

# ***God's People, Power, Purpose & Plan***

Acts 1:1-11

January 11, 2015

INTRO: Video ***“God’s Word in Tune – Acts 1:8”***

TIMELESS TRUTH:

***God has a powerful people  
&  
a purposed plan***

***(Christ + Comforter + Christians = Church)***

PREVIEW:

- 1. Vision** (vv.1-2)
- 2. Fusion** (and Con-fusion) (vv.3-7)
- 3. Mission** (and Co-Mission) (v.8)
- 4. Ascension-Tension** (vv.9-11)

**I. VISION:** (vv.1-2)  
*In the first book,  
Theophilus, I have dealt with  
all that Jesus **BEGAN**  
to do  
and (to) teach,  
until the day when he was taken up,  
after He had given commands  
through the Holy Spirit  
to the apostles  
whom He had chosen.*

**The Church is to *FINISH...*  
what the Christ *BEGAN!***

- JDP

1. The GOSPEL
2. True DISCIPLESHIP
3. The MISSION
4. BE-ing a WITNESS
5. Teaching TRUTH
6. FAITH in the RISEN Christ alone
7. Biblical OBEDIENCE
8. Being biblically SPIRIT-LED
9. Living SENT & SET-APART
10. CHOSEN children of Amazing GRACE

## **Take-away**

*When we become the people of God and embrace  
the worship of God, we are the Church of God...  
Then our walk with God will display both  
the wonder & hope of the world.*

## **II. FUSION:** (vv.3-7) (a.k.a. *Christ's resurrection ministry*)

3 He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

4 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me;

5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.

A. Clarification (vv.3-5)

1. **PROVING**

**He presented Himself alive** to them after his suffering by **many proofs**, appearing to them during forty days and...

2. **PROVIDENCE**

speaking about the **kingdom of God**.

Acts begins (1:3) & ends on that theme (28:31)

*"A spiritual awakening  
always soars  
on the wings of the  
Word."*

- Lewis Drummond

**QUOTE:**

“Let us remember that Jesus also had the crowds leave him because of what he taught after his initial success. "This is a hard teaching," they said. "Who can accept it?" ([John 6:60](#)). But he persevered with the few who remained. [Acts 1](#) shows that even with the disciples, after more than three years of concentrated teaching, they had not really understood one of the central aspects of Jesus' teaching—the kingdom of God. But what he had taught them finally blossomed in their lives. With the empowering of the Spirit they went out, proclaimed the good news, and sparked off the most powerful revolution the world has ever seen. The words of Paul, given in a different context, apply to the ministry of teaching too: "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" ([Gal. 6:9](#)).”

### 3. *PREPARATION*

And **while staying with them** He **ordered them** not to depart from Jerusalem,

God's pledge was to be fulfilled just ten **(10) days** later on the Day of Pentecost.

Jesus, after **gathering them together,**  
**commanded them not to leave Jerusalem** (cf. [Luke 24:49](#)). To the apostles, who were no doubt fired with enthusiasm and eager to begin, that must have seemed a strange command. Yet, it illustrates an important point: **All the preparation and training that knowledge and experience can bring are useless without the proper might. Power had to accompany truth.** - John MacArthur

#### **4. PROMISED**

but to **wait for the promise** of the  
Father, which, He said,  
**“you heard from Me;**

[Ezekiel 36:25-27](#) records God's promise for all who come into the New Covenant: **"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you."** There was to come a fullness of the Spirit in some way unique to the New Covenant and for all believers. But there was also a special anointing for the apostles.

## 5. **POWER**

5for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

**The baptism with the Holy Spirit is not a special privilege for some believers, nor are believers challenged and exhorted in Scripture to seek it. It is not even their responsibility to prepare for it by praying, pleading, tarrying, or any other means. The passive voice of the verb translated be baptized indicates the baptism by Jesus Christ with the Spirit is entirely a divine activity. It comes, like salvation itself, through grace, not human effort. Titus 3:5-6 says, "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior." God sovereignly pours out the Holy Spirit on those He saves.**

- John MacArthur

### **1 Corinthians 12:13:**

*"For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."*

**The baptism with the Holy Spirit implies a full experience of the Spirit, which among other things empowers us for witness. Paul makes fullness of the Spirit mandatory for Christians with the imperative: "Be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). Here, however, the result of the fullness is true, heartfelt worship (5:19-20).**

## B. Confusion (v.6)

So when they had come together, they asked Him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

NOTE:

- How well do we LISTEN to the Lord?
- Is our FOCUS on faith or flesh?
- Country/culture vs. Christ/Church?
  
- Jesus = "kingdom of God"

vs.

- Sinners = "kingdom of us"

## QUOTE

“The verb, the noun and the adverb of their sentence all betray doctrinal confusion about the kingdom. The verb *restore* shows that they were expecting a political and territorial kingdom; the noun *Israel* that they were expecting a national kingdom; and the adverbial clause *at this time* that they were expecting its immediate establishment.” - John Stott

### C. Calibration (v.7)

He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority.

#### **Matthew 24:44 (NASB)**

*"For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.*

Note: (see Peter in **John 21:21-22**)

- Stop acting like the King...
- Start building His kingdom!

**T/S:** Okay... we've covered the VISION & the FUSION of the Church – to include some Clarification, a little Confusion (in the FUSION), and even Christ's Calibration... Now it's time to see the Church's **Commission... to live ON-Mission** (v.8)

### **III. MISSION:** (v.8)

**Verse 8** begins with "but" (*alla*), suggesting that **Jesus is presenting an alternative aspiration for the disciples. Their primary concern should not be the political power that will come with the restoration of Israel's kingdom. It should be the spiritual power that will come through the baptism with the Holy Spirit, which will enable them to be witnesses "to the ends of the earth."** **This verse presents an outline and summary of Acts. The Holy Spirit's power and witness is the theme of the book. "The geographical terms provide a sort of 'Index of Contents' ...**

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has  
come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in  
Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria,  
and to the end of the earth.”

NOTE: ***"come upon"*** =  
***"clothed in power from on high"*** (Luke 24)

\*\*\* cf. "be filled" = perpetual

\*\*\* cf. "quench the Spirit"

***"The church that lives for itself will die by itself."***  
- Anonymous

## A. Power

1. You WILL = Don't Worry (today too)
2. Promise of Pentecost
3. Divine "dynamite"

**See *Philippians 4:13!***

**See *2 Peter 1:3!***

**All believers have in them spiritual dynamite for use of gifts, service, fellowship, and witness. They need to experience the release of that power in their lives through not grieving the Spirit by sin ([Eph. 4:30](#)), and being continually filled and controlled by the Spirit ([Eph. 5:18](#)). The latter takes place as believers yield moment by moment control of their lives to Him, and is the same as yielding their minds to the Word ([Col. 3:16](#)).**

- MacArthur New Testament Commentary

### ***QUOTE!!!***

“Someone once said that 95 percent of what happens in many evangelical churches could be done without the Holy Spirit. Many people will come to these churches attracted by the comprehensive program the church offers. People want a weekly religious dose, and, in our entertainment-oriented culture, a church that provides an entertaining program will attract people, just like a good concert or sporting event will attract people. But Christian ministry is ministry in the Spirit. Without the Spirit's power, our excellent programs are ultimately futile.

So whoever we are and whatever we do for God, our great desire should be to be filled with God's Spirit so that our work will spring from his resulting power.”

**- NIV Commentator**

## B. Purpose (worship, walk, witness)

### 1. Worship (Romans 12:1-2)

*Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*

### 2. Walk (John 14:23)

*Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.*

### 3. WITNESS

**"Witness" is a key word in the Book of Acts and is used twenty-nine times as either a verb or a noun.**

A witness is somebody who tells what he has seen and heard ([Acts 4:19-20](#)).

When you are on the witness stand in court, the judge is not interested in your ideas or opinions; he only wants to hear what you know.

Our English word *martyr* comes from the Greek word translated "witness," and many of God's people have sealed their witness by laying down their lives.

Contextualizing verses:

1 Corinthians 12:3:

*Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.*

### **John 14:25-26**

**25**"These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you.  
**26**"**But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you**

**QUESTION:** (from the text...)

So.... *WHAT* exactly will HAPPEN?  
(so they may believe)

**ANSWER:** John 14:12-14

*12*"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father. *13*"Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. *14*"If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.

\*\*\* Spirit-filled, Spirit-powered & Spirit-led = witness

\*\*\* BE-ing the Beatitudes = witness

- Poor in spirit
- Mourn
- Meek
- Hunger/Thirst after R
- Merciful
- Pure in heart
- Peace-makers
- Persecuted for R

\*\*\* Sharing the Fruit of Spirit = witness

- Love
- Joy
- Peace
- Patience
- Kindness
- Goodness
- Faithfulness
- Gentleness
- Self-control

\*\*\* BE-ing salt/light... = witness

\*\*\* Following Jesus (actually FOLLOWING) = witness

\*\*\* Championing Grace = witness

\*\*\* Reverence for God = witness

\*\*\* Faith-filled families = witness

- Self-less husbands
- Submissive wives
- Biblical parents
- Obedient children

\* Faith-FULL families = witness!

\*\*\* Nurturing sheep = witness

- \*\*\* Fending off wolves = witness
- \*\*\* Confronting false teachers = witness
- \*\*\* Fighting the good fight = witness
- \*\*\* Iron sharpening iron = witness
- \*\*\* Not leaning on own understanding
- \*\*\* Bearing other's burdens
- \*\*\* Walking by faith (not by sight) = witness
- \*\*\* Giving out of need (Macedonians) = witness
- \*\*\* Going back for more... (Paul) = witness
- \*\*\* Being an encourager... (Barnabas) = witness
- \*\*\* Throwing "parties"... (Matthew) = witness
- \*\*\* Inviting others to "come & see" ( Andy) = witness
- \*\*\* Fasting & Praying = witness
- \*\*\* God-honoring praying = witness
- \*\*\* Responding to Mercy = witness

- \*\*\* Explaining the miraculous/supernatural = witness
- \*\*\* Fishing for Men = witness
- \*\*\* Ambassadorship for Christ = witness
- \*\*\* Being Persecuted (FOR the gospel) = witness
- \*\*\* Living-out "Jesus is Lord!" = witness
- \*\*\* BE-ing the Aroma of Christ = witness  
(He smells different then people think!)
- \*\*\* Living for the "Kingdom of God" = witness
- \*\*\* Making DISCIPLES! = witness
- \*\*\* Intentionally "GO-ing" = witness
- \*\*\* Serving the "least of these" = witness
- \*\*\* Contentedness = witness
- \*\*\* Serving = witness  
(I did not come to serve but to be served...)
- \*\*\* Koinonia = witness (John 17:21-24)
- \*\*\* Not loving this world = witness (1<sup>st</sup> John)

- \*\*\* Persevering to the end = witness
- \*\*\* Being Courageous inspirations= witness  
(Esther, 3 Boys, Disciples, Martyrs – Karen Watson)
- \*\*\* Teaching Truth in Love = witness (Eph. 4:14-16)
- \*\*\* Repenting = witness
- \*\*\* Forgiving = witness
- \*\*\* Restoring = witness
- \*\*\* Bearing Fruit (30, 60, 100 fold) = witness
- \*\*\* Speaking on behalf of God = witness
- \*\*\* Crucified to self = witness
- \*\*\* Obedience (no matter what!) = witness
- \*\*\* Love for one another = witness
- \*\*\* Jesus is one's life Treasure= witness

**T/S: Romans 8:14...**

*“For all who are LED by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”*

## C. Plan

1. Local...
  - a. In home
  - b. Close to home

***"The light that shines the farthest  
will shine the brightest at home."***

- Dr. Oswald Smith

2. Regional...
  - a. People you can relate to...
  - b. People you don't relate to...

3. Global...
  - a. Every Tribe
  - b. Every Tongue

# ***Witness = BE-ing...***

*the Lord's born-again,  
loving & obedient,  
Holy Spirit-filled,  
empowered, led & emboldened  
representative-servant  
in any  
environment or encounter,  
locally, regionally, & globally.*

- JDP

“...when Jesus is thinking about "the kingdom of God" ([v. 3](#)) and "the ends of the earth" ([v. 8](#)), they are thinking about their own nation. Twenty centuries later these two errors are still seen in the church.”

***“His last command  
should be "our first concern."***

- NIV Commentator

QUOTE:

*The continuing need for revival of missionary interest arises because of our natural tendency to parochialism. The challenges at home can appear to be so great that we can lose sight of our responsibility to the world. The missionary vision is usually inconvenient, for it places on us many demands to which we must respond—and that not for our benefit but for others. We may have to make structural changes we are uncomfortable with. But under Spirit-empowered, visionary leadership, we can keep this vision of missions burning.*

#### **IV. TENSION of ASCENSION:** (vv.9-11)

**v.9** = And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

**! Game-changing exclamation mark !**

Try to imagine...

Any more questions?

Could anyone or anything pull you away?

You'd be ready to witness NOW!

Remember Thomas...

Are you blessed?

**v.10** = And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes,

**! Shock & Awe complete with Angels !**

**v.11** = and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

The Lord sent His angels to put the exclamation mark  
on His exclamation mark!

- JDP

Christ ***descended miraculously*** (virgin birth)

Christ ***lived miraculously*** (sinless life)

Christ ***ministered miraculously*** (signs & wonders)

Christ ***died miraculously*** (prophetic atonement)

Christ ***rose miraculously*** (proving He is the Christ)

Christ now ***ascends miraculously*** (proving proof)

AND...

Christ ***will return miraculously – to reign*** - Amen!

## IMPORTANCE of vv.9-11

*The assurance of His coming again (vv. 9-11).* Our Lord's ascension into heaven was an important part of His ministry, for if He had not returned to the Father, He could not have sent the promised gift of the Holy Spirit ([John 16:5-15](#)). Also, in heaven today, the Saviour is our interceding High Priest, giving us the grace that we need for life and service ([Heb. 4:14-16](#)). He is also our Advocate before the Father, forgiving us when we confess our sins ([1 John 1:9-2:2](#)). The exalted and glorified Head of the church is now working with His people on earth and helping them accomplish His purposes ([Mark 16:19-20](#)).

*"The Spirit of Christ is the spirit of missions,  
and the nearer we get to Him,  
the more intensely missionary we must become."*

- Henry Martyn (1781-1812)  
Missionary to Muslims in India/Persia

**The angels stressed that this same Jesus whom they had watched ascend would one day return in just the same way as they had watched Him go into heaven. He will return in His glorified body, accompanied with clouds (cf. [Dan. 7:13](#); [Matt. 24:30](#); [26:64](#); [Rev. 1:7](#); [14:14](#)), just as at His ascension.**

**This becomes a compelling motive. No one knows when He will come, but everyone must live in anticipation that it could be in their lifetime (cf. [Rom. 13:12-14](#); [2 Peter 3:14-18](#)).**

**The truth that Christ will return provides a powerful motive to serve Him. Paul writes, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" ([2 Cor. 5:10](#)).**

**In [Revelation 22:12](#) the Lord Jesus Christ said, "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done."**

**The task of finishing the work that Jesus began, the duty of evangelizing the lost world, is a daunting one. But the Lord in His mercy from the start has provided all the spiritual resources necessary to accomplish that task. It is up to each believer to appropriate those resources and put them to use. "We must work the works of Him who sent [Jesus Christ], as long as it is day; night is coming, when no man can work" ([John 9:4](#)).**

- MacArthur New Testament Commentary

# Let's Pray

**Acts 1:3-11 (NASB)**

- <sup>3</sup> *To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.*
- <sup>4</sup> *Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me;*
- <sup>5</sup> *for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."*
- <sup>6</sup> *So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"*
- <sup>7</sup> *He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority;*
- <sup>8</sup> *but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth."*
- <sup>9</sup> *And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.*
- <sup>10</sup> *And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them.*
- <sup>11</sup> *They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."*

What kind of question is that???

When it doesn't seem to fit... FOCUS!

What is God telling us in this question???

Let God answer for Himself (v.11b)

## **CONTEXT:**

Faith in His resurrection was important to the church because their own spiritual power depended on it. Also, the message of the Gospel involves the truth of the Resurrection ([Rom. 10:9-10](#); [1 Cor. 15:1-8](#)); and, if Jesus were dead, the church would be speechless. Finally, the official Jewish position was that the disciples had stolen Jesus' body from the tomb ([Matt. 28:11-15](#)), and the believers had to be able to refute this as they witnessed to the nation.

These believers were chosen to be special witnesses of **Christ's resurrection, and that was the emphasis in their ministry** ([Acts 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:30-32](#)).

*The coming of His kingdom* ([v. 3b](#)). This refers to the reign of God over the hearts and lives of those who have trusted Him (see [Matt. 6:33](#); [Rom. 14:17](#); [1 John 3:1-9](#)). When you read the four Gospels, you discover that the Apostles had a strongly political view of the kingdom and were especially concerned about their own positions and privileges. Being loyal Jews, they longed for the defeat of their enemies and the final establishment of the glorious kingdom under the rule of King Messiah. They did not realize that there must first be a spiritual change in the hearts of the people (see [Luke 1:67-79](#)).

## **Quote:**

The important thing is not to be curious about the future but to be busy in the present, sharing the message of God's *spiritual* kingdom. This is another emphasis in the Book of Acts (see [Acts 8:12](#); [14:22](#); [20:25](#); [28:23, 31](#)).

**Acts 1:8 is a key verse. To begin with, it explains that the power of the church comes from the Holy Spirit and not from man (see [Zech. 4:6](#)).**

**God's people experienced repeated fillings of the Spirit as they faced new opportunities and obstacles ([Acts 2:4](#); [4:8, 31](#); [9:17](#); [13:9](#)).**

Ordinary people were able *to* do extraordinary things because the Spirit of God was at work in their lives. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is not a luxury; it is an absolute necessity.

**"Witness" is a key word in the Book of Acts and is used twenty-nine times as either a verb or a noun.**

**A witness is somebody who tells what he has seen and heard ([Acts 4:19-20](#)).**

**When you are on the witness stand in court, the judge is not interested in your ideas or opinions; he only wants to hear what you know.**

**Our English word *martyr* comes from the Greek word translated "witness," and many of God's people have sealed their witness by laying down their lives.**

We hear a great deal these days about "soul winning," and the emphasis is a good one. However, **while some of God's people have a calling to evangelism ([Eph. 4:11](#)), all of God's people are expected to be witnesses and tell the lost about the Saviour.**

[Acts 1:8](#) also gives us a general outline of the Book of Acts as it describes the geographical spread of the Gospel:

from Jerusalem ([Acts 1-7](#))

to Judea and Samaria ([Acts 8-9](#)),

then to the Gentiles and to the ends of the earth ([Acts 10-28](#)).

No matter where we live, as Christians we should begin our witness at home and then extend it "into all the world."

As **Dr. Oswald J. Smith** used to say:

***"The light that shines the farthest  
will shine the brightest at home."***

### IMPORTANCE of vv.9-11

***The assurance of His coming again ([vv. 9-11](#)).*** Our Lord's ascension into heaven was an important part of His ministry, for if He had not returned to the Father, He could not have sent the promised gift of the Holy Spirit ([John 16:5-15](#)). Also, in heaven today, the Saviour is our interceding High Priest, giving us the grace that we need for life and service ([Heb. 4:14-16](#)). He is also our Advocate before the Father, forgiving us when we confess our sins ([1 John 1:9-2:2](#)). The exalted and glorified Head of the church is now working with His people on earth and helping them accomplish His purposes ([Mark 16:19-20](#)).

## Angels...

As the believers watched Jesus being taken up to glory, two angels appeared and gently rebuked them. Angels play an important role in the ministry described in Acts, just as they do today, even though we cannot see them (see [Acts 5:19-20](#); [8:26](#); [10:3-7](#); [12:7-10](#), [23](#); [27:23](#)). The angels are the servants of the saints ([Heb. 1:14](#)).

The two messengers gave the believers assurance that Jesus Christ would come again, just as He had been taken from them. This seems to refer to His public "coming in clouds" ([Matt. 24:30](#); [26:64](#); [Rev. 1:7](#)) rather than to His coming for His church "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" ([1 Cor. 15:51-52](#); [1 Thes. 4:13-18](#))

- Bible Exposition Commentary

### *Teaching and Instructions Before the Ascension* **(1:2b-8)**

IN THE FORTY days before Jesus' ascension, his primary ministry related to the truth of the gospel ([vv. 2b-3](#)). (1) He gave "instructions ... to the apostles" ([v. 2](#)). The verb for instructing (*entellomai*) has the idea of commanding or giving orders. This must refer to the commands given in [verses 4](#) and [8](#) not to leave Jerusalem until the Spirit comes and to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth (cf. [Luke 24:46-48](#)). **These instructions were given "through the Holy Spirit" (v. 2), which introduces a key theme of Acts: All Christian ministry depends on the activity of the Spirit in the minister and in the ones ministered to.**

(2) Luke then reports that Jesus' appearances were proof of his resurrection ([v. 3a](#)). **The objective reality of the resurrection was the ultimate proof of the amazing claims that the apostles were to make about Jesus (17:31).** The fact that the apostles were witnesses to this resurrection was a key to their preaching. So right at the start of his book, Luke presents the resurrection as an event attested by "many convincing proofs."

(3) **Jesus "spoke about the kingdom of God" (v. 3b), which refers to the reign or rule of God and was a key to his teaching.** There are fewer references to the kingdom in Acts ([8:12](#); [19:8](#); [20:25](#); [28:23, 31](#)), but they are

**...important, considering that "the book begins (1:3) and ends on that theme (28:31)."**

In the New Testament letters, while the kingdom is mentioned, what receives emphasis is the church, the body of Christ. But **there is a close connection between the church and the kingdom (Matt. 16:18-19).** **According to the Gospels, the kingdom of God came with the events of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and it finds its consummation in the return of Christ as Judge and King.**

**Verses 4-5:** ...present the crucial promise of the gift of baptism with the Holy Spirit. The word *baptizo* basically means dip or immerse.

**Jesus' question to James and John in Mark 10:38, "Are you able ... to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized" (NASB). This extends the meaning of immersion to a deluge or an overwhelming flood of suffering.**

When Luke records this promise in his Gospel, Jesus says, "Stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" ([Luke 24:49](#)). [Acts 1:8](#) also says that when the Holy Spirit comes, the disciples will receive power. Describing what happened when this promise was fulfilled, Luke writes that the disciples "were filled with the Holy Spirit"

**(Acts 2:4). The words "power" and "filled" in these verses suggest that the baptism with the Holy Spirit involves an experience of God's fullness.**

([v. 6](#)):

Jesus had taught them about the kingdom of God,  
but....  
they kept talking about the  
kingdom of Israel.

([v. 6](#)): (teaching QUOTE)

John Stott points out that: “the verb, the noun and the adverb of their sentence all betray doctrinal confusion about the kingdom. The verb *restore* shows that they were expecting a political and territorial kingdom; the noun *Israel* that they were expecting a national kingdom; and the adverbial clause *at this time* that they were expecting its immediate establishment.”

**v.7:**

Jesus' answer about not knowing times and dates set by the Father ([v. 7](#)) is consistent with what he said elsewhere on the topic of the timing of the last things (cf. [Matt. 24:36, 42, 44](#); [25:13](#); [Luke 12:40](#)).

**Matthew 24:44 (NASB)**

*"For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.*

[Verse 8](#) begins with "but" (*alla*), suggesting that Jesus is presenting an alternative aspiration for the disciples. Their primary concern should not be the political power that will come with the restoration of Israel's kingdom. It should be the spiritual power that will come through the baptism with the Holy Spirit, which will enable them to be witnesses "to the ends of the earth." This verse presents an outline and summary of Acts. The Holy Spirit's power and witness is the theme of the book. "The geographical terms provide a sort of 'Index of Contents'...'in Jerusalem' covers the first seven chapters, 'in all Judea and Samaria' covers [8:1](#) to [11:18](#), and the remainder of the book traces the progress of the gospel outside the frontiers of the Holy Land until it at last reaches Rome."

The disciples were already witnesses... But they also needed "power" to be effective witnesses, power that would come from the Holy Spirit.

**The way the Holy Spirit makes witnesses and empowers witness must cover the entire witnessing process, and this is well illustrated in Acts.**

## BRIDGING Contexts...

**THE BOOK OF ACTS has been aptly called the "Acts of the Holy Spirit," for all that the church achieves is through the Spirit.** In this first chapter Luke shows how the church prepared for the reception of the Spirit. For us today it gives essential ingredients for Spirit-anointed ministry.

**Objective facts and subjective experience.** The first few verses of Acts show an important factor in all of Acts—that the combination of the objective and the subjective are important aspects of the Christian religion.

Acts 1 also stresses the subjective experience of Christians. Thus, verses 4-5 refer to the baptism with the Holy Spirit, which, as noted above, includes a subjective experience of the power of the Spirit. To prepare to be witnesses of these great objective truths, one must have power coming from the indwelling Holy Spirit (v. 8). Peter's sermon at Pentecost climaxed with a statement of the objective truth: "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (2:36). But in response to the people's query about what they are to do, he says that if they repent and are baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins, they "will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (2:38). The context indicates that the gift of the Holy Spirit includes, among other things, a subjective experience of him.

## **Baptism with the Holy Spirit:**

**As already noted, the references to the baptism with the Holy Spirit suggest an experience of fullness with the Spirit. When does this take place? And what type of experience is it? Over these two questions there has been much debate in the church. Part of the problem is that the experience promised to the disciples and its fulfillment were in many ways unique, unrepeatable events. The same can be said of some of the other experiences of the coming of the Spirit to new believers in Acts. As a result, we have in the church an array of interpretations of what this means today.**

**A traditional evangelical explanation is that, while in Acts there were unique experiences of this baptism with the Holy Spirit, for us today such a baptism takes place at conversion, and the term *baptism* is used for initiation into the body of Christ and the resultant experience of the Spirit.**

**But there are also many evangelicals who see this baptism as a second definite work of grace, distinct from conversion, one that usually takes place some time after conversion. It raises Christians to a higher plane in their experience and enables them to enjoy the fullness of the Spirit.**

**One of the strongest arguments for the conversion-initiation position is the apparent use of this expression for everyone in the church in**

## [1 Corinthians 12:13:](#)

***"For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."***

...there are certain things we can be sure of. **The baptism with the Holy Spirit implies a full experience of the Spirit, which among other things empowers us for witness. Paul makes fullness of the Spirit mandatory for Christians with the imperative: "Be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). Here, however, the result of the fullness is true, heartfelt worship (5:19-20).**

The ministry that the apostles will have can be fulfilled only with the Spirit's power ([1:8](#)). So important was this that they were not to launch out on the urgent mission for which they had been so consistently prepared by Christ ([1:4-5](#)) until they received this power. More urgent than the mission at this time was having the right equipment to carry out the mission.

**This, then, is the abiding principle we glean from the emphasis on baptism with the Spirit in [Acts 1](#): The fullness of the Spirit is essential for Christian life and ministry.**

- NIV Application Commentary,

### **Two implicit rebukes.**

The question that the disciples asked about the time of restoring the kingdom to Israel elicits two implicit rebukes from Christ ([vv. 6-8](#)): about eschatological inquisitiveness and about parochialism.

Despite his earlier statements that no one knows the time of the end events, they still ask him about it. And...

#### **QUOTE:**

“...when Jesus is thinking about "the kingdom of God" ([v. 3](#)) and "the ends of the earth" ([v. 8](#)), they are thinking about their own nation. Twenty centuries later these two errors are still seen in the church.”

## The Great Commission:

We have said that the Great Commission (1:8) gives something of an outline and summary of Acts. This is an indication how important this commission is. Acts 10:42 contains another form of this commission. "He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead." Each of the four Gospels has a different form of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:21), and each one presents unique facets of the commission. We do not know when Acts 10:42 was uttered, but all the others were uttered between the resurrection and the ascension. We must, then, conclude that this commission was uppermost in Christ's thinking during the days before his ascension.

This realization clearly implies that ...

***“His last command  
should be "our first concern."***

As the book of Acts unfolds, we see that not only the apostles but also the other Christians were active in witness (8:1, 4). In the same way we too must witness for him. **Yet for our witness to be effective, it must be witness; that is, it must come out of a first-hand knowledge of the risen Christ.**

## **The Holy Spirit and mission:**

*This passage shows us how important the Holy Spirit is to our understanding of mission and how important mission is to our understanding of the Holy Spirit (vv. 2, 5, 8).*

The rest of the book of Acts expounds this theme. The Spirit is the one who regenerates and sanctifies us so that we experience the risen Christ to whom we witness ([vv. 4-5](#); cf. [John 3:5-8](#)). He fills individuals with special anointings to face special challenges in witness ([Acts 4:8, 31](#); [6:10](#); [7:55](#); [13:9](#)). He gives boldness in witness ([4:9-13, 31](#); [13:9-11](#)) and encourages his people in a way that helps them to grow in numbers ([9:31](#)). Just as the Spirit enabled the first Christians to speak in other tongues ([2:4](#)), he is the one who gives the words to speak in witness, in keeping with the promise of Christ ([Mark 13:11](#)). He directs people to special witnessing situations ([10:19](#)) and forbids them to go to some places they want to go ([16:6-7](#)). He calls people to their special mission ([13:2](#)) and sends them on their way ([13:4](#)). Finally, he directs the church to important doctrines relating to the mission of the church ([15:28](#)). The Christian mission and ministry, then, can only be done in the power of the Spirit.

## CONTEMPORARY Application:

**Acts 1** is the teaching "about the kingdom of God," which includes the importance of submitting to the rule of the transcendent God. This is the last thing that postmodern people want to do. Rather than looking for a God out there, they are discovering the god within them. New Age analyst Theodore Roszak says that our goal is "to awaken the god who sleeps at the root of the human being." This is one reason why the New Age movement has grown so rapidly in this era. There we have enough of the divine to satisfy the incurable religiosity of the human being (this is something that secular humanism of the modern era could not do). But the divine here is not a transcendent, supreme God, for such a god would be an affront to the quest for self-actualization that many are involved in. What we have instead is a pantheistic approach to reality, where everything, including ourselves, is part of the divine. **Swami Mukthananda**, who had a great influence on Werner Erhard (founder of EST and FORUM), captures this mood well: "Kneel to your own self. Honor and worship your own being. God dwells within you as you."

In summary, the gospel clashes with the pluralism, the subjectivism, and the pantheism of our day. Finding relevant and effective ways of presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ is a great challenge, to which we must devote ourselves with much vigor and commitment. On the one hand, we have an evangelistic responsibility to adapt our methods so that the unchanging gospel is communicated in a way that will make our people want to listen to it. On the other hand, we have the pastoral responsibility of helping develop Christians who know how to study and apply the Scriptures to their daily lives—that is, people who practice their belief in the supreme authority of Scripture in a postmodern world.

## **Bible teaching in preparation for revival:**

In a study of Josiah's revival, Lewis Drummond writes:

*"A spiritual awakening always soars  
on the wings of the Word."*

### **QUOTE:**

“Let us remember that Jesus also had the crowds leave him because of what he taught after his initial success. "This is a hard teaching," they said. "Who can accept it?" ([John 6:60](#)). But he persevered with the few who remained. [Acts 1](#) shows that even with the disciples, after more than three years of concentrated teaching, they had not really understood one of the central aspects of Jesus' teaching—the kingdom of God. But what he had taught them finally blossomed in their lives. With the empowering of the Spirit they went out, proclaimed the good news, and sparked off the most powerful revolution the world has ever seen. The words of Paul, given in a different context, apply to the ministry of teaching too: "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" ([Gal. 6:9](#)).”

**Unbalanced emphases.**

Each of the emphases within the church regarding the Holy Spirit can lead to unbalanced Christianity. The danger with the conversion-initiation interpretation is that it can take away a yearning for God's fullness and create a class of half-baked Christians who are not experiencing everything that God wishes them to enjoy.

On the other hand, those who emphasize the idea that the baptism with the Spirit empowers one for mission can neglect the vitally important aspect of living holy lives and having the fruit of the Spirit. This is happening so often now that it should be a major concern that the charismatic movement must address. ([1 Thess. 5:19-24](#))

### **SUMMARY Quote:**

[Acts 1](#) implies that ministry should not be done without the minister's experiencing the Spirit. Often Christian workers with serious spiritual problems refuse advice to stop their work and spend some time alone with God, trying to get their spiritual life back together. Usually the reason given is that their work will crumble if they take such a break. But even more serious than that is to have people doing God's work in the flesh, for then the most noble work is being done in an ignoble way and God's name is being dishonored.

It is easy for us to get distracted and find security in other things that serve as substitutes to the power of the Spirit. Excellent programming using the best of modern technology, management techniques, and building facilities can produce impressive results. Someone once said that 95 percent of what happens in many evangelical churches could be done without the Holy Spirit. Many people will come to these churches attracted by the comprehensive program the church offers. People want a weekly religious dose, and, in our entertainment-oriented culture, a church that provides an entertaining program will attract people, just like a good concert or sporting event will attract people. But Christian ministry is ministry in the Spirit. Without the Spirit's power, our excellent programs are ultimately futile.

So whoever we are and whatever we do for God, our great desire should be to be filled with God's Spirit so that our work will spring from his resulting power.

### **Parochialism.**

The second implied rebuke in Jesus' answer to the disciples' question about restoring the kingdom to Israel is about their parochialism. His reply is in terms of "the ends of the earth." According to the New Testament, there is no room in the Christian life for parochialism, racism, and prejudice. We will look at the issues of prejudice when we discuss Peter's visit to the home of Cornelius ([Acts 10](#)).

What we see in [Acts 1](#) is a parochialism of such heightened interest in one's own affairs that there was relatively no interest in the affairs of others. Jesus' answer was to develop a mission orientation—a reminder to us that our responsibility does not stop until the gospel has reached "to the ends of the earth."

At various times in its history, the church has lost its vision for the world. But God always called key servants and opened their minds to understand the Scriptures and what they have to say about the church's mission to the world ([Luke 24:45-48](#)). When the Protestant movement was missing this emphasis, for example, God sent people like the...

*Moravians and John Wesley (1703-1791)—who said,*

***"The world is my parish" —to bring it back.***

**QUOTE:** *The continuing need for revival of missionary interest arises because of our natural tendency to parochialism. The challenges at home can appear to be so great that we can lose sight of our responsibility to the world. The missionary vision is usually inconvenient, for it places on us many demands to which we must respond—and that not for our benefit but for others. We may have to make structural changes we are uncomfortable with. But under Spirit-empowered, visionary leadership, we can keep this vision of missions burning. William Booth was too old and sick to attend one of the important anniversaries of the Salvation Army. So he sent a telegram, which was not to be opened until the anniversary meeting. It contained only one word: "Others." William Temple is credited with the statement: "The Christian church is the one organization in the world that exists purely for the benefit of non-members." Mission!*

## Great Commission Christians.

Like a good motivator, Jesus constantly kept before his disciples a vision of the work they had been entrusted with. This is a good model for all leaders. Often people in the rank and file can get so engrossed in their particular work that they lose sight of the grand vision. Some may become so involved in maintenance or fighting fires that they lose sight of the vision. Consequently, demotivation and stagnation set in, which result in slow death. As someone has said, "The church that lives for itself will die by itself." Swiss theologian Emil Brunner once wrote, "A church exists by mission as fire exists by burning."

Leaders have the responsibility to place this grand vision before the people. Jesus is our model here. He talked of the significance of this mission ([Matt. 24:14](#)); he presented the need and the challenge to the people ([9:36-38](#)); he responded to objections to it ([John 4:35-38](#)); he gave himself as the model to follow ([20:21](#)); he showed them where it should be done ([Matt. 28:19](#); [Mark 16:15](#); [Acts 1:8](#)) and how it should be done ([Matt. 10:5-42](#); [28:19-20](#); [Luke 24:46-48](#); [Acts 1:8](#)). Note how there was creativity, variety, motivation, and instruction in the way he presented this commission. Following this example is one of the greatest responsibilities of a leader.

**It is the responsibility of Christian leaders first to burn with passion themselves for mission and to pay the price of such commitment (see [1 Cor. 9](#)); then, out of the credibility won from such passionate commitment, they must constantly keep the vision of mission before the people they lead.**

If something that the Bible testifies about is not true in our lives, we must stop all our activity and grapple with God until we know that it is true for us, just as the disciples waited in Jerusalem, devoting themselves to prayer ([1:14](#)).

### ***[The Ascension \(1:9-11\)](#)***

JESUS' ASCENSION TAKES place after his giving the Great Commission for the last time ([v. 9](#)). In the early church the ascension was associated with Christ's exaltation to God's right hand (see [Eph. 1:20-21](#); [Phil. 2:9](#); [Heb. 1:3](#); [2:9](#)). The expression "he was taken up" carries this idea, for "the Jews thought of heaven as 'above' and earth as 'below.'" The cloud also expresses this thought, "for in biblical language the cloud often served as a symbol of divine glory (cf., e.g., [Ex. 16:10](#); [Psa. 104:3](#))." The words "before their very eyes" show that Luke wants us to know that "something objective took place."

The upward gaze of the disciples is interrupted by the appearance of two men ([v. 10](#)), whose white clothes suggest that they are angels (see [Matt. 28:2-3](#); [John 20:12](#)). **There is a mild rebuke implied in their question about standing and "looking ... into the sky" ([v. 11a](#)).** It reminds us of the angelic rebuke that the women received as they were looking for the living among the dead ([Luke 24:5](#)). **The disciples always seem to be one step behind the surprising moves of God!**

LIKE THE PREVIOUS PASSAGE, this one continues the preparation of the church for Pentecost and for launching out on its mission. Again we will see principles that help the church today in preparing for mission.

**The importance of the ascension.** Though Jesus' ascension ([vv. 9-11](#)) is not often mentioned today among Christians, "in the primitive preaching the resurrection and ascension of Jesus represent one continuous movement and together constitute his exaltation."

- NIV Application Commentary

## Verse 9

*While they beheld.* While they *saw him*. It was of importance to state that circumstance, and to state it distinctly. It is not affirmed in the New Testament that they *saw him rise* from the dead; because the evidence of that fact could be better established by their seeing him *after* he was risen. But the truth of his *ascension to heaven* could not be confirmed in that manner. Hence it was so arranged as that he should ascend in open day; in the presence of his apostles; and that not when they were asleep, or indifferent, but when they were engaged in a conversation that should fix the attention, and when they were looking upon him.

Had Jesus vanished secretly, or in the night, the apostles would have been amazed and confounded; perhaps they would even have doubted whether they had not been deceived. But when they *saw* him leave them in this manner, they could not doubt that he had risen; and when they saw him ascend *to heaven*, they could not doubt that his work was approved, and that God would carry it onward. This event was exceedingly important.

(1.) It was a confirmation of the truth of the Christian religion.

(2.) It enabled the apostles to state distinctly *where* the Lord Jesus was, and *at once* directed their affections and their thoughts away from the earth, and opened their eyes on the glory of the scheme of religion they were to establish. If their Saviour was in *heaven*, it settled the question about the *nature* of his kingdom. It was clear that it was not designed to be a temporal kingdom. The *reasons* why it was proper that the Lord Jesus should ascend to heaven rather than remain on earth, were,

(1.) that he had *finished* the work which God gave him to do on the earth, [John 17:24](#), [19:30](#) and it was proper that he should be received back to the glory which he had with the Father before the world was, [John 17:4,15](#), [Philippians 2:6,9,10](#).

(2.) It was proper that *he* should ascend, that the Holy Spirit might come down and perform *his* part of the work of redemption. Jesus, by his *personal* ministry, as a man, could be but in one place; the Holy Spirit could be in all places, and be present at all times, and could apply the work to all men. [John 16:7](#).

(3.) A *part* of the work of Christ was yet to be performed in heaven. That was the work of *intercession*. The high priest of the Jews not only made an atonement, but also presented the blood of sacrifice before the mercy-seat, as the priest of the people, [Leviticus 16:11-14](#). This was done to typify the entrance of the great High Priest of our profession into the heavens, [Hebrews 9:7,8,11,12](#). The work which he performs there is the work of *intercession*, [Hebrews 7:25](#). This is properly the work which an advocate performs in a court of justice for his client. It means that Christ, our great High Priest, still pleads and manages our cause in heaven; secures our interests; obtains for us grace and mercy. It consists in his appearing in the presence of God for us, [Hebrews 9:24](#); in his presenting the merits of his blood, [Hebrews 9:12,14](#) and in securing the continuance of the mercy which has been bestowed on us, and which is still needful for our welfare. The Lord Jesus also ascended that he might assume and exercise the office of *King* in the immediate seat of power. All worlds were subject to him for the welfare of the church; and it was needful that he should be solemnly invested with that power in the presence of God, as the reward of his earthly toils. [1 Corinthians 15:25](#), "He must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet." [Ephesians 1:20-22](#); [Philippians 2:6-11](#).

*A cloud received him.* He entered into the region of the clouds, and was hid from their view. But *two* others of our race have been taken bodily from earth to heaven. Enoch was translated, ([Genesis 5:24](#); comp. [Hebrews 11:5](#)) and Elijah was taken by a whirlwind to heaven, [2 Kings 2:11](#). It is remarkable that when the *return* of the Saviour is mentioned, it is uniformly said that he will return *in the clouds*, [Acts 1:11](#); [Matthew 24:30](#), [26:64](#), [Mark 13:26](#), [Revelation 1:7](#), [Daniel 7:13](#). The clouds are an emblem of sublimity and grandeur, and perhaps this is all that is intended by these expressions. [Deuteronomy 4:11](#), [2 Samuel 12:12](#), [Psalms 97:2](#), [104:3](#).

# v.11

*In like manner*, etc. In clouds, as he ascended. [Acts 1:9](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:16](#). This address was designed to comfort the disciples. Though their Master and Friend was taken from them, yet he was not removed for ever. He would come again with similar majesty and glory, for the vindication of his people, and to tread all his enemies under his feet.

The *design* for which he will come, will be to judge the world, [Matthew 25](#). There will be an evident fitness and propriety in his coming.

(1.) Because his appropriate work in heaven as Mediator shall be accomplished; his people shall have been saved; the enemy subdued; death shall have been conquered; and the gospel shall have shown its power in subduing *all forms* of wickedness; in removing the effects of sin, in establishing the law, in vindicating the honour of God; and shall thus have done all that will be needful to be done to establish the authority of God throughout the universe. It will be proper, therefore, that this mysterious order of things shall be *wound up*, and the *results* become a matter of record in the history of the universe. It will be better than it would be to suffer an *eternal* millennium on the earth, while the saints should many of them slumber, and the wicked still be in their graves.

(2.) It is proper that he should come to vindicate his people, and raise them up to glory. Here they have been persecuted, oppressed, put to death. Their character is assailed; they are poor; and the world despises them. It is fit that God should show himself to be their Friend; that he should do justice to their injured names and motives; that he should bring out hidden and obscure virtue, and vindicate it; that he should enter every grave and bring forth his friends to life.

(3.) It is proper that he should show his hatred of sin. Here it triumphs. The wicked are rich, and honoured, and mighty, and say, "Where is the promise of his coming?" [2 Peter 3:4](#). It is right that he should defend his cause. Hence the Lord Jesus will come to guard the avenues to heaven, and to see *that the universe suffers no wrong*, by the admission of an improper person to the skies.

(4.) The great transactions of redemption have been public, open, often grand. The apostasy was public, in the face of angels and of the universe. Sin has been open, public, high-handed. Misery has been public, and has rolled its deep and turbid waves in the face of the universe. Death has been public; all worlds have seen the race cut down and moulder. The death of Jesus was public; the angels saw it; the heavens were clothed with mourning; the earth shook; and the dead arose. The angels have desired to look into these things, ([1 Peter 1:12](#),) and have felt an intense solicitude about men. Jesus was publicly whipped, cursed, crucified; and it is proper that he should publicly triumph, that all heaven rejoicing, and all hell at length humbled, should *see* his public victory. Hence he will come with clouds-with angels-with fire-and will raise the dead, and exhibit to all the universe the amazing close of the scheme of redemption.

(5.) We are in these verses presented with the most grand and wonderful events that this world has ever known-the ascension and return of the Lord Jesus. Here is consolation for the Christian; and here is a source of ceaseless alarm to the sinner.

**- Barnes' Notes on the New Testament.**

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From a purely human standpoint the apostles were in no way ready for such a task. There were things they still did not understand. Their faith was weak, as evidenced by our Lord's frequent reprimands of them (cf. [Matt. 8:26](#); [14:31](#); [16:8](#); [Luke 12:28](#)). Nor had they acquitted themselves well during the traumatic events surrounding Christ's arrest and crucifixion. They had not only failed in public witness but also in private loyalty and in personal faith. Peter, their acknowledged leader, had vehemently and profanely denied even knowing Jesus. His faith and spiritual character were not strong enough to withstand the challenge of a lowly servant girl ([Matt. 26:69-70](#)). With the exception of John, all the disciples had fled in fear of their own lives and were nowhere to be found at the crucifixion site. Although Jesus had explicitly predicted His resurrection, the disciples scoffed at the initial reports that His tomb was empty ([Luke 24:11](#)). When Jesus appeared to them, He found them cowering behind locked doors for fear of the Jewish authorities ([John 20:19](#)). Thomas, not present at that first appearance, refused to believe even the testimony of the other ten apostles ([John 20:24-28](#)). Only a second appearance, and the Lord's invitation to touch His crucifixion wounds, cured Thomas of his skepticism.

**The apostles themselves obviously lacked the understanding and spiritual power to complete Jesus' unfinished ministry of evangelism and edification. However, in these His last words to them before His ascension, the Lord Jesus Christ reiterates (cf. [John 20:22](#)) the promise of the Spirit. He will empower the apostles (and all subsequent believers) with those resources necessary to finish the Savior's unfinished work.**

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Acts 1-12.

## The Manifestation

*To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. ([1:3](#))*

The apostles needed not only the proper message but also the confidence to proclaim that message even if it cost their lives. They could hardly have been enthusiastic about proclaiming and facing martyrdom for a dead Christ. They needed to know that He was alive and would fulfill His promise of the kingdom. To secure that necessary confidence, Jesus **presented Himself alive, after His suffering**, to them. He offered them **many convincing proofs** (cf. [John 20:30](#)), such as entering a room where the doors were locked ([John 20:19](#)), showing them His crucifixion wounds ([Luke 24:39](#)), and eating and drinking with them ([Luke 24:41-43](#)). Most convincing, though, was His **appearing to them over a period of forty days**, beginning with the day of His resurrection. The Greek text actually reads "through forty days." That affirms that though He was not with them continuously, He did appear in their presence at intervals. Although it is by no means exhaustive, the most extensive summary of those appearances is found in [1 Corinthians 15:5-8](#).

The end result of these appearances was that the apostles became absolutely convinced of the reality of their Lord's physical resurrection. That assurance gave them the boldness to preach the gospel to the very people who crucified Christ. The transformation of the apostles from fearful, cowering skeptics to bold, powerful witnesses is a potent proof of the resurrection.

Lord was **speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God**. He taught them more truth related to the domain of divine rule over the hearts of believers. That theme, a frequent one during the Lord Jesus Christ's earthly ministry (cf. [Matt. 4:23](#); [9:35](#); [10:7](#); [13:1ff.](#); [Mark 1:15](#); [Luke 4:43](#); [9:2](#); [17:20ff.](#); [John 3:3ff.](#)), offered further proof to the disciples that it was really He.

The Lord wanted them to know that the crucifixion did not nullify the promised millennial kingdom (cf. [Isa. 2:2](#); [11:6-12](#); [Dan. 2:44](#); [Zech. 14:9](#)). The apostles no doubt had difficulty believing in that kingdom after the death of the King. The resurrection changed all that, and from that time on they proclaimed Jesus Christ as the King over an invisible, spiritual kingdom (cf. [Acts 17:7](#); [Col. 1:13](#); [1 Tim. 1:17](#); [6:15](#); [2 Tim. 4:1](#); [2 Peter 1:11](#); [Rev. 11:15](#); [12:10](#); [17:14](#); [19:16](#)). The kingdom will be manifested in its fullness at the second coming. At that point our Lord will personally reign on earth for a thousand years.

## The Might

*And gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now..." but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; ([1:4-5](#), [8a](#))*

Having received the message, and witnessed the manifestation of the risen Christ, the apostles may have been tempted to assume they were ready to minister in their own strength. To prevent that error Jesus, after **gathering them together, commanded them not to leave Jerusalem** (cf. [Luke 24:49](#)). **To the apostles, who were no doubt fired with enthusiasm and eager to begin, that must have seemed a strange command. Yet, it illustrates an important point: All the preparation and training that knowledge and experience can bring are useless without the proper might. Power had to accompany truth.**

To make certain the apostles were not only motivated but also supernaturally empowered for their mission, Jesus commanded them **to wait for what the Father had promised**. That promise, made repeatedly during the Lord's earthly ministry (cf. [Luke 11:13](#); [24:49](#); [John 7:39](#); [14:16](#), [26](#); [15:26](#); [16:7](#); [20:22](#)), was that the Holy Spirit would

be sent (cf. [Acts 2:33](#)). **God's pledge was to be fulfilled just ten days later on the Day of Pentecost.**

The apostles, like all believers of all dispensations, knew of and had tasted the working of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus sent them out on a preaching tour, He told them, "It is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you" ([Matt. 10:20](#); cf. [Luke 12:12](#)). In [John 14:17](#), Jesus told the apostles the Holy Spirit "abides with you, and will be in you." Like the other believers in the old economy, they experienced the Spirit's power for salvation and life, as well as for special occasions of ministry. **In the new economy, inaugurated at Pentecost, the Spirit would permanently indwell and empower them in a way that was unique.**

**While this promise of power was primarily for the apostles (as was the promise of revelation and inspiration in [John 14:26](#)), it also secondarily forecast the enabling power the Spirit would give to all believers (cf. [Acts 8:14-16](#); [10:44-48](#); [19:1-7](#)). The general promise was at the heart of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the New Covenant. [Ezekiel 36:25-27](#) records God's promise for all who come into the New Covenant: "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you." There was to come a fullness of the Spirit in some way unique to the New Covenant and for all believers. But there was also a special anointing for the apostles.**

In the present age, baptism by Christ through the agency of the Holy Spirit takes place for all believers at conversion. At that moment, every believer is placed into the body of Christ ([1 Cor. 12:13](#)). At that point the Spirit also takes up His permanent residency in the converted person's soul, so there is no such thing as a Christian who does not yet have the Holy Spirit ([Rom. 8:9](#); cf. [1 Cor. 6:19-20](#)).

**The baptism with the Holy Spirit is not a special privilege for some believers, nor are believers challenged and exhorted in Scripture to seek it. It is not even their responsibility to prepare for it by praying, pleading, tarrying, or any other means. The passive voice of the verb translated be baptized indicates the baptism by Jesus Christ with the Spirit is entirely a divine activity. It comes, like salvation itself, through grace, not human effort. [Titus 3:5-6](#) says, "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior." God sovereignly pours out the Holy Spirit on those He saves.**

**Power translates *dunamis*, from which the English word "dynamite" derives. All believers have in them spiritual dynamite for use of gifts, service, fellowship, and witness. They need to experience the release of that power in their lives through not grieving the Spirit by sin ([Eph. 4:30](#)), and being continually filled and controlled by the Spirit ([Eph. 5:18](#)). The latter takes place as believers yield moment by moment control of their lives to Him, and is the same as yielding their minds to the Word ([Col. 3:16](#)).**

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## **The Mystery**

*And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority;" ([1:6-7](#))*

The apostles shared the fervent hope of their nation that Messiah would come and take up His earthly kingdom. Often Jesus had taught them prophetically about the future ([Matt. 13:40-50](#); [24, 25](#); [Luke 12:36-40](#); [17:20-37](#); [21:5-36](#)). The enthusiastic question **they were asking Him, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"** is thus **perfectly understandable. After all, here was the resurrected Messiah speaking with them about His kingdom. They knew of no reason the earthly form of the kingdom could not be set up immediately, since the messianic work signaling the end of the age had arrived. It must be remembered that the interval between the two comings of Messiah was not explicitly taught in the Old Testament.**

Further, the apostles knew that [Ezekiel 36](#) and [Joel 2](#) connected the coming of the kingdom with the outpouring of the Spirit Jesus had just promised. It is understandable that they hoped the arrival of the kingdom was imminent.

([Deut. 29:29](#)). All that believers can know is that the kingdom will be established at the second coming ([Matt. 25:21-34](#)). The time of the second coming, however, remains unrevealed ([Mark 13:32](#)).

**Since the season of His coming cannot be known, and the Lord could return at any moment in the rapture of the church (cf. [1 Thess. 5:2](#)), believers must be continually ready. All must remember the Lord's solemn warning in [Mark 13:33-37](#):**

*Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time is. It is like a man, away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert. Therefore, be on the alert—for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, at cockcrowing, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all, "Be on the alert!"*

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## **The Mission**

*"you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." ([1:8b](#))*

Rather than engage in useless speculation over the time for the coming of the kingdom, the apostles were to focus on the work at hand.

**A witness for Jesus Christ is simply someone who tells the truth about Him. The apostles, as Peter points out, "were eyewitnesses of His majesty" ([2 Peter 1:16](#)).**

**This was the foremost purpose for which the empowering of the Holy Spirit came. And the early church was so effective that they "upset the world" ([Acts 17:6](#)). Jesus commands all believers to be His witness in the Great Commission:**

**"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20).**

**So many Christians sealed their witness to Christ with their blood that *marturēs* (witnesses) came to mean "martyrs." Their blood, as the second-century theologian Tertullian stated, became the seed of the church. Many were drawn to faith in Christ by observing how calmly and joyously Christians met their deaths.**

**Titus 2 indicates that how Christians live their lives lays the platform of integrity and believability on which effective personal witness is built.** In that text, Paul writes that we are to so live "that the word of God may not be dishonored" (v. 5), "that the opponent [of the Christian faith] may be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us" (v. 8), and "that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect" (v. 10), so that we may make it possible that the saving gospel comes winsomely to all.

Beginning in **Jerusalem**, the apostles carried out the Lord's mandate. Their witness spread beyond there to **all Judea and Samaria** (the neighboring area), and finally **even to the remotest part of the earth**. **Verse 8** provides the general outline for the book of Acts. Following that outline, **Luke chronicles the irresistible march of Christianity from Jerusalem, into Samaria and then through the Roman world**. As the book unfolds, we will move through those three sections of the expansion of the church.

**Today, believers continue to have the responsibility for being Christ's witnesses throughout this world.** The sphere for witnessing is as extensive as the kingdom—all the world. **That was and is the mission for the church until Jesus comes.**

## The Motive

*And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them; and they also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven." ([1:9-11](#))*

The Lord Jesus Christ was about to depart for heaven to return to His former glory (cf. [John 17:1-6](#)). Before doing that, **He left the apostles with a final, dramatic moment which provided powerful motivation for carrying on His work. To their amazement, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight (cf. [vv. 2, 11, 22](#)).** Jesus, in His glorious resurrection body, left this world for the realm of heaven to take His place on the throne at God's right hand. Back on the Mount of Olives ([Luke 24:50](#)), the shocked apostles **were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing.** To their further consternation, angels, described as **two men in white clothing**, suddenly appeared and **stood beside them.** Such angelic appearances were not unusual ([Gen. 18:2](#); [Josh. 5:13-15](#); [Mark 16:5](#)). Two of them confirm the promise of Christ's return as true (cf. [John 8:17](#)).

**These angels asked the bewildered apostles, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky?" They are called men of Galilee since all the apostles (with the exception of the dead traitor Judas) were from that region. The angels' question, "why do you stand looking into the sky?" indicates more than curiosity at the miracle. The word translated looking indicates**

**a long gaze, in this case a transfixed look as if losing someone. The question, then, is a mild rebuke to the apostles. They were not losing Jesus, as they feared. Maybe some of them remembered the vision of Ezekiel, who saw the glory of God depart to heaven from Israel ([Ezek. 10:18-19](#)) and feared it was happening again.**

**The angels went on to say, "This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven." The promise of [Zechariah 14:4](#) will come to pass, namely that the Messiah will return to the Mount of Olives.**

**The angels stressed that this same Jesus whom they had watched ascend would one day return in just the same way as they had watched Him go into heaven. He will return in His glorified body, accompanied with clouds (cf. [Dan. 7:13](#); [Matt. 24:30](#); [26:64](#); [Rev. 1:7](#); [14:14](#)), just as at His ascension.**

**This becomes a compelling motive. No one knows when He will come, but everyone must live in anticipation that it could be in their lifetime (cf. [Rom. 13:12-14](#); [2 Peter 3:14-18](#)).**

**The truth that Christ will return provides a powerful motive to serve Him. Paul writes, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" ([2 Cor. 5:10](#)).**

**In [Revelation 22:12](#) the Lord Jesus Christ said, "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done." Believers must serve Christ faithfully in light of His imminent return.**

**In [Revelation 16:15](#) Jesus warned, "Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his garments, lest he walk about naked and men see his shame" (cf. [1 John 2:28](#)).**

**The task of finishing the work that Jesus began, the duty of evangelizing the lost world, is a daunting one. But the Lord in His mercy from the start has provided all the spiritual resources necessary to accomplish that task. It is up to each believer to appropriate those resources and put them to use. "We must work the works of Him who sent [Jesus Christ], as long as it is day; night is coming, when no man can work" ([John 9:4](#)).**

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