Lesson 28
Acts 1–5

There are several stories in these chapters: In chapter 1 we learn that Jesus ministered to the apostles for forty days after his resurrection and that Matthias was chosen to fill the vacancy left by Judas. Chapter 2 tells us of the visit of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, the gift of tongues given to them as a sign of the Holy Ghost, and Peter’s sermon admonishing those who hear them to repent and be baptized. Chapters 3–4 tell of Peter and John healing a lame man, which resulted in many people believing their preaching, and the high priest, Caiaphas, and his family demanding that they cease preaching that Jesus was resurrected. Of course, they didn’t heed that demand. Chapter 5 begins with the story of Ananias and Sapphira, who withheld part of the money they received for the sale of their property, lying to Peter about how much they had received and dying as a result of their lie. Because many were converted as a result of the preaching of Peter and the other apostles, the high priest had all of the apostles arrested and imprisoned, but they were released by an angel. Called on to account for their refusal to obey the high priest’s command not to teach in Jesus’s name, they said they would obey God rather than men: as witnesses of Christ, they cannot refrain from preaching him.

We can understand each of these stories not only as historical stories but also as stories that help us understand how
to live in the world as Christians. Why do stories do that better than lists of principles for life? Pick one or two of these stories and use them to reflect on what it means to be a Christian.

**Acts 1**

**Verses 1–14:** It is important to recognize what verse 1 tells us—that Acts is a continuation of Luke’s records. Many scholars refer to the two of them together as one book, Luke-Acts. Does that make any difference in how you approach reading Acts? Does it make any difference in how you understand Luke?

Why do we have nothing in Acts of the teachings of the Lord’s forty-day ministry (verse 2)? Why was that ministry important to the apostles?

In verse 3, to what does the word *passion* refer, to the suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane and the Savior’s death on the cross, or does it also include the resurrection?

Why does Luke use that word, a word that could also be translated *experience* (Galatians 3:4), *suffering* (Luke 22:15), or *enduring* (Mark 8:31)? Might one of those other translations be equally or more appropriate here? If so, which one and why?

What do the apostles hope that the risen Lord will do (verse 6)?

The *Jerome Bible Commentary* points out that the order of preaching commanded by Jesus in verse 8 corresponds to the parts of Acts:¹
Jerusalem corresponds to Acts 1–7
Judea and Samaria corresponds to Acts 8–9
The ends of the earth corresponds to Acts 10–28, Rome being the end of the earth

What does that tell us about the book of Acts? What do you make of the angels’ response to the eleven apostles in verse 11?

**Verses 15–26:** Since Mathias never again appears in Luke’s account, why was it important that he tell us about his election to the Twelve? Why do you think we do not hear of him again?

Note that the word translated *bishoprick* in verse 20 (*episkopē*) means simply “office.” The literal meaning of the Greek word (*episkopē*) is “one who has the duty of watching over others,” an overseer. Why did the new apostle have to be chosen from among those who had been disciples from the time of Jesus’s baptism until the resurrection (verses 21–22)?

To what is the new member of the Twelve specifically to be ordained (verse 22)?

Does what we learn here about the ordination of Mathias have any relevance to us?

**Acts 2**

**Verses 1–13:** The festival of Pentecost (also called the Feast of Weeks) was originally an agricultural feast, but since it coincided with the date when the Israelites arrived at Sinai (Exodus 19:1), it became a feast in which Israel celebrated
the covenant of Sinai. That is why, for Qumran Jews, Pentecost was the most important feast of the year. For other Jews, however, it appears to have been a feast of secondary importance. Are there any parallels between the events of Sinai—or the Sinai covenant—and the events portrayed in these verses that would make the day of Pentecost particularly appropriate as the day when the Holy Ghost was given?

What is the significance of speaking in tongues at this time? Does it have symbolic significance? Does it have practical significance? How are the practical and the symbolic related to each other?

**Verses 14–36:** Verses 23–31 are a long interjection. Read verses 22 and 32–33 together, skipping the verses between. Of what is Peter testifying?

Why is it important that “we all are witnesses”? The Twelve are called as special witnesses (D&C 27:103), but are they the only witnesses of Christ’s divinity? If there are others, what is the difference between a special witness and other witnesses?

**Acts 3–4**

**Verses 3:1–11:** We have heard about the Seventy doing miracles, but we’ve not read of any disciples doing them. However, we frequently read about Jesus doing miracles. What role does Peter’s miracle play in Luke’s story about the development of the early Church?

**Verses 3:12–3:26:** Why does Peter refer to “the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob” in verse 13? What does that title mean to the Jews? Why is that one of God’s names? What does that name mean to us?
In verse 17 Peter says that he assumes that the people of Jerusalem, and their leaders, executed Jesus out of ignorance. Is he giving them the benefit of the doubt here, or does he really think that their ignorance explains what happened? (Compare Luke 22:34.) Does their ignorance explain why preaching is required, namely, to remove their ignorance?

When are “the times of refreshing” (verse 19)?

Jewish tradition seems to have associated the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the restoration of Israel with the end-time. But they have just seen the former (Acts 3:1–13), and the Lord has made it clear that he will not tell them about the latter (Acts 1:7). Now Peter has suggested that receipt of the Spirit is a fruit of repentance (Acts 2:38) and suggested that the end-time is yet to come (Acts 3:21). Surely Peter’s listeners would have found this confusing, given their assumptions. But is there a sense in which they were right? In other words, is there a connection between the reception of the Spirit and restoration? Individually? For the Church?

Why does Peter make an appeal for conversion by referring to the prophets in verses 22–26? Have he and the other Church leaders had a similar recent experience? (See, for example, Luke 24:27 and 24:44–46.)

**Verses 4:1–31:** Why would the Sadducees, which included the temple priests and the captain of the temple, have been angry about Peter’s preaching?

From what Luke tells us in Acts, it appears that the Sadducees and the temple leadership were the primary persecutors of the early Christian Church. Why do you think that was?
Why do the Twelve say they preach (verse 20)? For what do they pray (verse 29)?

**Verses 4:32–37:** If, as some assume, each member of the Church was required to give his possessions to the Church, why is Barnabas in particular remembered? Why does he stand out if he is doing what everyone did?

**Acts 5**

**Verses 1–11:** Verse 4 suggests that Ananias’s donation was voluntary rather than a requirement of membership. What, then, was his sin and that of his wife?

**Verses 12–16:** Why do the Saints meet at the Jerusalem temple? What does verse 13 mean? Why are healings so important to the story that Luke tells?

**Verses 17–42:** About what is the high priest indignant? Does verse 28 answer that question?

Compare the response here with the Twelve’s response to persecution in chapter 4. What differences and similarities are there, and what do we learn from that comparison?

What does Peter mean when he says, “We are his witnesses”? (verse 32).

What does he mean when he says “so is also the Holy Ghost”? To whom does the Holy Ghost bear witness of Jesus Christ?

What does Gamaliel, a Pharisee, suggest about Christianity in verse 39? What is he worried about?