LOGOS

Logos Online Bible Study

First Wednesdays, 7.00–8.30 pm, on Zoom

Christian Beginnings
According to the Acts of the Apostles
Session 6 – Acts 2.42–47

Acts – Chapter Two
The Birth of the Church – Overview

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Pentecost: The Phenomenon (vv 1–13)

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Pentecost: Exposition & Response (vv 14–41)
Peter's Sermon & First 'Converts'

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Pentecost: Lived Reality – Community Life (vv 42–47)

Pentecost: Lived Reality – Community Life (2.42–47)

‘They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone because many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. **44** All who believed were together and had all things in common; **45** they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. **46** Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, **47** praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.’

Pentecost: Lived Reality – Community Life (4.32–37)

‘Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. 33 With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. 35 They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. 36 There was a Levite from Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”). 37 He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.’

Pentecost: Lived Reality – Community Life (2.42–47)

‘They devoted (*proskarterountes*) themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship (*tê didachê tôn apostolôn kai tê koinônia*), to the breaking of bread (*tê klasei tou artou*) and the prayers (*tais proseuchais*). **43** Awe came upon everyone (*egineto de pasê psychê phobos*, lit, ‘there was fear in every soul’) because many wonders and signs (*terata kai sêmeia*) were being done through the apostles (*dia tôn apostolôn egineto*). **44** All who believed (*hoi pisteuontes*) were together and had all things in common (*eichon hapanta koina*); **45** they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need (*an tis chreian eichen*). **46** Day by day, as they spent much time together (*proskarterountes homothumadon*) in the temple (*en tô hierô*), they broke bread at home (*klôntes te kat oikon arton*) and ate their food with glad and generous hearts (*metelambanon trophês en agalliasei kai aphelotêti kardias*), **47** praising God and having the goodwill of all the people (*ainountes to theon kai echontes charin pros holon ton laon*). And day by day the Lord (*ho kyrios*) added to their number those who were being saved (*tous sôzomenous*).

'to the teaching of the apostles, to a communal form of life'

(*tê didachê tôn apostolôn kai tê koinônia*)

Kêrygma – Proclamation (What has God done?)

To announce the good news (*euangelion*) of Jesus Christ / to engender a (positive) response

'Therefore, let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah this Jesus whom you crucified.' (Acts 2.14–36; also Acts 10.34–43; Cor 15.1–5; Rom 10.8–17)

Didachê – Teaching (What does this mean?)

To introduce and explain Christian beliefs and how they inform Christian living

'And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease to teach and proclaim Jesus as the Messiah (*didaskontes kai euangelizomenoi ton Christon Iêsoun*).' (Acts 5.42; also Acts 18.11; Rom 12–15; 1 Cor 11–14)

Katêchêsis - Instruction (How to embrace the faith?)

More structured teaching in the Christian Way in preparation for Initiation

'[Apollos] had been instructed in the Way of the Lord (*katêchêmenos tên hodon tou kyriou*), and he taught accurately the things concerning Jesus …' (Acts 18.25; also 1 Cor 14.19; Gal 6.6)

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'This, too, the presbyter used to say. "Mark, who had been Peter's interpreter, wrote down carefully, but not in order, all that he remembered of the Lord's sayings and doings. For he had not heard the Lord or been one of his followers, but later, as I said, one of Peter's. Peter used to adapt his teachings to the occasion, without making a systematic arrangement of the Lord's sayings, so that Mark was quite justified in writing down some things just as he remembered them. For he had one purpose only – to leave out nothing that he had heard, and to make no misstatement about it.' (Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis [125-50 CE]; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.15)

'For the apostles, in the memoirs composed by them, which are called Gospels …'

(Justin Martyr [c100–165 CE], *First Apology* 66)

'to the teaching of the apostles, to a communal form of life'

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"They devoted themselves to the apostles' … fellowship (*tê koinônia*) … All who believed were together and had all things in common (*koina*) … Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common (*koina*)." (Acts 2.42, 44; 4.32)

'God is faithful, by whom you were called into the partnership (*koinônian)* of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord … The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing *(koinônia)* in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing *(koinônia)* in the body of Christ? … as you share *(koinônoi)* in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation … The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion *(koinônia)* of the Holy Spirit be with all of you … they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship *(koinônias)* … for your partnership *(koinônia)* in the gospel …any partnership *(koinônia)* in the Spirit … the sharing *(koinônia)* of his sufferings … so that you also may have fellowship *(koinônian)* with us, and truly our fellowship *(koinônia)* is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.' (1 Cor 1.9; 10.16; 2 Cor 1.7; 13.13; Gal 2.9; Phil 1.5; 2.1; 3.10; 1 John 1.3)

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<u>Sabbath-Jubilee Year Provision (cf Luke 4.16–21)</u>

'Every seventh year … There will, however, be no one in need among you … If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbour. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be.' (Deut 15.1–18)

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<u>Qumran Community (Essenes?)</u>

'[The Master shall teach the sai]nts to live(?) [according to the Book] of the Community (*hayâchad*) [Rul]e, as He commanded by the hand of Moses and all His servants the prophets … All those who freely devote themselves to His truth shall bring all their knowledge, powers and possessions into the Community of God (*byachad êl*), that they may purify their knowledge in the truth of God's precepts and order their powers according to His ways of perfection and all their possessions according to His righteous counsel.' (1QS 1.1, 10–15)

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<u>Essene Community</u>

'Riches they despise, and their community of goods (*koinônikon*) is truly admirable; you will not find one among them distinguished by greater opulence than another. They have a law that new members on admission to the sect shall confiscate their property to the order, with the result that you will nowhere see either abject poverty or inordinate wealth; the individual's possessions join the common stock and all, like brothers, enjoy a single patrimony … There is no buying or selling among themselves, but each gives what he has to any in need and receives from him in exchange something useful to himself; they are, moreover, freely permitted to take anything from any of their brothers without making any return … Members may of their own motion help the deserving, when in need, and supply food to the destitute … they are masters of their temper, champions of fidelity, very ministers of peace.' (Josephus [c 36 – c 100 CE], *Jewish War* 2.122–123, 127, 134–36; also Philo [c 20 BCE – c 50 CE], *Hypothetica* 11. 4–5, 10–12 & *Every Good Man is Free* 79, 85–87)

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<u>Community of Friends</u>

'Again, the proverb says, "Friends' goods are common property (*koina to philôn*)," and this is correct, since community is the essence of friendship (*en koinonia gar hê philia*) brothers have all things in common (*panta koina*), and so do members of a comradeship; other friends hold special possessions in common, more or fewer in different cases, inasmuch as friendships vary in degree … 'Moreover, all the proverbs agree with this; for example, "Friends have one soul (*mia psychê*) between them," "Friends' goods are common property (*koina ta philôn*)" …' (Aristotle [384–322 BCE], *Nicomachean Ethics* 1159b & 1168b; cf Plato [c428–c348 BCE], "After all, you're both friends, aren't you?" "Very much so," they both said. "Well it's said that what friends have they have in common (*oukoun koina ta ge philôn*) …' (Plato [c428–c348 BCE], *Lysis* 207c; also 'Friends … all things in common (*omnia communia*) …' (Seneca [4 BCE–65 CE], *De Beneficiis* 7.4 & 7.12; Cicero [106–43 BCE], *De Officiis* 1.53–58)

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Community of Goods – All Things in Common (*eichon hapanta koina*)

'We can conclude that the usage of the phrase, and the concepts behind it, had a variety of applications, with different degrees of sharing, and different degrees of formality … its primary use was to describe the result of an ideal friendship, friends sharing with one another as a family, as well as to lay out political applications of the friendship ideal.'

Roman A Montero, 'Christian *Koinônia*: Acts 2.42–47 and 4.32–37
as Descriptions of Normative Christian Practice,' p 5

‘to the breaking of bread’

(*tê klasei tou artou*)

<u>Shared Meal and/or Sacramental Ritual?</u>

‘Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me” … When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them … how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread …They devoted themselves … to the breaking of bread … they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts … when we met to break bread … After he had said this, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all, he broke it and began to eat.’ (Luke 22.19; 24.30, 35; Acts 2.42, 46; 20.7, 27.35)

‘The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread … For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread … For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes …’ (1 Cor 10.16; 11.23, 26)

‘to the breaking of bread’

(*tê klasei tou artou*)

Shared Meal and/or Sacramental Ritual?

‘When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord’s supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you proceeds to eat your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. What! Do you not have households to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?’ (1 Cor 11.20–22)

‘Now we command you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from every brother or sister living irresponsibly and not according to the tradition that they received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not irresponsible when we were with you, and we did not eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with toil and labour we worked night and day so that we might not burden any of you. This was not because we do not have that right but in order to give you an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: anyone unwilling to work should not eat. For we hear that some of you are living irresponsibly, mere busybodies, not doing any work. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.’ (2 Thess 3.6–12)

‘and the prayers’

(*tais proseuchais*)

Set prayers – Jewish (eg Psalter, 18 Benedictions)
or Christian (eg Lord’s Prayer, Christian Psalms or Hymns)?

Praying – devotional, corporate, bestowal of the Holy Spirit,
commissioning for service, seeking guidance, performing healings

‘… constantly devoting themselves to prayer … Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer … When they had prayed …they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness … while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word … They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them … While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” … The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit … Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, “Tabitha, get up.” Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up … He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God.’ (Acts 1.14; 3.1; 4.31; 6.4, 6; 7.59; 8.15; 9.40; 10.2)

‘many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles’

(*polla te terata kai semeia dia tôn apostolôn egineto*)

‘Peter said, “I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth (*en tô onomati Iêsou Christou tou Nazôraiou),* stand up and walk” … But Paul … “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ (*en onomati Iêsou Christou),* to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.’ (Acts 3.6; 16.18)

Peter (Acts 3.1–10; 5.15–16; 9.32–35, 36–41); Paul (14.8–11; 16.16–18; 19.11–12; 20.9–12; 28.8, 9); Paul and Barnabas (14.3); Ananias (9.17–19); Philip (8.6–7); Stephen (6.8); unspecified (2.43).

‘Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs (*dynamesin kai terasin kai sêmeiois*) that God did through him among you … how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.’ (Acts 2.22 & 10.38)

Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick … Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, “The kingdom of God has come near to you.’”(Luke 9.1–2 & 10.8–9)

‘many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles’

(*polla te terata kai semeia dia tôn apostolôn egineto*)

<u>According to the Apostle Paul</u>

‘For I will not be so bold as to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to win obedience from the gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit (*en dynamei sêmeiôn kai teratôn, en dynamei pneumatos),* so that from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ … My speech and my proclamation were made not with persuasive words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power (*en apodeixei pneumatos kay dynameôs*), so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God …The signs of an apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, signs and wonders and mighty works (*sêmeiois te kai terasin kai dynamesin*) … Well then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles (*energôn dynameis*) among you by your doing the works of the law or by your believing what you heard? … because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only but also in power (*en dynamei*) and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.’ (Rom 15.18–19; 1 Cor 2.4–5; 2 Cor 12.12; Gal 3.5; 1 Thess 1.5)

‘Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts’

‘One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o’clock in the afternoon … “Go, stand in the temple and tell the people the whole message about this life” … And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease to teach and proclaim Jesus as the Messiah.’ (Acts 3.1; 5.20, 42)

‘… and immediately [Paul] began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues … When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues … The same thing occurred in Iconium, where Paul and Barnabas went into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks became believers.’ (Acts 9.20; 13.5; 14.1)

‘And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease to teach and proclaim Jesus as the Messiah … As soon as he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many had gathered and were praying … After leaving the prison they went to Lydia’s home, and when they had seen and encouraged the brothers and sisters there, they departed … Then [Paul] left the synagogue and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God; his house was next door to the synagogue.’ (Acts 5.42; 12.12; 16.40; 18.7)



'Life in Community,' by Aidan Hart, The Saint John's Bible,
Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnosota, 2000.

Acts 2.42–47 – How Should these Verses be Interpreted?

These verses are almost certainly a creation of the author, Luke, and reflect not only his literary style, but also his theological convictions. With this qualification, how should these verses be understood?

Option 1

A literary creation, reflecting comparable 'Golden Age' scenarios, painting an idealised picture of Christian beginnings which bears little resemblance to what actually happened.

Option 2

An account of church life towards the end of the first century based on the author's own experience and possibly augmented with other sources.

Option 3

A reconstruction of the beginnings of Christian community in Jerusalem soon after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, drawing on testimonies Luke was able to access.

Acts 2.42–47 – How Should these Verses be Interpreted?

Although most of Jesus' ministry took place in Galilee, a number of sources corroborate Luke's witness to an early Christian community in Jerusalem (Gal 1.11–24 & 2.1–10; Rom 15.22–29; 1 Cor 16.1–4; 2 Cor 9.1–15; John 20.1–29; cf Luke 24.13–49)

These verses are most satisfactorily accounted for when understood as plausible historical reconstruction o f the early Jesus movement located in Jerusalem,based on sources available to Luke which he presents through the lens of what Spirit-inspired Christian community should look like.

Community & belonging
Jesus-centred (apostles' teaching)
Worship & prayer (temple & homes)
Shared meals (eucharistic & nutritional)
Mutual support & accountability
Life-affirming & welcoming
Tolerated & respected
Community of goods

Acts 2.42–47 – A Community of Goods?

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

<u>A fully organised community of goods</u>

Believers were required to surrender their material resources
for mutual support, especially care for the needy

<u>Voluntary redistribution in response to need</u>

Believers retained ownership of material resources, but put them at the disposal
of the community for mutual support, especially care for the needy

<u>Idealised portrayal of early Christian community</u>

Possibly based on actual cases of exemplary generosity, Luke has presented philanthropy
as a defining characteristic of Spirit-inspired community

Acts 2.42–47 – A Community of Goods?

'But a man named Ananias, with the consent of his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property; with his wife's knowledge, he kept back some of the proceeds and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles' feet. "Ananias," Peter asked, "why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, were not the proceeds at your disposal?"' (Acts 5.1–4)

I do not say this as a command, but I am, by mentioning the eagerness of others, testing the genuineness of your love. For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. And in this matter I am giving my opinion: it is beneficial for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something. Now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have. For I do not mean that there should be relief for others and hardship for you, but it is a question of equality between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may also supply your need, in order that there may be equality. As it is written, "The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little (Exod 16.18)."' (2 Cor 8.8–15)."

Community of Goods

‘Now at that time there dwelt in this country not only the other classes of the citizens who were occupied in the handicrafts and in the raising of food from the soil, but also the military class, which had been separated off at the commencement by divine heroes and dwelt apart. It was supplied with all that was required for its sustenance and training, and none of its members possessed any private property, but they regarded all they had as the common property of all; and from the rest of the citizens they claimed to receive nothing beyond a sufficiency of sustenance; and they practised all those pursuits which were mentioned yesterday, in the description of our proposed “Guardians.”’ (Plato, *Critias* 110c-d)

"A Golden Age"

'Golden was that first age, which, with no one to compel, without a law, of its own will, kept faith and did the right. There was no fear of punishment, no threatening words were to be read on brazen tablets; no suppliant throng gazed fearfully upon its judge's face; but without defenders lived secure. Not yet had the pine-tree, felled on its native mountains, descended thence into the watery plain to visit other lands; men knew no shores except their own. Not yet were cities begirt with steep moats; there were no trumpets of straight, no horns of curving brass, no swords or helmets. There was no need at all of armed men, for nations, secure from war's alarms, passed the years in gentle ease. The earth herself, without compulsion, untouched by hoe or plowshare, of herself gave all things needful. And men, content with food which came with no one's seeking, gathered the arbute fruit, strawberries from the mountain-sides, cornel-cherries, berries hanging thick upon the prickly bramble, and acorns fallen from the spreading tree of Jove. Then spring was everlasting, and gentle zephyrs with warm breath played with the flowers that sprang unplanted. Anon the earth, untilled, brought forth her stores of grain, and the fields, though unfallowed, grew white with the heavy, bearded wheat. Streams of milk and streams of sweet nectar flowed, and yellow honey was distilled from the verdant oak.'

(Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.88–111)

Acts 2.42–47 & 4.32–37 – Blueprint for the Monastic Life

(especially community living [cenobitic]; cf solitary [eremitic])

Pachomius (292–346 CE, architect of monastic life)

Born in Upper Egypt, he encountered Christianity when serving at a soldier in Rome's North African army. On discharge, he soon joined the hermit Palemon and a colony of solitaries (anchorites) at Tabennisi on the river Nile. From there, he formed the first monastic enclosure and created the first common rule of life. At the time of his death, Pachomius had founded 11 monasteries comprising 7,000 monks and nuns.

'We should love one another and show that we are truly servants of the Lord Jesus Christ and sons of Pachomius and disciples of the Koinonia … We read in the Acts of the Apostles: "The multitude of believers was of one heart and soul, and no one called anything his own; rather they held everything in common. The apostles gave witness to the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus with great power" (Acts 4.32–33). So those of us who live in ceonobia and are joined to one another by mutual love, should be zealous for discovering how, in this life, we may have fellowship with the holy fathers so that in the future life we may share in their lot; knowing that the Cross is the source of our doctrine, and that we must suffer along with Christ (Romans 8.17).' (*Liber Orsiesii* 23 & 50, an early primer in pachomian spirituality)

Acts 2.42–47 & 4.32–37 – Blueprint for Social Justice

Gerrard Winstanley (1609–1676) founder of the Diggers, Surrey

Born in Wigan, he worked as a cloth merchant until his business collapsed. Around 1648, he broke with the Church of England, moving toward an abstract mysticism that viewed 'Reason' as an inner divine guide in every person. On 1 April 1649, he and co-founder William Everard led a group of poor settlers to occupy and cultivate common waste land on St George's Hill in Weybridge, Surrey. They proclaimed that the earth was a 'common treasury' meant to be shared freely by all of humanity, opposing private property, land enclosures and the like. Local landowners and authorities used legal harassment and hired force to beat the Diggers and destroy their colonies. Winstanley later appealed to Oliver Cromwell, proposing a moneyless commonwealth, though it was never implemented. After the collapse of the movement, Winstanley later joined the Quakers.

'Leave of this buying and selling of land, or of the fruits of the earth, and as it was in the light of Reason first made, so let it be in action, amongst all a common treasurie; not enclosing or hedging in any part of earth, saying, this is mine; which is rebellion and high treason against the King of Righteousnesse; and let this word of the Lord be acted amongst all; work together, eat bread together. Act 4.32.'

The New Law of Righteousness

Logos Online Bible Study

First Wednesdays, 7.00–8.30 pm, on Zoom

Christian Beginnings
According to the Acts of the Apostles

Next Time
Wednesday 2nd December 2026

Session 7 – Acts 3.1–10 & 4.1–12

Please read beforehand