

THE GREAT COMMISSION

What Now?

Matthew 28:16–20

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

As the end of the conference drew near, the decision makers discussed, “What now?” When William Carey realized these decision makers favored the wide road with a smooth path, he grabbed Andrew Fuller’s arm crying out, “Is nothing again going to be done?”

William Carey wanted a missionary society that supported international workers who would make disciples among people who had never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. Eventually, his vision materialized, and he became one of those workers, going to India. For more than 40 years, without returning home, he translated the Bible, preached the gospel, and made disciples. We now know William Carey (1761–1834) as the father of modern missions.

The global vision that compelled Carey comes from the words Jesus spoke in Matthew 28:16–20—the passage we’ll study today. As Christians, we’re indebted to those who’ve proclaimed Jesus’ message before us and summoned by our Lord to continue in that worthy endeavor so others, too, may enjoy Christ.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

You may want to ask a friend or your church small group to join you in this four-part series for the next few weeks. Glean each other’s insights in this study and encourage one another as you carry out Jesus’ Great Commission. You could also participate with Chuck Swindoll here at Insight for Living Ministries in [Vision 195](#)—our mission to reach all 195 countries with the message of God’s majesty.

In case you’re wondering what Bible translation Chuck likes to use, he prefers the New Living Translation as well as the New American Standard Bible. If you want to add resources to your library, you may want [The Swindoll Study Bible](#) which is a wonderful aid for mining the gold of Scripture and using it in your life. If you don’t have a Bible atlas or dictionary, we recommend the [Zondervan Essential Atlas of the Bible](#) and the [New Unger’s Bible Dictionary](#).

Quotable

*The plan Jesus set
in motion, before
He ascended back
into heaven, is
the only plan that
will work.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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It's always important to pray before reading God's Word. Since we'll focus on Jesus' global mission, read Psalm 67:2–3 below, and write it as a prayer in your own words while also requesting God's aid in this study.

May your ways be known throughout the earth,

your saving power among people everywhere.

May the nations praise you, O God.

Yes, may all the nations praise you.



Observation: Reading Closely

Chuck details his Bible study method in his book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*. It's the same method we use in these studies to help you prepare your own spiritual meals—a vital skill for all Christians.

We begin with observation—discovering what the Bible says by reading it slowly and paying attention to the words the author uses. It's simple. The only difficulty comes from its principal requirement: patience. We can't hurry observation.

Read Matthew 28:16–20, and note questions you may have about the text or anything that stands out to you. In observation, we ask interpretive questions, but we don't answer them until step two.



According to Matthew 28:17, the eleven disciples responded in what two ways to Jesus?

_____ and _____

According to 28:18, how much authority has been given to Jesus? _____

According to 28:19, to what nations did Jesus send His disciples? _____

According to 28:20, which of Jesus' commands are His disciples to obey? _____

According to 28:20, how long will Jesus be with His people? _____

Did you catch the “therefore” in 28:19? In observation, we note the logical connection of statements—especially when we see connectives like “therefore.” So how does the “therefore” connect verse 28:19 with verse 28:18?



Interpretation: Gaining Clarity

Once we've observed what the text says, we then seek to understand what it means. The second step for studying the Bible is interpretation. In this step, we want to see through the author's eyes as best we can—and this requires some rigorous study. We do this to avoid importing our own definitions into the author's words and imposing our own opinions into the author's meaning.

The Setting—Matthew 28:16–17

First, we examine the setting of our passage. Begin by looking up *Galilee* (Matthew 28:16) in your Bible dictionary and atlas. Note anything interesting you find. Why do you think Jesus wanted to meet His disciples there instead of in Jerusalem where they were? Look at Matthew 28:10.



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Imagine seeing the resurrected Jesus on that mountain in Galilee. His new, immortal body appeared in such an awesome state—perhaps in dazzling white like at His transfiguration—that the disciples who recognized Jesus worshiped Him and those who didn't recognize Jesus doubted it was Him. What a sight that must have been!

The Great Commission—Matthew 28:18–20a

With unadorned words, Jesus opened His mouth once more and taught His disciples. He began with a statement—not a command. It is this declaration in 28:18 that Matthew developed throughout his entire gospel. With a passive verb, explosive meaning emerges: Jesus is of God. Jesus' listeners caught only glimpses of Jesus' authority, but none could quite grasp it. The inconceivable happened in Matthew 28. What was that event, and how did it prove Jesus' authority?

Rephrase Jesus' statement "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth" in your own words. Doing this increases our understanding because we must know what the text means before we can restate it.

According to Matthew 28:18–20a, how do we make disciples and what does a disciple do?

Matthew intended his readers to use Jesus' teaching recorded in this book to make disciples in all nations. What a thought! We can read the very words written by a man who knew Jesus personally almost two thousand years ago. What a privilege to study God's Word!



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Correlation: Comparing Passages of Scripture

Correlation follows interpretation in the *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method. We correlate a biblical passage by comparing its meaning with the meaning of other biblical passages. Sometimes correlation is essential to interpretation, which is the case with our passage.

Jesus told His disciples to baptize new disciples. Matthew also mentioned baptism at the beginning of Jesus' ministry (Matthew 3). What he said there will help us understand the significance of baptism in 28:19 because the meaning is more explicit. So peruse Matthew 3.

According to Matthew 3:1–2, 6, what did people do before they were baptized and what did they seek?

Now that we understand Matthew's theological explanation of baptism, what is baptism's significance in Matthew 28:19? When new disciples are baptized, what should they do and under whose authority do they pledge themselves?

By the way, did you notice who Jesus met with? Not the Jewish leaders of the Sanhedrin nor the military generals representing the hard fist of Rome. Jesus "told his disciples" (28:18). Yes, He met with normal folks like you and me to carry out His only plan to redeem the world.



The Divine Assurance—Matthew 28:20b

Did you notice Jesus' words of comfort? How does Jesus' assurance in Matthew 28:20b allow His disciples to carry out His command described in Matthew 28:19?

Just think—the God of the universe cares about us, gives us purpose in life, reveals to us His plan for the world, and equips us with His presence to do what He commands.

O the deep, deep love of Jesus,

Vast, unmeasured, boundless, free,

Rolling as a mighty ocean

In its fullness over me.¹



Application: Living Powerfully

We leave our Bible study incomplete without applying it to our lives. The Bible, combined with God's Spirit, is power. We're weak, but with His power, we're strong.

In Matthew 28:16–20, Jesus spoke a simple, clear plan to ordinary people like you and me. As Chuck observed, Jesus' brief statement displays that He is intense about the mission but relaxed regarding the method. Take a bit of time to reflect and write down how you have participated in Jesus' Great Commission.

If you feel like you are lodged in a spiritual rut, consider changing your normal routine of how you engage in the Great Commission.



If you want to change it up, pray for clarity and wisdom as to how God would have you move forward in a new way in His Great Commission. If He's made it clear, then pray for courage to do what He's revealed. Write down the one thing you know to do this week, or perhaps even today, to further His plan of making disciples—whether you do it every week or you've never done it before.

God will always guide you as you share in new ways the glorious news of His Son, Jesus. Remember Paul's words in Colossians?

Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart. Pray for us, too, that God will give us many opportunities to speak about his mysterious plan concerning Christ. (Colossians 4:2–3)

It is this prayer we're praying for you. May God give you opportunities to speak out His mysterious, glorious plan of Christ to those who desperately need good news.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for making Your plan simple and clear and for using me to further Your purposes. I pray for a renewed sense of that purpose, greater enthusiasm in it, and an extra measure of urgency for accomplishing Your Great Commission. I know many have not heard, so please use me as You will for Your Son's glory. It's in Jesus' name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Samuel Trevor Francis, "O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus," in *The Celebration Hymnal: Songs and Hymns for Worship* (Nashville: Word Music/Integrity Music, 1997), hymn 352.



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What Now?

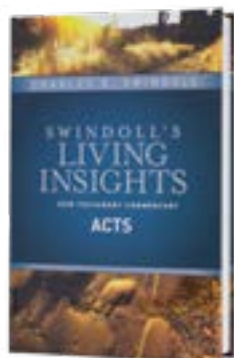
Matthew 28:16–20

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Tools for Digging Deeper



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For the 2018 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Aaron Massey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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THE GREAT COMMISSION

Kick-Starting a Plan to Reach the World

Acts 1:6–11

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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LET'S BEGIN HERE

The disciples stood amid the olive trees on that mountain near Jerusalem listening to their risen Lord one last time. Except they were no longer disciples—Jesus had just commissioned them as apostles. And without warning, the feet of Jesus elevated off the dirt, and the clouds in the blue sky above them received Him out of their sight. Jesus was gone.

Confused, they strained to see their Lord when, immediately, two angels appeared and said that He would return just as He came. Jesus promised them the Holy Spirit. He gave them a strategy. Their purpose was clear. Jesus charged the apostles to bear witness to Him across the world in the Spirit's power until He returns. That's the plan.

Like the apostles, you and I live during the same in-between time. Like them, we have been equipped with their apostolic testimony recorded in Scripture and clothed with the same Spirit of power to carry out the same plan of reaching the world with Jesus' message.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

We'll soon explore Jesus' living words in Acts 1:6–11 which He told His apostles before entering heaven. In these *Searching the Scriptures* studies, we use the same Bible study method Chuck Swindoll uses. It consists of four steps: observation, interpretation, correlation, and application.

During observation, we use only the Bible. During interpretation, we use study resources. Good commentaries always aid our study of the Scriptures. Because we will be studying a passage in Acts, you may want to add to your library Chuck's [commentary](#) on Acts from his *Living Insights New Testament Commentary Series*.

Quotable

*To reach an ever-
challenging world,
Spirit-led power
must be involved.
We dare not do it
in the flesh.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Acts 1:6–11

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Searching the Scriptures Tip 1

The Bible can be an intimidating book containing unusual language from different cultures that existed thousands of years ago—not to mention the small print and hundreds of pages! To make it easy, Chuck has simplified the Bible's content into three categories: 1) people, 2) events, and 3) great truths known as doctrines. We'll apply these three categories later in this study to show you how they relate.

The Bible does not contain merely human words nor the philosophy of the learned. God breathed the words of Scripture. His Spirit produced it—and it still speaks today. For that reason, it's always best to pray for understanding anytime we read it. The psalmist says:

*Give me understanding and I will obey your instructions;
I will put them into practice with all my heart. (Psalm 119:34)*

Restate this prayer in your own words below. Think carefully on your words, and pray them genuinely.



Observation: What Does the Passage Say?

Open your Bible and grab something for notetaking—either physical or electronic. In this first step, called observation, we inspect the details of what's written. We inspect the passage from a bird's-eye view as well as a mouse's close-up perspective.

So let's begin by reading Acts 1:6–11. Read it slowly, several times, and write down important details you discover. Also, write down any questions you have.



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During observation, it's helpful to answer basic questions from the text to make sure we don't miss anything. Let's do that now.

Who were the people in Acts 1:6–11?

What main event occurred in Acts 1:6–11?

How did Jesus and the angels correct the disciples? (Hint: Look for two different corrections.)

The apostles wanted to rule the world when Jesus wanted them to reach the world. They looked up when they should've been looking out. Aren't we thankful for those moments when God redirects our steps? Afterward, we see how His ways are better. Always.



Interpretation: What Does the Passage Mean?

In this second step, called interpretation, we seek to understand what the author says. What point or points did the author make? We do this by examining both the cultural and literary contexts of the passage to get a better grip on how the original audience would have read the text.



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Acts 1:6–11

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As Chuck mentioned in his sermon, this passage contains the transition of Jesus' disciples, who watched and learned from Jesus' ministry on earth, to apostles of Jesus who proclaimed what they witnessed and learned from Him. Use your Bible dictionary to look up *disciple* and *apostle*. If you don't have one, we recommend the *New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. Also, try Dr. Bill Mounce's free online Greek dictionary to look up *disciple* and *apostle*. As you read, remember these terms:

- *Gloss*: basic usage of the word
- *Definition*: English translations of the word
- *Concordance*: every location of the word in the New Testament in order of occurrence

Now, in the table below, record your understanding of the meaning of the two terms and how they differ.

Disciple	Apostle

Examining Acts 1:6 and 1:8, describe the difference between the kind of power the disciples wanted and the kind of power Jesus promised.



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Acts 1:6–11

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Jesus said the power of the Holy Spirit would come upon them in order that they might be witnesses. As witnesses, they testified to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. They also explained how Jesus came from God, how He reigns as Lord, and they beseeched all to turn to Him to receive forgiveness for their corrupt ways and to worship Him as the one, true God. What a powerful claim!

Jesus told the apostles they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Look up each location in your dictionary and write down the progression Jesus used. You can also reference a commentary or use Dr. Constable's [online](#) commentary if you don't have one.



Searching the Scriptures Tip 2

In his sermon on Acts 1:6–11, Chuck says the most important person in the Bible is Jesus. The Old Testament looks forward to Him, the Gospels look at Him, and the remaining New Testament documents look back on Him. In our passage, Jesus ascended into heaven. This momentous event leads to a key doctrine in theology. Since Jesus ascended into heaven, we know He will return (Acts 1:11), that He currently reigns at God's right hand ([Psalm 110:1](#); [Acts 2:33](#)), and that He intercedes with the Father on our behalf ([Hebrews 7:24–27](#)). See the connection between the people, events, and great truths of the Bible?



Correlation: How Does the Passage Compare?

Correlation expands our understanding of a passage because we compare it with other passages in the Bible that speak on the same or a similar topic. The Bible interprets itself. In Acts 1:8, the power Jesus refers to regarding the Holy Spirit is the power to serve God as a witness. Sometimes, the Holy Spirit gave the apostles power to do miracles while at other times He gave them power to preach.



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Acts 4 contains a wonderful picture of the power given to the apostles. Take a moment to read this chapter. Describe how it illustrates the power which the Holy Spirit gave to the apostles as witnesses.

The God who worked in the lives of the apostles is the same God who loves you and works through your life. So don't be afraid, but take courage in our God who made the planets and the stars.



Application: What Does This Passage Instruct?

Like the apostles, we, too, live in the in-between time awaiting Jesus' second coming. We just examined Jesus kick-starting His plan to reach the world. Amazingly, we partake in the same plan as those who saw Jesus lift off the earth into the clouds almost two thousand years ago.

Locating Your Piece of the Earth

Jesus intends for His message to spread to all tribes and languages. Take time to reflect on how you have engaged Jesus' plan recently. Now consider if there's anything new God would have you do around your piece of the earth to advance His message. Have you felt your heart tug toward your non-Christian neighbor or your conscience prod you to give a bit more toward missions? Perhaps it's God! Take a moment to write what you've reflected upon and the actions you sense God's Spirit leading you to take.



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Acts 1:6–11

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Sharing with Power

While God may not have us perform miracles like the apostles, we still receive power from the Holy Spirit to share the message of Jesus. Take a moment to write a simple prayer requesting God's power to share His glorious news with those people in your sphere of living who thirst for a sweet word to revive their souls. Then we'll pray together.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for making me a laborer in Your harvest. You are the Lord of the harvest who extends life, peace, and joy from Your Spirit because of the work of Your Son. Grateful to have life, we give You thanks. Eager to share this news, we ask for power. We look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. In Jesus' name, amen.



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Kick-Starting a Plan to Reach the World

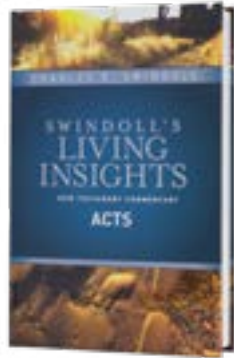
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THE GREAT COMMISSION

Essential Fuel for Fulfilling the Mission

Acts 2:1–13

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LET'S BEGIN HERE

“If I do go away, then I will send him to you” (John 16:7). “He will guide you into all truth” (16:13). “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you” (Acts 1:8).

Jesus’ promises echoed in the minds of the newly commissioned apostles as they sat in the upper room during Pentecost—just fifty days after His crucifixion. Jesus already appeared to them in His resurrected body, taught them, then ascended into the clouds. But after Jesus’ ascension, what were the apostles to do next? Jesus said to simply wait for the Spirit—and that’s what they did.

Then, with exquisite timing, the Holy Spirit rushed into the room filling the apostles with power to proclaim the works of God through Christ. The Spirit’s coming happened just as Jesus promised, and that same Spirit indwells all Christians today. From Him we receive wisdom, courage, and power to proclaim the gospel of Christ in our own time—nearly two thousand years later.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

If you’ve been engaged in Insight for Living Ministries’ *Searching the Scriptures* studies, you’ve caught on that we use the Bible study method Chuck Swindoll follows. It includes four basic steps: observation, interpretation, correlation, and application. Today we’ll cover these steps as we examine Acts 2:1–13, written by Luke—the doctor who also wrote the gospel that bears his name. They’re helpful for those new to the Bible as well as those who’ve studied the Bible for years.

It’s always best to begin your study with prayer. After Israel’s King Solomon built God’s temple, he dedicated it with this prayer:

“In the future, foreigners who do not belong to your people Israel will hear of you. They will come from distant lands because of your name, for they will hear of your great name and your strong hand and your powerful arm. And when they pray toward this Temple, then hear

Quotable

*The Holy Spirit
became the fuel
that would ignite
the engine of
evangelism.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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from heaven where you live, and grant what they ask of you. In this way, all the people of the earth will come to know and fear you, just as your own people Israel do. They, too, will know that this Temple I have built honors your name.” (1 Kings 8:41–43)

God now fully expresses Himself through Jesus and no longer dwells in stone structures built by calloused fingers. So we don't pray toward a temple, but to God Himself in Jesus' name. However, our mission remains the same. Like Solomon who proclaimed God to the nations through the building of the temple, we herald Jesus so that nations may hear of His great name, learn of His wonderful deeds, call upon Him, and receive the salvation He promises. Pray for the Spirit to give you strength through this study. Try incorporating into your prayer a bit of the language from Solomon's prayer.



Observation

To observe a biblical passage means to read what it says. We ponder every word the author uses, noting how the words connect in a sentence, how the sentences connect in a paragraph, and how paragraphs connect through the whole book.

Read [Acts 2:1–13](#) a few times in your preferred translation. Chuck likes the *New Living Translation* and the *New American Standard Bible*. The NLT version, a thought-for-thought translation, changes the order of words and ideas from the original languages to foster the smoothest reading experience. The NASB, a word-for-word translation, keeps the English words and ideas as close as possible to the order in which they occur in the original languages so we can more easily perceive each author's flow of thought and emphases.

Write down what you observe in Acts 2:1–13, examining the who, what, when, why, and how of the passage.





Searching the Scriptures Tip

In his book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Chuck teaches us to look for ideas that are associated in meaning or connected with the words *like* or *as*.¹ We'll focus on that in this step so we don't misinterpret the image or meaning Luke conveyed.

Chuck identifies three supernatural signs in Acts 2:1–13.

The Audible Sign—Acts 2:1–2

In these verses, what noise came from heaven and to what did Luke compare it?

The Visual Sign—Acts 2:3

In this verse what visible sign appeared and rested on the disciples, and to what did Luke compare it?

See the importance of noticing *like* and *as*? The sound of wind rushed into the room of believers, but their hair did not wave and their tunics did not flap. They saw flames but felt no heat.

The Oral Sign—Acts 2:4–13

In these verses, what sign bellowed from the lips of the Aramaic-speaking Galileans?



Where were the visiting Jews from? What did the Christian Galileans say to the visitors?

The gospel boomed in perhaps a dozen languages. Wow! “But in fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don’t, the Advocate won’t come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you” (John 16:7). For this, we are thankful.



Interpretation

When we interpret the Bible, we want to understand what it means, so we consult resources, perform word studies, and learn the cultural background.

First, take a look at this [map](#). It shows the spread of Christianity across the Roman Empire, but notice that most of the places in our passage are mentioned before Christianity expanded. The Jewish travelers came from all over! What’s the farthest city from Jerusalem you can find?

Next, look up *Pentecost* in your Bible Dictionary. If you don’t have one, we recommend the [New Unger’s Bible Dictionary](#). You can also reference Dr. Constable’s [notes](#) on Acts 2:1 for a quick and helpful overview. You’ll find it on the right reading pane.

Why is Pentecost significant to our understanding of the passage?

The devout Jewish travelers journeyed to Jerusalem to offer the first of their crops to God. Then God made them the first of His church harvest through His Spirit. How did this help spread Jesus’ good news?



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Essential Fuel for Fulfilling the Mission

Acts 2:1–13

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Now we see God's strategy by sending the Spirit during Pentecost. Also, we learn how the church spread so rapidly in the first century—like we see on the map. The visiting Jews heard the gospel, believed in Christ, learned from the apostles, and journeyed back home. Many of them became the seed for the planted churches across the Mediterranean.



Correlation

The Bible interprets itself—that's the motto of correlation. We correlate the Bible when we compare the meaning of one biblical passage to another. The authors of the Bible considered themselves part of a cohesive story, so they alluded to God's work in the past to explain what God was doing in their present.

Events from Israel's past illuminate our understanding of Acts 2:1–13. Read the following passages from the Old Testament, and write down your reflections as they relate to our passage.

Numbers 11:16–29

Joel 2:28–29

Acts 2:1–13 is known as the great reversal of Babel. In Babel, people of one language unified themselves and committed idolatry against the one true God. Take a moment to read [Genesis 11:1–9](#), the account of Babel. What did the people build, and what was God's judgment against them?



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In what ways did the events in Acts 2:1–13 reverse God’s judgment on the people’s sin at Babel? (Hint: it involves their language and worship.)



Application

Application is the last step in the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study. With the Spirit’s power, we’ll integrate what we’ve learned into our minds and hearts.

Why and Whom We Serve

Notice that the Galileans proclaimed the works of God. They did not speak to make their own names great nor recount the greatness of their deeds; they wanted to glorify Jesus. That’s what we want to do too. So let’s reflect. Consider areas in which you serve and may be tempted to act in your own power or make your name great instead of God’s. The areas may be at church, work, home, or in your community. Write down two of them—and be specific regarding your struggle in that area.

It’s a blessing from God that we’re allowed to serve in these capacities. They benefit us as we benefit others. We combat pride and self-exaltation through prayer. We pray before, during, and after our times of service. Take a moment to write a prayer thanking God for your opportunities of service, requesting that God give you strength to accomplish His work and asking that He be glorified through your service. Then internalize your prayer so you can pray it when you serve.



Where We Serve

Above we considered and prayed over where we currently serve, but some of us may need to embrace a new location—a new job, neighborhood, city, or even country. Do you sense the Spirit nudging you in a different direction? If so, write down where that might be.

If you're married, have you discussed this new direction with your spouse? It's also wise to discuss with pastors, spiritual mentors, and other family members when you're considering such a change. The Spirit often speaks through the wise counsel of fellow believers. Do you need to seek guidance from others during this time?



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for empowering me by Your Spirit to carry the good news of Your Son, Jesus, that others may hear of His mighty works and receive life that only He can give. In Him we have true hope, joy, and strength, and through Him we experience Your true love. It stops us in our tracks. I pray that He may increase and that I may decrease. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2017), 101.



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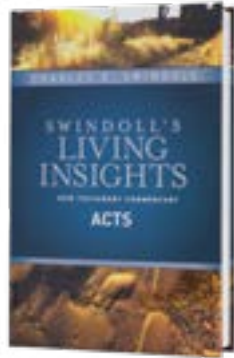
Acts 2:1–13

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THE GREAT COMMISSION

An Original Snapshot of the First Church

Acts 2:41–47

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LET'S BEGIN HERE

“Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.”¹

Few have stated it better than Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882). He captured an enduring principle that threads history and spans cultures: enthusiasm. It became the hallmark of the early church. Only, it was a special kind of enthusiasm fueled by divine power—a magnetic power. Excitement bubbled out of the members of the early church because of what Jesus had done for them and because of the Spirit of God in them.

Today we will walk through the door of Acts 2:41–47 and lock hands with Christians in the first church. We will sit among them, learn from them, and stand in awe of God with them. For we have the same Spirit, follow the same teachings, and unite under the same strong name: Jesus Christ.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Today we will apply Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method to Acts 2:41–47—the last passage in this four-part series. So far, we've studied the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16–20), Jesus' plan (Acts 1:6–11), and the Spirit's igniting (2:1–13).

Before studying the Bible we want to pray, because the Spirit of God who inspired this passage of Scripture is the very same Spirit who empowers us to learn spiritual truths and grow spiritually. Pray these words with me:

Father, thank You for preserving Your Word, for making it so accessible, and for providing this snapshot of the first church. I ask that You bless this time set aside to learn more about You and Your ways. Please illuminate my mind and kindle my heart so that You may be glorified in my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

Quotable

“All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper), and to prayer”; those are the priorities.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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To gain more familiarity with the context of today's passage, read all of Acts 2 so you can experience the first sermon preached by Peter after the Spirit's empowering. Don't forget that Jews from all over the world heard Peter that day during Pentecost.



Observation

Before understanding what the Bible means, we must perform a careful reading of what it says. We call this observation. It's step one. During observation, we want to read the text—we're not trying to understand culture, word translations, or adopt a principle for living. That all comes later. For now, with intentionality and attentiveness, read Acts 2:41–47, letting each word nestle in your mind.

First, you'll want to write down what you see. In narrative, we observe the characters, action, location, and dialogue. The more we find now, the easier and deeper our interpretation will be later. For each verse, write down two to three observations.

Acts 2:41

Acts 2:42

Acts 2:43



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Acts 2:44

Acts 2:45

Acts 2:46

Acts 2:47



Searching the Scriptures Observation Tip

Sometimes the authors of biblical narratives insert their theological interpretation of the events or teaching. These statements are important to note in observation so we can use them during our own interpretation.



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Yes, observation can take a bit of time, but it helps us walk through the orchard of the Bible, see the green leaves, feel the rough bark, and taste the sweet strawberries and juicy oranges. Rushing the observation process would be like looking down at the orchard from the window of a plane.

What are the four priorities to which the new believers devoted themselves in Acts 2:42?

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)

What does fellowship (Acts 2:42) look like according to Acts 2:44–46?

In what two places did the church meet according to Acts 2:46?

- 1)
- 2)

Did you see how Luke interpreted the events of our passage in Acts 2:47? Again, we want to mark statements like these because they help us in the next step, interpretation, to which we will now turn.



Interpretation

We seek to understand what the author means during interpretation—the second step in our Bible study method. We want to understand the author’s intention and discern those great truths that bind the pages of Scripture. We also want to understand cultural references and the original languages underlying our English translation. Did you know the Old Testament was first written in Hebrew with a few parts in Aramaic and the New Testament was first written in Greek?



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Acts 2:41 says that three thousand people were added to the church after Peter's sermon. How many believed in Jesus before Peter preached? (Cross-reference Acts 1:15.)

Where were the new believers from? (Cross-reference Acts 2:5.)

Just imagine all those faces with different clothes, lifestyles, and languages. If visiting Jews stayed in Jerusalem beyond Pentecost to learn about Jesus, what would they have needed? Now revisit Acts 2:45. Who would have been sharing their property and possessions with whom?

According to the end of Acts 2:43, God confirmed the message of the apostles by performing signs and wonders through them. Use your Bible dictionary to look up the word *sign*. If you don't have a Bible dictionary, we recommend *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. You can also reference Dr. Constable's *notes* on this verse—they're in the right reading pane. Write down what you learn about the theological significance of signs.

Remember Luke's theological interpretation in Acts 2:47? How does his statement imply God's involvement and approval of the events in Acts 2?



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Imagine a Roman worshiper of the mythological god Jupiter reading this in the first century. Part of Luke's intent for writing Acts was to display to Roman citizens how the power of God was working in the church and not through the political fist of Roman might.

It's false to think a true, thriving church will always be persecuted. In Acts, churches were either persecuted or well-received depending on what God ordained in that specific location. In our passage, how did the people in Jerusalem respond to the first church? What verse tells you this? What characteristics about this first church do you think would have caused this response?

“And a deep sense of awe came over them all” (Acts 2:43). Talk about enthusiasm! The exciting part is that God still works miracles today—giving us new hearts, transforming lives, restoring relationships, and releasing us from deadly habits. Before we move on, take a moment to thank Jesus for the change He's made in you.



Correlation

In this third step, we compare our passage with other biblical passages to gain a better understanding of the topic in our passage. We call this correlation.

Acts 2:42 contains four basic descriptions of the first church: 1) apostolic teaching, 2) fellowship, 3) sharing meals like the Lord's Supper, and 4) prayer. From these characteristics, churches today can measure if they are prioritizing the important things. After Paul planted churches all over the world, many of them gradually or immediately strayed from these four foundational practices and focused instead on nonessentials. He addressed the churches in letters.

Paul praised a core practice in the Macedonian churches which he wanted Corinth to emulate (2 Corinthians 8:1–15). The church in Corinth had neglected to do what the churches in Macedonia were doing. Peruse the passage and find the core practice that we also see in Acts 2:41–47. Find it? So how did Paul use the gospel to encourage and exhort the church in Corinth to emulate the Macedonian churches?



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The church in Colossae also wandered from one of the priorities discussed in Acts 2:41–47. Read Colossians 2:1–10, and note how the Colossian church strayed. Then summarize how Paul sought to reestablish them.

If you're looking for a new Bible reading plan, a good study would be to read all 13 letters by the apostle Paul, and note how he led each congregation back to the key operating principles: apostolic teaching, fellowship, sharing meals including the Lord's Supper, and prayer. As Chuck emphasizes in his sermon, churches are to devote themselves to these things with a single-minded perseverance.



Application

In the previous three studies, we brainstormed ways you can fulfill the Great Commission. Hopefully, you've celebrated how Jesus has used you and your church in His global mission and have identified opportunities to further engage your community and our world with the gospel.

We just read how the first church exuded awe toward God (Acts 2:42). So in this final study of this series, we'll focus only upon worship. We exist to worship God, stand in awe of Him, give thanks for all He's done, and adore Him for who He is. Our missional activities will not work if worship doesn't precede and pervade all our going and doing.

Grab your calendar and fill in a few slots over the next week with one word: *worship*. During these times, you might want to listen to worship music or read the Bible. Simply go to your favorite location without distractions—a room or bench where you can quickly prepare your heart and mind for the presence of God. You may even invite friends or family. To make it purposeful, note the specifics of how you wish to spend this time. What songs will you sing? How many chapters will you read? At which time will you pray?



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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, how amazing and inspiring it is to see Your work in the beginning of Your church era. You continue to work in our age as You did then—healing broken hearts, enlightening darkened minds, and comforting anxious souls. You give us true hope. Thank You for restoring my life, that though I was dead, now I live; and though I was blind, now I see. You are my hope, my life, my breath, and my rock. I praise You and give You all the glory and honor. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Circles,” in *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: The Collected Works* (n.p.: Bybliotech, Kindle, n.d.), 7116.



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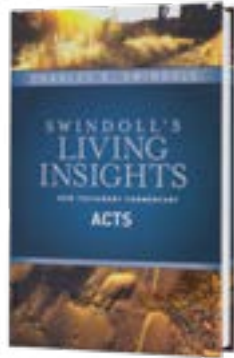
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