

The Commission

Acts 1: 1-11

Acts 1: 1-3

The beginning segment of Acts is written as a prologue. It briefly summarizes what Luke wrote in his gospel more thoroughly: the things Jesus did and began to teach in his first book, and sets up the reader with the major theme of the book in v.8 which is to be witnesses for Jesus to the ends of the earth. He tells Theophilus that the disciples were eyewitnesses to Jesus' ministry: his teachings about the Kingdom of God, his miracles and signs which attested to his claim of being the Son of God. They were witnesses to the horrific crucifixion fulfilling the prophecies regarding the Messiah, the Lamb of God. And they were eyewitnesses to his resurrected presence and his ascension to Heaven.

Luke addressed this letter to Theophilus. In Greek, Theophilus means One who loves God. This name has caused scholars to abound in a variety of theories behind this name. Some propose that Theophilus never existed. Conceivably it could be Luke's way of addressing *all* who love God, and is possibly one of the Lord's divine puns! The Bible has used names to convey meaning to different people and situations before. Certainly we are ones who love God, and Luke's message is for us, too; otherwise, the Holy Spirit wouldn't have assured its continued use and reverence throughout the centuries.

Theophilus is a very common Greek name of the first century and its use is well documented up through the 3rd century. That being the case, a purely symbolic dedication using the name Theophilus seems unlikely. More aptly, Theophilus was a Christian whom Luke knew and was encouraging in the faith. Luke had already instructed him in the details and eyewitness accounts of Jesus' ministry in the Gospel of Luke to shore up the man's faith, as well as anyone else who would come in contact with his writing. Most certainly Luke intended this account of the formation and growth of the church as recorded in Acts to spread along with the Gospel as it is its sequel. Other scholars have suggested that Theophilus was Luke's patron who helped defray the cost of creating this book. Certainly, this book was written to the benefit of believers across the Roman Empire as well as those new in the faith, but special dedication to Theophilus may have been from gratitude for financial support.

As we get started today in the beginning of Acts, we are actually retracing a few steps from our study of the Gospels. If you were part of that study you will recall that we ended with Jesus being taken up to Heaven while the disciples were gathered around him, as recorded in the Gospel of Luke. Acts verse 3 summarizes that Jesus was with them after his suffering (his crucifixion) and gave them "*many convincing proofs that he was alive*". Luke tells us that Jesus

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was with the disciples for 40 days imparting a last few lessons and instructions regarding the Kingdom of God and preparing them for when he would no longer be leading them in this earthly ministry.

Notice that Luke begins his story while Jesus is *in the middle* of talking about the *promised* coming of the Holy Spirit and the command to wait in Jerusalem. Seemingly out of nowhere the apostles (we must call them that now, they are no longer just disciples, learning from their master and teacher; they now are the teachers sent out to teach new followers in the faith) suddenly ask Jesus if he's now going to establish or restore the kingdom to Israel. They are thinking of a physical, political kingdom separate from Rome. Where did this tangent come from? Why are they asking this now while Jesus is talking about the Holy Spirit, which is not of a physical kingdom, but of the Kingdom of God? I'd like us to take the time today to walk through the scriptures slowly, almost verse by verse so we can see why the apostles are linking a political kingdom with the coming of the Holy Spirit. We'll also see something amazing about the promise of the Holy Spirit coming to the followers of Jesus that isn't readily observed in just reading the scriptures presented in this week's homework.

Acts 1:3-10

Starting in verse 3 we have Luke narrating the beginning of the story that is Christ's spiritual ministry to encompass the world in the Kingdom of God. Where the Gospel had been Jesus' earthly ministry, we now transition to his spiritual ministry led by the Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus' earthly ministry began with a period of preparation, so too will the apostle commence the spiritual ministry with a time of preparation. Verse 3 reads, "*He [Jesus] appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke to them about the kingdom of God.*" These forty days are a period of transition for the disciples as they graduate from being "disciples" to becoming "apostles". This time period is Jesus' completion of his earthly ministry, wherein he finishes teaching his disciples and prepares them for their ministry to the rest of the world. Let's dwell on the significance of the number 40 for a few minutes.

- Jesus spent 40 days in the desert wilderness being tempted by Satan (Luke 4). These forty days were in preparation for his earthly ministry. These forty days came just prior to his embarking on his ministry.
- Jesus spent 40 days with the apostles between his resurrection and the ascension preparing The Eleven for their world wide ministry after Jesus' heavenward departure.
- Literal 40 days. Pentecost falls 50 days from Passover. Jesus was crucified on Passover, the Resurrection comes on the third day, appearances for 40 days, and about a week of prayer for the disciples before Pentecost, the day they also receive the Holy Spirit.

Verses 4-5 introduce who will be leading this new phase of ministry. Jesus instructs the apostles, "*Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with*

the Holy Spirit.” Jesus’ words recall that John’s baptism with water was a call to repentance, an outward sign of turning one’s life back to God. John prophesied in Luke 3:16 that one was coming who would baptize with fire. This continues as a theme throughout Acts as new converts confess the name of Jesus and receive a baptism of water as an outward sign of their faith and repentance and also receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

We must understand the fact that prior to and during Jesus’ ministry, there is no reference to the Holy Spirit indwelling anyone other than Jesus. The Spirit descended upon him at his baptism (Luke 3:22). The Spirit filled him as he returned from the Jordan (Luke 4:1). It led him in and out of the wilderness (Luke 4:1 & 14). It rested upon him during his sermon at Nazareth (Luke 4:18). There is no other person in history up until the time of Jesus with whom the Spirit dwelt. It had been *with* Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Spirit of God made itself and its power known to various judges and prophets. 1 Samuel 3:19-21 tells us that the Lord, or the Spirit of the Lord was “*with Samuel*” and “*revealed himself to Samuel*” through his word. 1 Samuel 17:13 tells us that the “*the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power*” at his anointing, just as it had with Saul at his anointing in 1 Samuel 10:10. Before the time of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, or Spirit of God came upon an individual for a specific reason and specific time and could retreat from that person. It was upon that person, but it did not dwell within that person as it dwelled within the tabernacle. In our study of King David we saw the disastrous results for Saul when the Spirit of the Lord departed. That vacancy left by the Spirit of the Lord was a vacuum, an empty space that drew in another spirit. With the absence of the Spirit of the Lord, Saul was overcome by another spirit – a spirit of madness, self-absorption and evil. What is to come for the apostles, and for all who claim the name of Jesus as their savior, is something all together different from what was experienced in the Old Testament.

The time had come for something radically new and different. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit was made possible by Christ’s work on the cross. A believer’s repentance and acceptance of Jesus Christ as their personal savior, their redeemer, is what justifies them, makes them “right” before the holy throne of God in the heavenlies so that the Holy Spirit can enter into and coexist with each of us individually, without fear of the Holy Spirit departing.

The followers of Jesus were awaiting that Baptism of the Holy Spirit that would be poured out upon them as flames at Pentecost. From that point the Holy Spirit would dwell or reside with them. The Spirit residing with them was a whole new concept. The same Spirit who rested upon Jesus during his ministry would empower the apostles for their ministry. And the same Jesus who taught them during his earthly life would continue to instruct them through the presence of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes to dwell in the hearts of mankind in the same fashion that the Lord dwelled in the Holy of Holies.

V. 6-8

In the minds of 1st Century Jews the advent, or coming, of the Holy Spirit was closely linked to the coming of God’s Kingdom. The Jewish mindset was that as soon as the Holy Spirit came, the Days of the Lord were upon them. *The Final Days*. The Lord, the Messiah would

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come and establish his everlasting kingdom. Joel describes this event that would lead up to the “*great and dreadful day of the LORD*”:

The Day of the Lord

²⁸ *'And afterward,*

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,

your old men will dream dreams,

your young men will see visions.

²⁹ *Even on my servants, both men and women,*

I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

³⁰ *I will show wonders in the heavens*

and on the earth,

blood and fire and billows of smoke.

³¹ *The sun will be turned to darkness*

and the moon to blood

before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

³² *And everyone who calls*

on the name of the LORD will be saved;

for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem

there will be deliverance,

as the LORD has said,

among the survivors

whom the LORD calls.

(Joel 2:28-32)

By their response to Jesus' mention of the Holy Spirit, you can see the apostles still haven't quite got their minds wrapped around Jesus' spiritual Kingdom of God in the hearts of men. They are still thinking about a physical, geographical, political Jewish Kingdom, with Jesus as their King and the Romans defeated. This is why in verse 6 they ask if Jesus is going to restore the kingdom to Israel. They anticipate Jesus to be a Messiah in the style of Moses or David delivering Israel from their enemies. Jesus brings them back in line to the spiritual kingdom in verses 7 and 8 with a firm rebuke: "*It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.*" (v.7). It is not yet time for restored *physical* kingdom. Their mission is to be a witness to the nations and peoples of the world drawing them into a spiritual kingdom.

Verse 8 says, "*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses....*" The restoration of the Kingdom involves a *world-* wide mission. Not just a mission to Jews in Judea, but beyond. It is God's original plan. The Jews were to be a light of God's truth to the world, not just to other Jews. In order to accomplish this mission, the apostles would need super-natural help in the form of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised that the disciples will receive power to witness. The verb tense here is in the imperative: You *will* (or must) receive power; and you *will* be my witnesses. The power they were to receive was divine power, in Greek *dynamis*, the same word used for the power behind Jesus' miracles in the Gospel. It is the Spirit's power. Receiving the Spirit is the preparation, or equipping, necessary

for the mission. The role of the apostles is to be the witnesses testifying to how God will restore mankind to God's *spiritual* kingdom.

V. 9-11

Our passage ends with Luke recounting the Ascension in verses 9-11. Two final miracles the followers of Jesus witnessed and can testify to Jesus' Divinity and promises. This scene reaffirms what the followers of Jesus already knew: Jesus is the Son of God. He resides in Heaven and He will return. If he has the power to depart at will, he has the power and authority to return at will. He promised to return, the apostles have no reason to expect otherwise. The appearance of angels affirms this as well "[Jesus] will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (v.11). The angels serve a second purpose. Their rebuke, "*Men of Galilee...why do you stand there looking into the sky?*", or perhaps better translated: "You Galileans, why are you gawking at the sky?" draws their attention back to the earthly realm. Can't you just see them all standing there, gazing up into the heavens trying to catch a last glimpse of their beloved Lord, standing there awe-struck and slack-jawed? What a glorious and majestic moment: Jesus rising up in to the clouds. Moments of high spiritual experience are never the ends in themselves. It was time to come down from the mountain top experience and get back to work witnessing and testifying to what they had seen. They had been commissioned with a job to do, Jesus promised that they would be equipped to fulfill that job; it was time to get themselves ready for the work ahead.