



First Baptist  
MADISON

## WITNESSES FOR JESUS

ACTS 1:6-11; 1 PETER 2:1-12 SEPTEMBER 12, 2021

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

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### INTRODUCTION

- 1 **What is the most memorable event you have witnessed? Think concerts, sports, a speech or lecture, or even something like a natural disaster.**
  
- 2 **When you tell people about that event now, what are the most important details you include?**
  
- 3 **Today we will talk about the church's responsibility to be Jesus' witnesses to the world. As witnesses for Christ, what do you consider some of the most important parts of the message we communicate?**

## UNDERSTANDING

### > Read Acts 1:6-11.

*Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup> He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." <sup>9</sup> After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. <sup>10</sup> They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. <sup>11</sup> "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."*

**1:6-7.** The disciples' question revived their political goals, an ideal they could never quite stifle. Throughout the Gospels they wanted Jesus to throw off the iron hand of Rome, tell the nation He was their Messiah, and set up the kingdom. Surely now that He had risen from the dead and instructed his troops, it was time for the rebellion to begin. The Lord's answer offers a warning Christians have not heeded very well for almost two thousand years: It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority (v. 7). The fact of that return is absolute. The time was not revealed to Jesus' own disciples at the time of the ascension, and it will never be known by any human until the Lord comes again, regardless of what someone may claim. We can't criticize the disciples too much, however, because the Old Testament links Spirit baptism with the coming kingdom (see Isa. 32:15-20; Ezek. 39:28-29; Joel 2:28-3:1). The Lord did not deny the kingdom is coming but only warned the disciples that God's schedule is none of their business.

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**1:8.** Some have suggested that this key verse of our book may contain a threefold table of contents: “Jerusalem,” Acts 2:42–8:3; “Judea” and “Samaria,” Acts 8:4–12:24; “ends of the earth,” Acts 12:25–28:31. We cannot know if Luke had that kind of division in mind, but the book unfolds in a fascinating manner somewhat along that pattern. Notice that the call to witness is not limited to any select group of people, since it spreads from the apostles to the 120 believers and on throughout the pages of Acts. Nor can we restrict it only to service in our own churches or to some kind of “professional ministry.” Every believer should be a “world Christian,” able to function for the Savior from the other side of the street to the other side of the world.

**1:9-10.** Here we find the seven last words of Christ on earth: “and to the ends of the earth.” Immediately after uttering those words, He ascended and was hidden by a cloud, even as they watched. The concept of a cloud linked with God is a common Old Testament theme (see Exod. 13:21; Ps. 68:4; Isa. 19:1; Dan. 7:13). We refer to it as the Shekinah glory explained in Ezekiel 11:14-25. This account elaborates on Luke’s earlier report to Theophilus. The two men who announced this great event in history were angels. Angels taking the form of men was hardly unknown, even in New Testament times (see Matt. 28:2-3; John 20:12; Luke 24:4). Picture the disciples standing in fear and awe “looking intently,” a phrase which appears fourteen times in the New Testament, twelve of them in Luke through Acts. We know this was the eleventh appearance of the Lord after His resurrection and that the ascension took place on the Mount of Olives in the vicinity of Bethany (see Luke 24:45-53).

**1:11.** These disciples were literally men of Galilee, citizens of the northern portion of Israel. The angelic question took on special poignancy in the light of the Lord’s command; but rather than scolding, the angel assured the disciples that Jesus would return. Let’s

not miss the emphasis of Luke's specific words: "This Jesus ... will come in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven." Not some different Jesus, but a literal, physical, resurrected Savior would return. The Jesus they knew and loved would come again to earth just as He ascended from earth. Other New Testament passages such as 1 Thessalonians 4-5 explain the details more fully. Why would the Lord return to heaven? Why did He continuously say to the disciples that His exit was essential to the Holy Spirit's entrance? Certainly it fits God's plan and purpose, and that reason alone would be enough. We can also see some practical things. The second coming has no appeal for unbelievers, only for believers. With Jesus in heaven, we must live our lives by faith and turn our hearts and vision upward and forward. During the time He is there and we are here, He serves as our heavenly intercessor and advocate—an encouraging thought in our efforts to live and witness for Him.

- **Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He left His disciples with some instructions about what their responsibility would be in His absence. What mission did Jesus leave His disciples?**
  
- **What does it mean to be the witness of Christ? What is at the heart of our message, and how does it get communicated?**

- **Think honestly about our church and your relationship with Christ. What are some of the things your witness about Jesus communicates to others, for good or for bad?**
  
- **After Jesus gave His disciples the task of being His witnesses to the world, He ascended to heaven, where the Book of Hebrews tells us He is seated at the right hand of God. (See Heb. 1:3-4.) What are some reasons this truth, along with the promise of Jesus' return, should motivate us in our work as Jesus' witnesses?**

**> Read 1 Peter 2:1-3.**

*Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. <sup>2</sup> Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, <sup>3</sup> now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

**2:1.** “Rid” carries the idea of taking off a suit of clothes. Previously, as pagans, these Christians had clothed themselves with all manner of wickedness—deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander. They were to remove and throw away such clothing. These words concern believers' relationships with one another and with the world. Believers are not to deceive others. Deceit includes all hypocrisy—pretending something other than the truth. Neither are believers to envy others. Envy reveals a failure to rejoice in God's gifts to us and to live in gratitude for His generosity. Slander means “speaking against”

others in rumors, false accusations, gossip, or harsh criticism. All such speech violates the command to love that Peter had mentioned a few sentences earlier (1 Pet. 1:22).

**2:2.** The apostle resumed his earlier analogy of the new birth (1 Pet. 1:23) and compared the readers to newborn infants. This does not necessarily imply they were recent converts or spiritually immature. Peter's emphasis here was on the natural craving of an infant for its mother's milk, not on the readers' spiritual condition. Desire means "to crave." They were to desire God's milk with the kind of craving an infant has for its mother's milk. Peter called this milk unadulterated, meaning "pure"; it is devoid of impurities or anything to dilute it. Furthermore, it is spiritual, as opposed to the physical milk a baby seeks. Obviously Bible study is one source of this milk. The apostle then spelled out the reason for drinking deeply of this milk: that you may grow by it in your salvation. The new birth is only the beginning of our salvation. We must not stop there, as if receiving salvation is all there is. We must continue to grow in that salvation; and we mature only by drinking of the unadulterated spiritual milk that alone produces spiritual growth and maturity.

**2:3.** Peter then arrived at the point that enables us to understand the nature of this spiritual milk. In saying they had tasted that the Lord is good, Peter implied these Asian Christians should continue to drink what they already tasted. In other words, the spiritual milk they needed centered in Christ Himself. The apostle likely took this idea from Psalm 34:8, which refers to tasting the Lord to see that He, the God of Israel, is good. In applying this verse to our Lord, Peter implied Jesus' Deity in the strongest way possible. To grow in your Christian life, you absolutely must

remain in constant, daily fellowship with Jesus Christ. Daily immersion of yourself in God's Word is a valuable discipline in drawing you close to your Savior. Periods of deep, concentrated prayer unite your heart with the living Lord. Periods of meditation on God's Word or listening to what your Lord has to say molds you in His image.

- **Contrast the things Peter says we are not to do as Jesus' witnesses with the things we are to do. What picture do these verses paint of those who represent Christ?**

- **Why is it important to rid ourselves of malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander?**

- **What does getting rid of those things have to do with yearning for spiritual milk or growing in salvation?**

> **Read 1 Peter 2:4-10.**

*As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—<sup>5</sup> you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup> For in Scripture it says:*

*“See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”<sup>7</sup> Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,”<sup>8</sup> and, “A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.”*

*They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.<sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

**2:4.** Many years earlier, Jesus had given Simon the nickname “Rock” (petros in Greek, from which the name Peter comes). Here the apostle nicknamed “Rock” described Jesus as a living stone. (See Psalm 118:22, which refers to the cornerstone that the builders rejected, and also see Peter’s use of this psalm in v. 7.) The world at large had rejected Jesus, but God had chosen Him and declared Him valuable. Jesus is the chosen One, and we are chosen because we are in Him. Our entire identity is wrapped up in Him.

**2:5.** Because of our relation to the resurrected and living Lord, we too can be called living stones (but not in the same sense as Jesus). Just as stones were used to build the temple of God in Jerusalem, so we are being built into a spiritual house, a temple, to God. God now dwells in His people, not in a building (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19). Then Peter changed to another word picture and described believers as priests who offer spiritual sacrifices. Under the old covenant the priests of Israel sacrificed bulls and goats in the temple. As Christians, we are priests of the



new covenant who offer spiritual sacrifices to God. These sacrifices are truly acceptable to God, because they are offered through Jesus Christ. Peter specified the nature of these spiritual gifts in verse 9.

**2:6.** Peter then cited a series of texts from the Hebrew Scriptures on which he based his comments. “It stands” in Scripture is a solemn formula for citing quotations from Scripture as the Word of God. Peter first quoted Isaiah 28:16 as it appears in the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Septuagint was the Bible of many in the early church, particularly those who spoke or read Greek. Isaiah had condemned Israel for rejecting the Lord’s message and for relying on pagan nations for their support. Through Isaiah, God told Israel He was laying the true foundation stone on which His people were to be built. A cornerstone was the great stone lying at the corner of a building uniting one wall to another. This foundational cornerstone supports everything else and ties it all together. The cornerstone God was laying in Zion was either God Himself or the Messiah. Thus whoever believes in Him will never be put to shame. Those trusting in Jesus never have to worry about whether He will disappoint them. God made that clear to Isaiah, to Israel, and to us.

**2:7.** Peter pointed out a great difference between those who believe in Jesus as their Lord and those who do not. God gives honor to those who believe. The unbelieving, on the other hand, will be disconcerted to discover that the stone they rejected has become the cornerstone. Here Peter quoted Psalm 118:22. This verse could describe an event in the construction of the temple or perhaps it was a proverbial saying from that period. “Cornerstone” here may mean either a foundational cornerstone as in Isaiah 28:16 or the topmost capstone. Though rejected by the

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leaders of Israel and Rome, Jesus was the most important stone of the true temple, the people of God.

**2:8.** Peter next quoted Isaiah 8:14. In this verse, Isaiah said God should be a rock of sanctuary to His people. Instead, they failed to obey God, and they stumbled over Him as they would a huge rock placed in their paths. In a similar manner, Jesus the Messiah is a sanctuary to believers, but the One over whom unbelievers stumble. The statement “they were destined for this” expresses God’s sovereignty, but it does not mean unbelievers have no responsibility for disobeying the message. They reject Jesus as Savior and suffer the consequences.

**2:9.** Peter then identified implications of the new identity that Christians have and are to understand. As Israel was God’s chosen people, believers are a chosen race. We are also a royal priesthood, belonging both to the family of the King and to the priestly family. We are a holy nation, a people for His possession, as Israel had been. Our purpose as the people of God and as priests is to proclaim the praises of God. Here we learn the nature of the spiritual sacrifices of this new priesthood—praising God. Hebrews 13:15 refers to “a sacrifice of praise.” Romans 12:1 speaks of the spiritual worship of offering our “bodies as a living sacrifice” to God. Although Peter did not name the sacrifice of our bodies here, the entire passage implies it. Such a sacrifice of praise is merited by the nature of what God has done for us in Christ. He has called us out of the darkness of our world into His marvelous light in Christ.

**2:10.** Peter then applied Hosea 2:23 to these largely Gentile congregations. Once they did not belong to God’s people Israel, but then they became part of God’s people, the church. Formerly they knew nothing of God’s mercy to

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Israel, but then they received mercy through the Lord Jesus Christ. Many believers have a faulty sense of identity as Christians. They may see themselves only as church members or as possessing a certainty of a home in heaven. Such believers can find their lives transformed by understanding they are part of something far greater than themselves. They belong to the new people of God. God now lives in them. They are priests serving before God, offering up the sacrifice of praise to Him amid a perverted and lost world.

- **What truths did Peter present in these verses as characteristics of individual believers and the church who are sent out as Christ's witnesses?**
  
- **Of the descriptions presented—living stones, spiritual house, holy priesthood, chosen people, royal priesthood, holy nation, people of God—which stands out to you as especially significant?**
  
- **What do these descriptions communicate to the world about Jesus, the One of whom we witness?**

- **As both the church and individual believers, Peter referred to us as chosen people, a royal priesthood. What effect does that have on your relationship with people in and outside of the church?**
  
- **How does it affect your relationship with God?**

> **Read 1 Peter 2:11-12.**

*Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. <sup>12</sup> Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*

**2:11.** Peter addressed these believers as “temporary residents,” forms of which were used in chapter 1 (vv. 1,17). Like this term, “aliens” also was used first of Jews in the dispersion following the Babylonian exile. Here they refer to Christians as exiles on this earth. As God’s new people and new priesthood, the readers were to draw back from every temptation to satisfy the desires of the flesh. “Fleshly” does not mean simply “bodily.” “Flesh” in the New Testament refers to human desires that do not result from the Holy Spirit’s work. The unspiritual desires war against you, Peter wrote. Fleshly desires are not only sinful, they also are self-destructive.

**2:12.** Peter called on these believers to live such honorable lives that they would refute all the

false accusations against them. Their good works would not only give the lie to every accusation, but their deeds also would convince even their accusers that God was at work in them. “Glorify God” means both to praise God and to confess that God is always right.

- **What additional insight do verses 11-12 give us into how our identity in Christ (see vv. 4-10) is to influence our witness to the world?**
  
- **How does this way of living glorify God?**
  
- **These verses from Peter also hint at the important role our witness plays in the end times. What is that role, and how does that challenge you?**

## APPLICATION

- 1 **What is one way you've been challenged as you evaluate your own witness?**
  
- 2 **What do you see as some of the biggest hurdles in your own life to being the type of witness we've talked about today?**
  
- 3 **In what ways does our church fit together as a spiritual house? What are some areas we could improve?**

## PRAY

Pray for a greater understanding of the importance of representing Christ well as His witnesses. Pray that as we assess what a healthy church looks like, the people of FBC Madison and in your group will be challenged to reassess their investment in our church and do their part to make it a place where our purity brings glory to God.