for him:

*You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem,*



*and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8).*

The book goes on to describe how the apostles preached the Gospel, witnessing by words and actions (including miracles), and the responses they received.

### The True Gospel

English versions of the Bible contain four books with titles *"The gospel according to..."* with the name Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These inspired records tell about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Mark 1:1 reads *"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God"*.

The word 'gospel' occurs many times in the New Testament. For example, in the NKJV it occurs 23 times in the four gospel records and Acts, and 79 times in the letters. An interesting example is found in Luke chapter four. Verses 14–21 contain the full account, but verse 18 reads: *"The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor..."*

This is a quote from Isaiah 61:1 which Jesus claimed to fulfil. The words in Isaiah (translated from Hebrew) are 'good tidings' and this is what is meant by the Greek word which is translated 'gospel'. Sometimes this Greek word is also translated 'good tidings', notably in Luke 2:10 when the angels told shepherds about Jesus' birth. Every single New Testament reference to the gospel is associated with good tidings about Jesus of Nazareth.

## Not a New Message

However, the apostle Paul said that ‘the gospel’ had been preached to Abraham (Galatians 3:8), which was thousands of years before Jesus was born. So how could the life of Jesus have been described so long before his birth? Abraham was promised a land, many descendants, and a single special descendant through whom all families of the earth would be blessed. The Jewish nation came from Abraham (as did the Arabs), and their existence was a part of the promises. But the much greater promise was that all families (Jews and non-Jews) would be blessed through a single special descendant (Galatians 3:8; Genesis 12:1–3 and Galatians 3:16), who was Jesus. The apostles stressed repeatedly that salvation is only possible through Jesus the Christ. The whole of God’s plan for the world has always centred on His Son Jesus. This simply cannot be over-emphasised.

The apostles risked their lives in order to witness to the true gospel. Paul warned that even in his time the gospel message was getting corrupted, with dire consequences (Galatians 1:6–12). They preached *“things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ”* (Acts 8:12), which is the core of the gospel.

If we want to be saved we need to understand and believe this one true gospel by reading the whole Bible.

## To the Jews First

The apostles’ witness was first to the Jews. Jesus was a Jew, and the promises about him had been given to the Jewish nation (Acts 26:6, Romans 3:1–2). However, many Jews doggedly refused to accept that Jesus was ‘the

Christ’ (Messiah, anointed one) and their promised saviour. This is not too surprising given that they had previously rejected the evidence provided by Jesus himself, and had him killed.

However, God had always said that salvation would be offered to Gentiles (non-Jews) and the first Gentile convert was Cornelius (Acts 10). This was a shock to the Jews, but the gospel was being preached to both Jews and non-Jews.

## What Was Preached?

The table opposite shows themes that occur regularly in the book of Acts, specifically before chapter 10, i.e. while the witness was to the Jews. The main events in these chapters are: the ascension of Jesus (chapter 1); the apostles receive Holy Spirit power (chapter 2); they do miracles and get arrested and persecuted but continue to witness (chapters 3–8); Saul of Tarsus is converted (chapter 9).

In studying this table, we must remember that Old Testament scriptures were well known to Jews. So, the apostles did not need to emphasise things which their audience already believed. We see the critical importance of Jesus. His death and resurrection fulfilled many Old Testament prophecies. There was an urgent need to respond as God required.

There is only one gospel, as we saw above, and these themes need to be central to our Christianity. Are we studying the whole Bible so that we can make proper sense of what the apostles taught? How do our lives compare with those first century apostles in terms of dedication and enthusiasm for the gospel?

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Theme in Preaching	References in Acts 1–9 (while witnessing to Jews)	Number of references in Acts 10–28 (witnessing to Jews AND Gentiles)
Jesus was approved by God	2:22; 3:13,14,26; 4:27; 7:52	2
Jesus was crucified	2:23,36; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 7:52; 8:32-35	3
God raised Jesus from the dead	1:3, 22; 2:24,31,32; 3:15; 4:10,33; 5:31; 7:56	6
Belief in resurrection	4:2	4
Jesus was exalted / is in heaven	1:2,9,11,22; 2:33,36; 3:13,20-21; 4:11,27,30; 5:31; 7:56	1
Jesus is the Christ	2:36; 5:42; 9:22,34	4
Apostles were witnesses	1:8,22; 2:32; 3:15; 4:33; 5:32	5
Apostles had Holy Spirit power and authority <sup>(*)</sup>	1:8; 2:4,33; 4:31; 5:9,12,32; 6:3,5,8; 7:51,55; 8:6,17	17
Gentiles also to be offered salvation	2:39; 9:15	5
These events were prophesied in the Old Testament	2:16,25,30,34; 3:18,21,22,24,25; 4:11,25; 7:52; 8:32-35	8
The importance of the name of Jesus	2:21,38; 3:6,16; 4:10,12,17- 18,30; 5:28,40,41; 8:12,16; 9:14-16,21,27,29	9
Salvation is through Jesus	2:21,38; 3:19,26; 4:12; 5:31	6
Jesus will come back / judge the world	1:11; 3:20-23	3
Kingdom of God	1:3,6; 8:12	5
The need for repentance	2:38; 3:19,26; 5:31; 8:22	7
Baptism	2:38,41; 8:12-13,16,38; 9:18	10
The importance of the Jewish fathers	3:13,25; 5:30; 7:2,44-45	5
God is the Creator	4:24	2

*\* This was a very special privilege of the early apostles to enable them to establish the first century Christian churches.*