

# Gospel Doctrine Lesson 28: "We Are Witnesses"

(Acts 1-5)

**LESSON GOAL:** To accept our responsibility to be witnesses of Jesus Christ and see how the gift of the Holy Ghost helps us do so.

**ACTS** is an account of important events in the Church during the thirty plus years following Jesus' mortal life. The book of Acts was **written by Luke**, the same who wrote the third gospel.

Two principle divisions in the book of Acts:

- a. Acts 1-12: Activities of the church centered in Jerusalem. Peter, president of the church, is the principal figure.
- b. Acts 13-28: The main focus of these chapters is on Paul and his missionary journeys.

**D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner:** "Sadly, the second half of the New Testament is sometimes neglected by Latter-day Saints. That is unfortunate because the times in which those books of the New Testament were written were not so different from our own. **The information in those books and the lessons we can learn from them could become a towering source of peace and power in coping with life's challenges in our own times.** These books speak of the former-day Saints having to endure persecution; temptations and perversions of every kind, including prostitution, adultery, fornication, and homosexuality; recurring and vexing welfare problems; famine and economic uncertainties; sorrow and suffering; trials and tribulations; the allure of reason over revelation; false teachers; and apostasy" (*New Testament Apostles Testify of Christ*, 1-2).

## 1. The Lord ascends into heaven. Matthias is called to be an Apostle -- (Acts 1)

**Robert J. Matthews:** "Doctrinally, the book of Acts is priceless. **Christ did little to set up his church until after the resurrection.** Therefore, the ordinances, sacraments, practices, and their administration would be anyone's best guess without this one-of-a-kind document. Even with it, there has been vast confusion within Christianity, but clearly **Acts teaches us of crucial doctrines: Apostolic authority** and continuity of the Quorum, **the laying on of hands** for the gift of the Holy Ghost, **the offices of the priesthood**, the necessity of **being properly called of God**, **worship on Sunday** as the Sabbath, **the law of consecration**, the relationship between the law of Moses and the gospel of Christ, and so on. The compilation known as the book of Acts presents our first glimpse of the Church after the departure of Jesus" (*Behold the Messiah* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994], 310).

**Robert L. Millet:** "The world is hard pressed to give any meaningful explanation as to what took place during the forty days that Christ ministered to the Twelve following his resurrection (Acts 1:3). In fact, their attempts at commentary are embarrassingly poor. To Latter-day Saints the matter seems most obvious...**to teach the nature of vicarious ordinances, and to instruct the Apostles in the fulness of the temple ceremony.**" (Robert L. Millet and Joseph Fielding McConkie, *The Life Beyond* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1986], 159.)

By this time, Peter's leadership role among the twelve apostles had been established.

**Spencer W. Kimball:** "When Christ chose this fisherman for his first and chief apostle, he was taking no chances. **He picked a diamond in the rough—a diamond that would need to be cut, trimmed, and polished by correction, chastisement, and trials—but nevertheless a diamond of real quality.** The Savior knew this apostle could be trusted to receive the keys of the kingdom, the sealing and the loosing power. Like other humans, Peter might make some errors in his developing process, but he would be solid, trustworthy, and dependable as a leader of the kingdom of God." (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, edited by Edward L. Kimball [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982], 470.)

Following the 40-day ministry, the first order of business was to fill up the quorum.

The qualifications for the new apostle:

- He must have been with the disciples since the baptism of John and
- He must be a witness of the resurrection (Acts 1:22).

**Mark E. Petersen:** "There was a great significance in [filling this vacancy]. It demonstrated beyond all doubt the fact that it was the plan and purpose of the Lord that the **Quorum of Twelve should continue to be a Quorum of Twelve** and not a Quorum of Eleven, or a Quorum of Ten, or Nine, finally to disappear... It gave encouragement to the Saints. It proved to them and to all men that **the Church organization** as provided by the Savior was to go on without change as long as men were willing to hear and accept the true gospel." ("Which Church is Right," Latter-day Tracts [Pamphlets], 6.)

Matthias was called and was numbered with the eleven apostles

**Elder Charles A. Callis:** "The Lord is the searcher of the heart. He knows the qualifications, the most secret purposes and intentions and dispositions of all men. Every man whom we have sustained by our vote this afternoon, in the position to which he has been appointed, that man, I testify, has been chosen by the spirit of revelation, by the Holy Ghost, which, as I have stated is the genius of the Priesthood. While this spirit remains in the Church and it will remain forever we need not be afraid that we will be led astray, for God loves us. He loves the men whom he has appointed and he will move upon them, by the Holy Spirit, to select men whom he has chosen to be overseers of the flock, "to feed the Church of God." (*Conference Report, April 1938, Afternoon Meeting 101.*)

**APPLICATION:** Recognize that the Lord has organized the twelve apostles, and He, not men, will choose them.

## 2. On the day of Pentecost, the Apostles are filled with the Holy Ghost -- (Acts 2)

The Feast of Pentecost was a harvest celebration held 50 days after the Feast of the Passover. Jews from many nations came to Jerusalem for this feast.

- The Holy Ghost came upon them like cloven tongues of fire "and they were filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues" (Acts 2:4), so everyone heard the gospel in their own tongues.

**Parley P. Pratt:** "The gift of the Holy Spirit adapts itself to all attributes of man. These attributes are in embryo; and are to be gradually developed. They resemble a bud—a germ, which gradually develops into bloom, and then by progress, produces the mature fruit, after its own kind. **The Holy Ghost quickens** all the intellectual faculties, increases, enlarges, expands and purifies all the natural passions and affections; and adapts them, by the gift of wisdom, to their lawful use. **It inspires, develops, cultivates and matures** all the fine-toned sympathies, joys, tastes, kindred feelings and affections of our nature. It inspires virtue, kindness, goodness, tenderness, gentleness and charity. It develops beauty of person, form and features. It tends to health, vigor, animation and social feeling. It develops and invigorates all the faculties of the physical and intellectual man. **It strengthens, invigorates,** and gives tone to the nerves. In short, it is, as it were, marrow to the bone, joy to the heart, light to the eyes, music to the ears, and life to the whole being." (*Key to the Science of Theology/A Voice of Warning* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1965], 101).

Again, Peter took the lead in explaining and teaching (Acts 2:14), bearing a powerful witness of the mission and resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:31,32), and 3000 new members were added to the fold. We are told that they:

- gladly received the word (2:41)
- continued steadfastly in the doctrine of the apostles (2:42)
- continued steadfastly in fellowship (2:42)
- continued steadfastly in breaking of bread (2:42)
- continued steadfastly in prayer (2:42)
- had all things in common (2:44)
- parted their goods to all men in accordance with need (2:45)
- continued daily in the temple (2:46)
- praised God (2:47)

**APPLICATION:** It is vital for us to have a testimony of Jesus Christ and to let the Holy Ghost help us share it.

## 3. Peter and John heal a lame man by the power of Jesus Christ -- (Acts 3-4)

**Spencer W. Kimball:**

"As you have read those early accounts, have you pictured yourself there with Peter and John as they entered the temple gate on a certain day?... 'Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I unto thee (Acts 3:6).

"Such as I have.' All of us need to ponder those words. **Do we, too, have something we need to share?** Yes! We have **the gospel of Jesus Christ**, the gospel of peace, the gospel of joy. We have truths that can make any person better and more fulfilled, any marriage happier and sweeter, any home more heavenly. We have the priesthood power of God to bless our homes and lives and the lives of others. Yes, it is to ourselves, our homes, our quorums, our classes, our Church assignments that we must carry more energetically those things that we have received. **And it is to our nonmember neighbors and associates that we are now asked to also "give such as we have."** **The Lord has commanded us to do so.** We must lengthen our stride and must do it now." ("Always a Convert Church: Some Lessons to Learn and Apply This Year," *Ensign*, Sept. 1975, 2)

**Harold B. Lee:** "You cannot lift another soul until you are standing on higher ground than he is. You must be sure, if you would rescue the man, that you yourself are setting the example of what you would have him be. You cannot light a fire in another soul unless it is burning in your own soul. You teachers, the testimony that you bear, the spirit with which you teach and with which you lead, is one of the most important assets that you can have, as you help to strengthen those who need so much, wherein you have so much to give. Who of us, in whatever station we may have been in, have not needed strengthening?" (*Stand Ye in Holy Places* [SLC: Deseret Book Co., 1974], 186-187).

**David O. McKay:** "Without Jesus of Nazareth, the Crucified Christ, the Risen Lord, the traits of the jungle will hold the human family in bondage" (October 1965 General Conference address).

**Robert L. Backman:** "The Apostles who there stood with the Son of God responded to this call with faith, boldness, and power. We read that they were 'all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.' (Acts 4:31.) They had seen a resurrected being, had eaten with him, had felt his hands and feet. They knew, and knowing, they testified: 'For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard' (Acts 4:20).

"Does that commission extend to us as his disciples? Perhaps we have not seen, in person, the risen Lord. **But the testimony of his chosen witnesses is etched into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.** We know, and knowing, we too must testify. Is there any question in the mind of any of us that this is one of the chief responsibilities we enjoy by reason of our membership in his Church? I began with Mormon's declaration, 'I have been called of him to declare his word among his people, that they might have everlasting life.' (3 Ne. 5:13.) **Such is the calling of each of us.**" ("Jesus the Christ," *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 8)

**APPLICATION:** Circumstances will arise in our lives that will require our **courage** to be a witness for Jesus Christ.

#### 4. The Apostles continue to preach and heal with great power -- (Acts 5)

**Neal A. Maxwell:** "Unfortunately, we tend to think of consecration only in terms of property and money. But there are so many ways of keeping back part. One might be giving of money and time and yet hold back a significant portion of himself. One might share talents publicly yet privately retain a particular pride. One might hold back from kneeling before God's throne and yet bow to a particular gallery of peers. One might accept a Church calling but have his heart more set on maintaining a certain role in the world.

Still others find it easier to bend their knees than their minds. Exciting exploration is preferred to plodding implementation; speculation seems more fun than consecration, and so **is trying to soften the hard doctrines instead of submitting to them.** Worse still, by not obeying, these few members lack real knowing. Lacking real knowing, they cannot defend their faith and may become critics instead of defenders! (CR, October 1992).

**Gordon B. Hinckley:** "In our time, those found in dishonesty do not die as did Ananias and Sapphira, but **something within them dies. Conscience chokes, character withers, self-respect vanishes, integrity dies**" ("We Believe in Being Honest," *Ensign*, Oct. 1990, 2).

**Neal A. Maxwell:** "...when truth 'cutteth ... to the very center' (1 Ne. 16:2), this may signal that **spiritual surgery is underway, painfully severing pride from the soul.** (*Ensign*, November 1987, 31.)

"There is kindness in this pain, for as truth, the Lord's laser, cuts through to all but the hardest of hearts, so the healing light of the gospel is let in. The outer encrustations of evil can make us so insensitive that only the cuts 'to the very center' have any hope of bringing the desired response!" (*Things As They Really Are*, 79.)

"Most of us don't like to be "cut to the center," and when the gospel standards cut us, it hurts. **The tendency is to deal with the pain by rejecting further surgery.** (*For the Power Is in Them...: Mormon Musings*, 49.)

**APPLICATION:** I pray that I can be obedient and follow Christ. I want it known in heaven that I am reliable and will depend on the Holy Ghost to help me know when and how to testify of Jesus Christ.