***All Jesus Continues to Do and To Teach***

**Pentecost #5, Acts 1:1-11 May 9, 2021**

***“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you,   
and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria,   
and to the ends of the earth.”*Acts 1:8 (with help from Resonate’s Glocal Mission Summit)**

**Writing to a “friend of God”**

*1 In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.*

Acts 1:1

1) We already know Dr. Luke – this volume is a continuation of his gospel!

2) Luke writes to those who desire to follow God even more completely

**One step closer to Pentecost**

*3 After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. 4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”   
 So when they met together, they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”  
 He said to them, “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own   
authority . . . .”*

Acts 1:3-7

1) During these forty days, they did a lot of eating together (probably fish!)

2) Key point: Acts believers will be identified by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

3) The story of the “Acts of the Holy Spirit” (Bruce’s title) begins with God’s sovereignty

**The Great Commission**

*6 So when they met together, they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”*

*7 He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

Acts 1

1) Luke transitions from concerns about the kingdom to the story of the church in God’s plan

2) We don’t need to know times and “seasons” because we are in the last days

3) Luke begins both his volumes with the work and power of the Spirit (see Luke 1:35; Genesis 1:2)

4) This will be our outline: Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria, then to the ends of the earth

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | geographic outline of Acts | the experience of the  Acts church | my  21st century mission | what I am learning from the Acts church |
| Jerusalem |  |  |  |  |
| all Judea |  |  |  |  |
| and Samaria |  |  |  |  |
| to the ends of the earth |  |  |  |  |

Study challenge: One great way to really get the feel for Acts is to develop different outlines: by main character, by sermon, by opposition, by main audience, by journey, by how the power of the Spirit is revealed, by Judean and Roman administrations (Herods and Roman emperors)

**Ascension Day (continued on Wednesday night!)**

*9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.*

*10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”*

Acts 1

1) Jesus ascended so that he could take his rightful place at the right hand of the Father

2) Jesus ascended so that the Holy Spirit could take precedence in God’s economy of salvation

3) Jesus ascended so that we would watch for his return

**Lessons from Luke’s transitions**

1) Believers (that’s us!) are the disciples

7 *So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.*

Acts 6:1-7

2) We are in the last days

14 *Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. 15 These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! 16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:*

*17 “ ‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people . . . .*

*20 The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood*

*before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.*

*21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’*

Acts 2:14-21

3) Transition from Jews to Gentiles: we are looking to the ends of the earth

*44 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. 45 When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.*

*46 Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. 47 For this is what the Lord has commanded us:*

*“ ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’”*

*48 When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.*

Acts 13:13-52



**Resources for further studies in Acts**

The Bible Project team has great stuff on Acts at [*https://open.life.church/items/179224-poster-jpg*](https://open.life.church/items/179224-poster-jpg)

Spurgeon has a sermon on this text at [*http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/sermons/2330.htm*](http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/sermons/2330.htm)

Deffinbaugh’s introduction at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts*](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts )  
and sermon at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/2-preparation-pentecost-acts-11-26*](https://bible.org/seriespage/2-preparation-pentecost-acts-11-26)

I have really appreciated John Stott’s *The Spirit, The Church and the World: The Message of Acts* (IVP, 1990) and F. F. Bruce’s work: *New Testament History* (Doubleday, 1980) and *The Book of the Acts* (Eerdmans, 1984).

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# Acts Timeline (ESV Study Bible)

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# The Unique Contribution of the Book of Acts

Deffinbaugh at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts*](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts )

### Introduction[1](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts" \l "P10_192)

I remember receiving a phone call from a new believer in Jesus.  After he came to faith, he developed an appetite for the Word of God.  He began at the Gospel of Matthew and began working his way through the New Testament.  When he had a question, he would call me or someone else for an answer.  I was not surprised when he called one day, but I must admit that I was a bit concerned.  My friend was about to make a confession, and I was not sure I wanted to hear it.  Was there a serious moral failure, a relapse back into some former sin?  I was about to find out.

My friend continued, “I read the Gospel of Matthew, and then Mark and Luke, but I was so eager to get to Acts, I skipped John.”  I assured my friend that this was not a serious problem.  I would wish that each of us were as eager as my friend to immerse ourselves in this great book of the New Testament.  In this introductory lesson, I will attempt to point out some of the unique contributions of this book, and thus to motivate you to commit yourself to a serious and consistent study of Acts in these next few months.

### A Word about the Author of Acts

Most of you are probably aware of the fact that the Book of Acts is the second of two volumes, the first of which is the Gospel of Luke:

1 Now many have undertaken to compile an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, 2 like the accounts passed on to us by those who were eyewitnesses and servants of the word from the beginning. 3 So it seemed good to me as well, because I have followed all things carefully from the beginning, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 so that you may know for certain the things you were taught ([Luke 1:1-4](javascript:%7b%7d)).[2](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts" \l "P16_2488)

The Book of Acts simply continues the account where the Gospel of Luke left off: 1 *I wrote the former account, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach 2 until the day he was taken up to heaven, after he had given orders by the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. 3 To the same apostles also, after his suffering, he presented himself alive with many convincing proofs. He was seen by them over a forty-day period and spoke about matters concerning the kingdom of God* ([Acts 1:1-3](javascript:%7b%7d)).

By the second century, Luke was recognized as the author of both Luke and Acts.  No serious challenge to this conclusion has been made.  Luke is named three times in the New Testament, and from these references, we learn something about him.

Our dear friend Luke the physician and Demas greet you ([Colossians 4:14](javascript:%7b%7d)).

23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you. 24 Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my colaborers, greet you too ([Philemon 1:23-24](javascript:%7b%7d)).

From these two texts, we learn that Luke was a physician and that he was a fellow-laborer with Paul.  From the Book of Acts, we learn that Luke accompanied Paul on some of his journeys.  This is evident by the so-called**“we”**passages in Acts ([Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16](javascript:%7b%7d)).

In [Acts 16](javascript:%7b%7d), we can see that Luke must have joined Paul and his other co-workers in Troas.  This would mean that he was present when Paul received his Macedonian vision.  Luke thus accompanied Paul and the others to Philippi.  He was also with Paul in Troas, when the church gathered and Eutychus fell from the window and was taken up dead.  Was it Dr. Luke who pronounced this young man dead, making his healing even more emphatic?  We find Luke with Paul as he was in Caesarea, on his way to Jerusalem.  Luke would have heard the ominous prophecy of Agabus, warning Paul of what awaited him in Jerusalem.  Did he agree with those who urged Paul not to go?  Finally, we find Luke with Paul on his journey to Rome.  He was there with Paul when their ship was broken up on the rocks.  He witnessed Paul’s miraculous deliverance from the snake bite and the healing of the father of Publius.

We assume from the final chapters of Acts what Paul makes absolutely clear in his final epistle:

10 For Demas deserted me, since he loved the present age, and he went to Thessalonica. Crescens went to Galatia and Titus to Dalmatia. 11**Only Luke is with me**. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is a great help to me in ministry ([2 Timothy 4:10-11](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

Luke was not only Paul’s companion and coworker in ministry; Luke was a man who faithfully stood with Paul to the end.  I can respect what a man like this writes, inspired by the Spirit of God.

### The Unique Contribution of the Book of Acts

Some of you will recognize that I have written on the Book of Acts before.[3](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts" \l "P29_6198)In this earlier effort, I outlined a number of reasons why the Book of Acts is important.  This time, I would like to approach this matter from a slightly different perspective.  I would like to suggest what it would be like if there were no Book of Acts.  What would it be like without the Book of Acts?

*First of all, our Bibles would be smaller*.  When combined with Luke’s first volume, his two accounts – Luke and Acts – take up over one-fourth of the real estate of the New Testament.  If the importance of a subject is indicated by how much space is devoted to it (I call this the “law of proportion”), then Luke’s writings must be significant.

*Second, the absence of the Book of Acts would diminish the contribution of the remaining New Testament epistles.*There would be a significant historical gap between the events of the Gospels and the writing of the New Testament epistles.  How would we know why the church at Corinth suddenly appears as the recipient of two preserved epistles?   Where did this church come from?  It is the Book of Acts that provides this information.

These words of Peter would have little impact on us, apart from the Book of Acts:

12 Dear friends, do not be astonished that a trial by fire is occurring among you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice in the degree that you have shared in the sufferings of Christ, so that when his glory is revealed you may also rejoice and be glad. 14 If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory, who is the Spirit of God, rests on you. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer or thief or criminal or as a troublemaker ([1 Peter 4:12-15](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The Gospels do not leave us with a very positive impression of Peter.  He denied his Lord three times rather than risk dying with Him.  But when we read the Book of Acts, we find a transformed Peter.  He now stands before some of the same people who orchestrated our Lord’s crucifixion and says,

22 “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man clearly attested to you by God with powerful deeds, wonders, and miraculous signs that God performed among you through him, just as you yourselves know— 23 this man, who was handed over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you executed by nailing him to a cross at the hands of Gentiles. 24 But God raised him up, having released him from the pains of death, because it was not possible for him to be held in its power. . . . 36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know beyond a doubt that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ” ([Acts 2:22-24](javascript:%7b%7d), 36).

13 “The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our forefathers, has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate after he had decided to release him. 14 But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a man who was a murderer be released to you. 15 You killed the Originator of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this fact we are witnesses!” ([Acts 3:13-15](javascript:%7b%7d))

When commanded not to teach in the name of Jesus, Peter responded,

29 But Peter and the apostles replied, “We must obey God rather than people. 30 The God of our forefathers raised up Jesus, whom you seized and killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him to his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are witnesses of these events, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him” ([Acts 5:29-32](javascript:%7b%7d)).

It is the Book of Acts that certifies Peter as a man who is qualified to speak on the subject of suffering for the name of Jesus.  Thanks to Acts, Peter’s exhortations carry much more weight than if Acts had not been written.

Beyond Peter and his epistles, the situation is even more dramatic with Paul and his writings.  Paul was a man well known by the Christian community – as a persecutor of the church:

10 Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias,” and he replied, “Here I am, Lord.” 11 Then the Lord told him, “Get up and go to the street called ‘Straight,’ and at Judas’ house look for a man from Tarsus named Saul. For he is praying, 12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and place his hands on him so that he may see again.” 13 But**Ananias replied, “Lord, I have heard from many people about this man, how much harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem, 14 and here he has authority from the chief priests to imprison all who call on your name!”**([Acts 9:10-14](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine)

When Paul writes, he writes with the full authority of an apostle:

From Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Sosthenes, our brother ([1 Corinthians 1:1](javascript:%7b%7d)).

1 Am I not free?**Am I not an apostle**? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? 2 If I am not an apostle to others, at least I am to you, for you are the confirming sign of my apostleship in the Lord. 3 This is my defense to those who examine me. 4 Do we not have the right to financial support? 5**Do we not have the right to the company of a believing wife, like the other apostles and the Lord’s brothers and Cephas**? ([1 Corinthians 9:1-5](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine)

37 If anyone considers himself a prophet or spiritual person, he should acknowledge that**what I write to you is the Lord’s command**([1 Corinthians 14:37](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

For this gospel I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher ([2 Timothy 1:11](javascript:%7b%7d)).

For I consider myself not at all inferior to those “super-apostles” ([2 Corinthians 11:5](javascript:%7b%7d)).

11 I have become a fool. You yourselves forced me to do it, for I should have been commended by you. For I lack nothing in comparison to those “super-apostles,” even though I am nothing. 12 Indeed, the signs of an apostle were performed among you with great perseverance by signs and wonders and powerful deeds ([2 Corinthians 12:11-12](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Apart from the Book of Acts, how would we know and heed Paul’s instructions as those of a true apostle?  In Acts, we have three accounts of his conversion and commissioning ([Acts 9](javascript:%7b%7d), 22, 26).  We see not only his desire to associate with the saints, but also his willingness to suffer as a Christian.  It is the Book of Acts that certifies Paul as a true apostle to the readers of the New Testament.  We might dare say that it is in the Book of Acts that Paul “earns his stripes” (literally) as an apostle of Jesus Christ.  And so it is that we can read:

From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear the marks of Jesus on my body ([Galatians 6:17](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The theological issues addressed in the epistles would be without background or context, except for the fact that Acts describes the origin of some of these problems. Let me simply list some of the issues the church faced in New Testament times (many of which persist as potential problems today):

The relationship of the Old Testament to the New[4](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts" \l "P53_13180)

The explanation of how the ethnic makeup of the church is more Gentile than it is Jewish[5](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts" \l "P55_13338)

The relationship between Israel and the church[6](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts" \l "P57_13404)

The relationship between Jewish and Gentile believers in the church[7](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts" \l "P59_13509)

The relationship between Gentile saints and Judaism (do you have to be Jewish to be Christian?)[8](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts" \l "P61_13625)

The influence of Judaisers or Jewish heresies in the church

The roots of many of these problems can be found in the Book of Acts, so Acts helps us to understand the problems that are addressed in the epistles.

Without the Book of Acts, we would be hard pressed to find an example of the apostolic preaching of the gospel.  Think of the many rich sermons we find preached by the apostles:

[Acts 2:14-36](javascript:%7b%7d)Peter’s powerful sermon at Pentecost

[Acts 3-4](javascript:%7b%7d)Peter’s preaching (as a result of the healing of the lame man)

[Acts 7](javascript:%7b%7d)Stephen’s powerful sermon, which sums up the Old Testament in terms of Jewish unbelief

[Acts 10](javascript:%7b%7d)Peter’s gospel message at the home of Cornelius

[Acts 13:13-41](javascript:%7b%7d)Paul’s sermon at (Pisidian) Antioch

[Acts 17:16-31](javascript:%7b%7d)Paul’s preaching at Athens

[Acts 20:17-34](javascript:%7b%7d)Paul’s message to the Ephesian elders

[Acts 26](javascript:%7b%7d)Paul’s appeal to Agrippa

The examples of the “apostolic preaching of the cross” are found in the Book of Acts and virtually nowhere else (at least in the form of a preached sermon).

### Keys to the Book of Acts

I would like to suggest some “mental hooks” which may help you think through the message of the Book of Acts.  These appear to be some of the key themes of the Book of Acts, which are intertwined throughout the book.

### Transition

Many changes are documented as one reads through the Book of Acts.  Consider the following areas of transition:

*There is the transition from a primarily Jewish church in Jerusalem to predominantly Gentile churches elsewhere.* Initially, the church in Jerusalem was almost exclusively Jewish (with perhaps some proselytes as well).  This was not entirely coincidental, for in time it became evident that the Jewish believers (which appears to include the apostles) were opposed to evangelism among the Gentiles.  We see this in their response to the salvation of those at the home of Cornelius, when Peter preached the gospel to them: *1 Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles too had accepted the word of God. 2 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers took issue with him, 3 saying, “You went to uncircumcised men and shared a meal with them”* ([Acts 11:1-3](javascript:%7b%7d)).

It might appear that their only concern was that Peter (along with those Jews who accompanied him) had defiled himself by eating with these Gentiles, but this can hardly be the case.  Notice their response after Peter explained how all this had come to pass:

18 When they heard this, they ceased their objections and praised God, saying, “So then, God has granted the repentance that leads to life even to the Gentiles” ([Acts 11:18](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Now notice the following verse:

19 Now those who had been scattered because of the persecution that took place over Stephen went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the message to no one but Jews ([Acts 11:19](javascript:%7b%7d)).

It was not the apostles who were at the forefront of Gentile evangelism; it was an unnamed, unknown (to the Jerusalem Jewish believers, it would seem) group of Hellenistic Jewish believers who spread the gospel to the Gentiles.  They didn’t seem to grasp the fact that this was frowned upon by the Jerusalem Jewish brethren, or they simply refused to abide by such narrow thinking.  There is absolutely no question but what unbelieving Jews adamantly opposed taking the gospel to the Gentiles.[9](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts" \l "P85_17022)In spite of these obstacles, the gospel was taken to the Gentiles, and thus more and more predominantly Gentile churches were planted.  It was Paul’s practice to take the gospel**“to the Jew first,”**but when this message was rejected, Paul turned to the Gentiles (see [Acts 18:5-7](javascript:%7b%7d)).

There is also the transition from opposition by the Pharisees in the Gospels to opposition that is led by the Sadducees in Acts.  When comparing the frequency in which the terms “Pharisees” and “Sadducees” (singular or plural) occur in Luke and Acts, one can see an indication of the transition from Pharisee-inspired resistance to the gospel in the Gospels to Sadducee-initiated resistance in Acts.[10](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts" \l "P87_17768)It is not really difficult to understand how this change came to pass.  The Pharisees opposed Jesus because He claimed to be God, and because they considered Him to be a law-breaker – particularly a Sabbath-breaker.  They probably were motivated to oppose Him because He was so critical of them:

20 “For I tell you, unless your righteousness goes beyond that of the experts in the law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” ([Matthew 5:20](javascript:%7b%7d)).

[Matthew 23](javascript:%7b%7d) contains an even more strident denouncement of the Pharisees, because of their hypocrisy.  It is no wonder they opposed Jesus.

Jesus made it very clear that He would rise from the dead, as the great and final sign proving the validity of His claim to be Messiah:

38 Then some of the experts in the law along with some Pharisees answered him, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.” 39 But he answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet [Jonah. 40](javascript:%7b%7d) For just as Jonah was in the belly of the huge fish for three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights” ([Matthew 12:38-40](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The Pharisees were very aware of His claim that He would rise from the dead, which is why they took such efforts to secure His tomb:

62 The next day (which is after the day of preparation) the chief priests and the Pharisees assembled before Pilate 63 and said, “Sir, we remember that while that deceiver was still alive he said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ 64 So give orders to secure the tomb until the third day. Otherwise his disciples may come and steal his body and say to the people, ‘He has been raised from the dead,’ and the last deception will be worse than the first.” 65 Pilate said to them, “Take a guard of soldiers. Go and make it as secure as you can.” 66 So they went with the soldiers of the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone ([Matthew 27:62-66](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The resurrection seems to have “taken the wind out of the sails” of the Pharisees.  They are strangely silent in Acts (compared to the Gospels), and in fact, some Pharisees appear to be very cautious about condemning the apostles:

33 Now when they heard this, they became furious and wanted to execute them. 34**But a Pharisee whose name was Gamaliel, a teacher of the law who was respected by all the people**, stood up in the council and ordered the men to be put outside for a short time. 35 Then he said to the council, “Men of Israel, pay close attention to what you are about to do to these men. 36 For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and nothing came of it. 37 After him Judas the Galilean arose in the days of the census, and incited people to follow him in revolt. He too was killed, and all who followed him were scattered. 38 So in this case I say to you, stay away from these men and leave them alone, because if this plan or this undertaking originates with people, it will come to nothing, 39 but if it is from God, you will not be able to stop them, or you may even be found fighting against God.” He convinced them, 40 and they summoned the apostles and had them beaten. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and released them ([Acts 5:33-40](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

Here Gamaliel, a prominent Pharisee, cautioned the Sanhedrin about opposing the apostles.  Later on, the Pharisees somewhat come to Paul’s defense when the Sanhedrin meets once again, this time to try Paul on charges of defiling the temple:

6 Then when Paul noticed that part of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, he shouted out in the council, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. I am on trial concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead!” 7 When he said this, an argument began between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. 8 (For the Sadducees say there is no resurrection, or angel, or spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.) 9 There was a great commotion, and **some experts in the law from the party of the Pharisees stood up and protested strongly, “We find nothing wrong with this man. What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?**” ([Acts 23:6-9](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine)

Thus, it is the Sadducees who take up the cause of opposing the gospel and the apostles in Acts:

While Peter and John were speaking to the people, the priests and the commander of the temple guard and**the Sadducees came up to them**([Acts 4:1](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

*Likewise, there is a transition from an emphasis on the “kingdom of God” in the Gospels and early Acts to “the church.”*The expression,**“the Kingdom of God”**is found 31 times in Luke and a total of 49 times in all the Gospels combined.  It is found only six times in the Book of Acts and eight times in the rest of the New Testament.  On the other hand, the term**“church”**occurs only twice in the Gospels, both times in Matthew (16:18; 18:17), while it is found 19 times in Acts, and 88 times in the epistles.  One is therefore obliged to explain this transition.  It is probably best to turn to [Romans 9-11](javascript:%7b%7d) for this explanation.

There is yet another transition from Peter and the Jerusalem apostles in the first half of Acts to “Paul and his companions” from chapter 13 on.  It seems apparent that while Peter is dominant in the first half of Acts, he is overshadowed by Paul in the last half of the book.

*There are geographical transitions as well in the Book of Acts.*It has been noted by many that [Acts 1:8](javascript:%7b%7d) provides an excellent geographical outline of the Book of Acts:

“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 farthest parts of the earth” ([Acts 1:8](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The events of chapters 1-7 take place in Jerusalem and Judea.  Samaria is reached with the gospel in chapter 8, and from there it goes to**“the farthest parts of the earth,”**ending in Rome (chapter 28).

### Watershed Decisions

Acts contains some of the landmark decisions of the early church, the implications of which are great.  These decisions are to the church what certain Supreme Court rulings (like Roe v. Wade) have been to our country, for good or evil.

The first decision came reluctantly, when the apostles reluctantly acknowledged that the gospel was for the Gentiles, as well as the Jews.  This entailed a recognition that our Lord had set aside the Jewish food laws of the Old Testament (see [Mark 7:19](javascript:%7b%7d); [Acts 10:9-16; 11:4-12](javascript:%7b%7d)).  As we learn from [Galatians 2:11-14](javascript:%7b%7d), Peter had to be reminded of this fact.

We recently had a very practical object lesson regarding the way these food laws separate Jews and Gentiles.  This past week, several from our church went to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to assist Hurricane Katrina flood victims by serving (good!) food to the emergency medical personnel who were risking their lives in the rescue efforts, particularly in New Orleans.  We would serve up to 200 people or more, so you can imagine the impact of a few who observed the Jewish food laws.  They required not only different food, but they could use only certain cooking utensils, and the end result was that they cooked for themselves separately.  In no way do I wish to demean these devout folks for observing the rules of their faith; I simply wish to show how doing so separates folks.  Having this experience helped me appreciate the magnitude of the revelation that foods should no longer keep Jewish believers from sharing their faith with Gentiles.

A second watershed decision was that of the Jerusalem Council, as recorded in [Acts 15](javascript:%7b%7d).  The decision that the gospel should go to the Gentiles, as well as to the Jews, was reached in [Acts 10](javascript:%7b%7d) and 11.  In [Acts 15](javascript:%7b%7d), the question arose as to just what would be required of Gentile converts to the faith.  Some insisted that while the Gentiles could be saved by faith in Jesus as the Messiah, they must submit themselves to the Law of Moses.  In effect, in order to be saved, one must also become a Jewish proselyte.  Paul and Barnabas strongly opposed this requirement, and thus the Jerusalem Council was convened.  The end result was the decision that Gentile converts did not need to submit themselves to Jewish laws, but needed to observe a handful of prohibitions that would minimize offense to Jewish believers.  The implications of this decision were monumental, and the epistles will take this matter up in much greater detail.

### Fulfillment

Another theme we find in the Book of Acts is that of fulfillment. There is, of course, the element of fulfillment in that Old Testament texts and promises are fulfilled in the Book of Acts.  Peter views the death of Judas as a fulfillment of [Psalm 69:25](javascript:%7b%7d).  Further, he believes that [Psalm 109:8](javascript:%7b%7d) will be fulfilled when they identify someone who will replace Judas (see [Acts 1:15-26](javascript:%7b%7d)).  Peter’s sermon in [Acts 2](javascript:%7b%7d) is punctuated with Old Testament texts, which have been fulfilled in the Pentecost experience and in the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ.  Later, in [Acts 4](javascript:%7b%7d), the saints in Jerusalem understand their persecution in the light of the Old Testament Scriptures, particularly [Psalm 2](javascript:%7b%7d).  Stephen’s sermon in [Acts 7](javascript:%7b%7d) is a concise survey of Old Testament history, with emphasis on Jewish resistance and rejection of God’s leaders and leadership.  Paul’s preaching also includes the element of fulfillment of the Old Testament (see [Acts 13:41](javascript:%7b%7d)).

There is yet another aspect of fulfillment in Acts, and that is the fulfillment of Jesus’ words in the Gospels.  For example, we find the fulfillment of our Lord’s promises in [John 14-16](javascript:%7b%7d) regarding the coming and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.  Luke also records our Lord’s instruction to wait for that which the Father promised ([Luke 24:49](javascript:%7b%7d)).  We find the beginnings of the fulfillment of the Great Commission (e.g., [Matthew 28:18-20](javascript:%7b%7d)).  We see Peter’s leadership as the fulfillment of our Lord’s words in [Matthew 16:16-19](javascript:%7b%7d).  We can also find the first fruits of our Lord’s warning to Israel that the kingdom will be taken from them and given to another people ([Matthew 21:43](javascript:%7b%7d)), and of our Lord’s forewarning of coming persecution ([John 15:18-21](javascript:%7b%7d)).  We see examples of our Lord’s promise of a Spirit-inspired response to unjust charges ([Matthew 10:16-20](javascript:%7b%7d)).

These words are difficult to grasp when reading John’s Gospel:

12 I tell you the solemn truth, the person who believes in me will perform the miraculous deeds that I am doing,**and will perform greater deeds than these**, because I am going to the Father ([John 14:12](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

But as we read through the Book of Acts, we can see what a great impact the gospel had on many Jews and even more Gentiles, because of the empowering work of the Holy Spirit in and through the apostles.

### Prayer

It is fervent and persistent prayer in [Acts 1](javascript:%7b%7d) that precedes the coming of the Spirit in power in [Acts 2](javascript:%7b%7d).  Reference to prayer is found 31 times in the Book of Acts,[11](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts" \l "P118_28969)more than any other New Testament book.  Prayer precedes nearly every significant event in Acts.  The lame man was healed as Peter and John made their way to the temple for prayer ([Acts 3:1](javascript:%7b%7d)f.).  The church’s prayer for boldness was dramatically answered ([Acts 4:23-31](javascript:%7b%7d)).  The apostles prayed and then laid hands on the seven**“deacons”**[12](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts" \l "P119_29367)they appointed to oversee the feeding of the widows, so that they could devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word ([Acts 6:1-6](javascript:%7b%7d)).  Who can forget Stephen’s prayer, as he was dying:

59 They continued to stone Stephen while he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” 60 Then he fell to his knees and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” When he had said this, he died ([Acts 7:59-60](javascript:%7b%7d)).

I believe that the conversion of Saul was an answer to this prayer.

Prayer played a significant part in the sending forth of Barnabas and Saul as the first missionaries from the church at Antioch ([Acts 13:1-4](javascript:%7b%7d)).  Paul and those with him encountered Lydia at a place of prayer in Philippi, and thus she was the first recorded convert in Macedonia ([Acts 16:13](javascript:%7b%7d)).  Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise just before the earthquake released them and paved the way for the conversion of the Philippian jailor and his family ([Acts 16:22-34](javascript:%7b%7d)).  In the Book of Acts, when God’s people were moved to prayer, God did great and mighty works.

### The Sovereignty of God

I have to admit that I did not recognize the sovereignty of God as a dominant theme in Acts the first time I taught through the book.  But the more I study Acts, the more I see that this is not the account of apostles and early saints who did everything right, thus prompting God to act.  Indeed, Acts presents flawed saints, through whom a sovereign God worked, often in spite of human failures.  And even when the apostles seemed to “do it right,” God chose to carry out His purposes in a different or somewhat modified way.  Let me seek to illustrate what I mean.

In [Acts 1](javascript:%7b%7d), Peter and those with him are prompted to fill Judas’ place as an apostle, and as a witness of our Lord’s resurrection.  The process appears to be a godly one.  They are prompted by Old Testament prophecies from the Book of Psalms.  They take action after prayer and discussion, when unity regarding their actions has been reached.  They nominate two men and leave the final selection to God.  What was done seems to be biblical and necessary.  And yet we never hear of Matthias again (by name).  He appears to play no significant role in the church.  But then in chapter 8, we are introduced to Saul, who is converted in chapter 9.  Saul, who becomes Paul in chapter 13, becomes not only an apostle, but the driving force behind the evangelization of the Gentiles.  The choice made by the apostles in [Acts 1](javascript:%7b%7d) appears to be overruled by God.  He will appoint His apostles His way.  We shall explore more about this in our next lesson in this series.

In [Acts 6](javascript:%7b%7d), we read of the appointment of the seven deacons, who are put in charge of the care and feeding of the widows in Jerusalem.  The problem was a serious one, threatening the unity of the church.  The solution that the apostles proposed appeared to be a wise thing to do. Highly qualified men (who all appear to be Hellenistic Jews) were selected and brought before the apostles, who commissioned them for this task.  The inference of the text is that the apostles appointed these seven men so that they, the apostles, could pray and preach – in other words, so that they could take the lead in evangelizing the lost.  The simple fact of the matter is that it was two of these**“deacons”**who became the frontrunners of evangelism, especially among those in Samaria and among the Gentiles.  Stephen became a powerful preacher ([Acts 6:10](javascript:%7b%7d)), whose death precipitated such persecution that all the saints (except the apostles) had to flee Jerusalem ([Acts 8:1-2](javascript:%7b%7d)), and thus take the gospel to the Gentiles ([Acts 11:19-21](javascript:%7b%7d)).  Philip was sent to Samaria and was instrumental in the salvation of the Ethiopian eunuch ([Acts 8:4](javascript:%7b%7d)ff.).  And so it is that those who were appointed by the apostles to care for the widows*so that the apostles could minister the word of God*became more effective in their evangelistic ministry than the apostles they were to assist.

The “Great Commission” of [Acts 1:8](javascript:%7b%7d) is not carried out purposefully by the apostles who were given the commission, but it is carried out providentially by the persecution of [Acts 8:1](javascript:%7b%7d).  What the apostles didn’t initiate, God Himself initiated through the death of Stephen and the persecution of the church.

The sovereignty of God is also evident in the Book of Acts by the way He bestows His Spirit.  Acts illustrates what Paul taught in [1 Corinthians 12](javascript:%7b%7d):

It is one and the same Spirit,**distributing as he decides**to each person, who produces all these things ([1 Corinthians 12:11](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

There is no simple “pattern” set down in Acts by which we receive the Spirit as the church did at Pentecost.  There is no formula that Christians can “plug in” in order to get what they desire.  God is sovereign, and He acts in sovereign freedom, as He wills.  Even when the church appears to “do it right,” God retains the right to do it His way, just so that men will recognize it is all of Him, and not of us.  He is the potter; we are the clay.  That is the way it is supposed to be.

### Ways of Thinking through Acts

Before I close, I would like to suggest several “grids,” or ways of thinking through the Book of Acts.  There is, first of all, the geographical grid, which is set out at the beginning of the book:

“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 farthest parts of the earth” ([Acts 1:8](javascript:%7b%7d)).

I have already mentioned this, but we can see that the Book of Acts begins in Jerusalem and ends in Rome,**“the remotest part of the earth”**from a Jewish point of view.  We can thus see that our Lord’s Great Commission in [Acts 1:8](javascript:%7b%7d) is sovereignly accomplished in Acts, but in a very different way than anyone would have imagined.

Another grid would be to think of the Book of Acts in terms of its leading personalities.  The Book begins with Peter in the lead, along with John and their fellow apostles. But midway into Acts, we find that Paul has become the dominant personality in Acts, accompanied by his associates in ministry.

While the Book of Acts begins in Jerusalem with a predominantly Jewish church, it ends in Rome with a predominantly Gentile population.  The book begins with the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus and the offer of the kingdom, and it ends with the rejection of the Jews in Rome and the refocusing of Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles.

I would suggest one final approach to the Book of Acts.  I believe that Acts is the repetition of the ministry of our Lord, accompanied by the repetition of the response of Judaism’s leadership to Jesus, as seen in the persecution of the apostles, the early church, and especially Paul.  Just as Jesus**“set His face toward Jerusalem”**([Luke 9:51](javascript:%7b%7d), ESV, KJV, NKJV), so also Paul determined to go to Jerusalem, knowing what awaited him there (see [Acts 21:10-14](javascript:%7b%7d)).

### Conclusion

I hope these observations will convince you of the importance and relevance of the Book of Acts.  While we have four Gospels and numerous epistles, we have only this divinely-inspired account of the birth of the church and of the ministry of the apostles.  May God give you an appetite, a hunger, for this book.  And may we come to grasp more fully the crucial role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church (collectively), and in our lives (individually).

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[3](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts" \l "P29_6199)[/seriespage/getting-ahead-god-acts-11-26](https://bible.org/seriespage/getting-ahead-god-acts-11-26" \t "_top)

[4](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts" \l "P53_13181)See for example [2 Corinthians 3](javascript:%7b%7d) and 4, the entire Book of Hebrews.

[5](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts" \l "P55_13339)See [Romans 9-11](javascript:%7b%7d).

[6](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts" \l "P57_13405)See [Romans 9-11](javascript:%7b%7d); [Ephesians 2](javascript:%7b%7d) and 3.

[7](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts" \l "P59_13510)See [Romans 14-15](javascript:%7b%7d).

[8](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts" \l "P61_13626)See [1 Timothy 1:7](javascript:%7b%7d); [Titus 1:10-14](javascript:%7b%7d); [2 Corinthians 11](javascript:%7b%7d), especially verse 22; [Philippians 3](javascript:%7b%7d); [Revelation 3:9](javascript:%7b%7d).

[9](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts" \l "P85_17023)This is evident in texts like [Luke 4:16-30](javascript:%7b%7d) and [Acts 22:20-22](javascript:%7b%7d).

[10](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts" \l "P87_17769)In Luke’s Gospel, the term**“Pharisee”**is found (singular and plural) 26 times.  In Acts, this same term occurs only six times.  In Luke,**“Sadducees”**is found once, while it occurs five times in Acts.

[11](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts" \l "P118_28970)31 times in the NET Bible; 30 times in ESV; 29 times in NASV.

[12](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts" \l "P119_29368)The noun form used to designate deacons is not found in this text, but a form of the same root is employed to describe their function.

# Preparation for Pentecost (Acts 1:1-26)

Deffinbaugh’s message at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/2-preparation-pentecost-acts-11-26*](https://bible.org/seriespage/2-preparation-pentecost-acts-11-26)

### Introduction[1](https://bible.org/seriespage/2-preparation-pentecost-acts-11-26" \l "P6_79)

Ben Hadad, the king of Syria, was threatening war against Israel and its King, Ahab.  He boasted of his victory over Israel, and we read,

The king of Israel replied, “Tell him the one who puts on his battle gear should not boast like one who is taking it off” ([1 Kings 20:11](javascript:%7b%7d)).[2](https://bible.org/seriespage/2-preparation-pentecost-acts-11-26" \l "P9_946)

The point is that one should not boast before his victory, but should wait until after.  There is a great difference between “before” and “after.”

One of the popular themes in contemporary advertising is that of “before” and “after.”  There are the weight loss programs, which exhibit the most unflattering photo they can find to present as “before” their program was attempted.  Then follows a marvelous “after” photo, which displays a beautiful person, so different from the “before” photo.

In times past, though I have not seen this as much lately, we saw the “before” and “after” of advertising for weight gain. A photo of the proverbial “90-pound weakling” was followed by the “after” of an awesome, muscle-flexing Charles Atlas physique.  Who wouldn’t want to look like that?

The “before” and “after” theme is found frequently in the media. “Makeover” programs turn proverbial ugly ducklings into swans.  Now it has become popular to carry this theme over to homes, where pitiful or plain houses are transformed into palatial homes.

Long before modern advertising, the Bible had its own versions of “before” and “after.”  In Genesis, we have a picture of man “before” the fall and “after.”  In the Book of Judges, we have Gideon as a fearful and reticent man (“before”), and then we have Gideon “after” as the brave warrior.  In [Ephesians 2](javascript:%7b%7d), Paul contrasts the Gentiles in their unbelief with the Gentiles as saints, now a part of the church.

I believe the first chapter of Acts could be titled “Before,” because it precedes Pentecost in chapter two, and from there on it is definitely “after.”  While we may be eager to get to Pentecost, let us pause long enough to consider Luke’s introduction to the Book of Acts and to the transforming power of Pentecost.  Let us give thought to the way Luke prepares us for what is yet to come.

### The Structure of Our Text

I would like to look at [Acts 1](javascript:%7b%7d) in three segments:

Verses 1-11 From Christ’s Resurrection to His Return

Verses 12-14 Waiting in Jerusalem

Verses 15-26 Filling the Vacancy left by Judas

Verses 1-11 describe what happened during that 40-day period between our Lord’s resurrection and His ascension.  In verses 12-14, Luke tells us what the apostles were doing while they waited.  Finally, verses 15-26 are the account of the selection of Matthias as the twelfth apostle, a replacement for Judas.

I must tell you that the most problematic passage in [Acts 1](javascript:%7b%7d) is the final paragraph which describes the selection of Matthias as the twelfth apostle.  Why does Luke spend as much time (12 verses) describing this one event as he does depicting the 40 days of our Lord’s appearances on the earth (11 verses)?  What is so important about the selection of Matthias that deserves this kind of editorial space?  That is what we shall seek to discover in our study.

#### Forty Days of Purpose [Acts 1:1-11](javascript:%7b%7d)

1 I wrote the former account, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach 2 until the day he was taken up to heaven, after he had given orders by the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. 3 To the same apostles also, after his suffering, he presented himself alive with many convincing proofs. He was seen by them over a forty-day period and spoke about matters concerning the kingdom of God. 4 While he was with them, he declared, “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait there for what my Father promised, which you heard about 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 gathered together, they began to ask him, “Lord, is this the time when you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” 7 He told them, “You are not permitted to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 8 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 farthest parts of the earth.” 9 After he had said this, while they were watching, he was lifted up and a cloud hid him from their sight. 10 As they were still staring into the sky while he was going, suddenly two men in white clothing stood near them 11 and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will come back in the same way you saw him go into heaven” ([Acts 1:1-11](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Luke begins by informing his readers that the Book of Acts is the second volume of his account of the life and ministry of Jesus. Volume 1 – the Gospel of Luke – is the description of **“all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after he had given orders by the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen”**(verse 1b-2a).  By inference, this second volume is the account of all that Jesus continued to do and to teach, through His apostles.  As the first volume ends with the Great Commission, the second volume begins with it (verse 8).  What I would like to underscore is the role of the Holy Spirit in our Lord’s giving of the Great Commission.  We are told in verse 2 that Jesus gave orders by the Holy Spirit. We are further told that the Great Commission was an order given to the apostles who Jesus Himself had chosen.

I believe that among the many things we see in these early verses, we find that the Holy Spirit’s ministry in Acts – a dominant theme in this book – is linked to His ministry through the person of our Lord.  Put another way, the same Holy Spirit who empowered Jesus as He gave the Great Commission is the One who will empower the apostles (and the church) to carry out this command.  The ministry of the Holy Spirit does not commence in Acts, it continues in Acts.  Its commencement is found in the Gospels.  My point here is that Luke links the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of our Lord in the Gospels to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church in Acts.

As I read the early verses of chapter one, I am also impressed with the realization that Luke provides us with some powerful evidences of the resurrection of our Lord from the dead:

To the same apostles also, after his suffering, he presented himself alive with many convincing proofs. He was seen by them over a forty-day period and spoke about matters concerning the kingdom of God ([Acts 1:3](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Think of it!  Jesus waited 40 days from the time of His resurrection till the day of His ascension into heaven. During those 40 days, He provided them with **“many convincing proofs”** that He had indeed risen from the dead.  Only Paul matches Luke in the proofs he supplies for the resurrection:

3 For I passed on to you as of first importance what I also received—that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, 4 and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as though to one born at the wrong time, he appeared to me also. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God ([1 Corinthians 15:3-9](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The apostles were witnesses of our Lord’s resurrection (1:8, 22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39-41; 13:30-31).  Our Lord saw to it that these witnesses had more than enough evidence of His resurrection, and added to this was the witness of the Spirit to the resurrection:

7 But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I am going away. For if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you, but if I go, I will send him to you. 8 And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong concerning sin and righteousness and judgment— 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; 10 **concerning righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer**; 11 and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned” ([John 16:7-11](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

The Holy Spirit would internally indict sinners regarding the righteousness of Christ because He cannot be seen any longer.  The empty tomb and the absence of a body is further evidence of our Lord’s resurrection, and to this the Holy Spirit will bear witness.

A further matter of interest is that during this 40-day period, our Lord spoke with the apostles concerning the things pertaining to the kingdom of God (1:3).  We are not, however, given any indication as to just what things Jesus taught them.  Based upon Paul’s words in [Ephesians 3](javascript:%7b%7d), I am inclined to assume what a portion of this conversation may have been:

4 When reading this, you will be able to understand my insight into this secret of Christ. 5 Now this secret was not disclosed to people in former generations as **it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit, 6 namely, that through the gospel the Gentiles are fellow heirs, fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus** ([Ephesians 3:4-6](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

Somewhere along the line, the apostles were enlightened by our Lord concerning the mystery of the church. I would suspect that it may have been during that 40-day interval between our Lord’s resurrection and His ascension. What is of particular interest is that this revelation came about **“through the Spirit.”**

There is additional evidence that our Lord spoke to the apostles about the mystery of the church during these 40 days. When the apostles asked Jesus regarding the timing of the coming of the kingdom of God, they appear to indicate that they know the kingdom will be set aside for a time:

So when they had gathered together, they began to ask him, “Lord, is this the time when you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” ([Acts 1:6](javascript:%7b%7d))

Why did the apostles speak of the coming of the kingdom of God as its being “restored”?  I think it was because Jesus had revealed the mystery of the church to them.

There is a theme which dominates the 40-day period between the resurrection and ascension of our Lord.  If I were to summarize it, it would probably be like this:

“Your mission until I return is to preach the gospel to all nations. The Holy Spirit will come upon you shortly to empower you to carry out this task, so wait in Jerusalem until you receive this power.”

The coming of the Spirit is described as: (1) “the promise of the Father (verse 4); (2) that which the apostles heard from Jesus (verse 4); and, (3) that which John the Baptist foretold (verse 5).  The apostles sought greater knowledge.  Jesus informed them that they had (or would have) all the knowledge they needed.  What they needed was power, power to proclaim the gospel so that men would believe and be saved.  Pentecost was the occasion which God chose to bestow this power on His apostles.

When the apostles[3](https://bible.org/seriespage/2-preparation-pentecost-acts-11-26" \l "P44_12707)press Jesus to tell them the time when the kingdom of God will be established, Jesus graciously refuses by informing them that this information is outside their authority – there is no “need to know” so far as they are concerned.  This information, this timing, is something that falls entirely within the Father’s own authority.  To seek this knowledge is to go outside the boundaries of their authority.[4](https://bible.org/seriespage/2-preparation-pentecost-acts-11-26" \l "P45_13481)

But isn’t Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit really a matter of authority, a legitimate matter of authority?  In the Great Commission of [Matthew 28](javascript:%7b%7d), Jesus claimed all authority, and He based His command to proclaim the gospel to all nations on this authority:

18 Then Jesus came up and said to them, “**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me**. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” ([Matthew 28:18-20](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

I believe that when the Spirit came upon the apostles, they received the authority they needed to carry out the Great Commission. They sought authority that was outside the boundaries God had established. Jesus promised authority within the boundaries of what God purposed, because the coming of the Spirit was **“the promise of the Father”** (verse 4).

Luke’s account of our Lord’s ascension is brief, but informative:

9 After he had said this, while they were watching, he was lifted up and a cloud hid him from their sight. 10 As they were still staring into the sky while he was going, suddenly two men in white clothing stood near them 11 and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will come back in the same way you saw him go into heaven” ([Acts 1:9-11](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Luke’s Great Commission (unlike those in the Gospel of Matthew, Mark, and John) was given just prior to His ascension.  Our Lord’s last words sum up the focus of the first 11 verses of Acts:  They are to be His witnesses, beginning in Jerusalem and ending in the remotest part(s) of the earth.  They will receive power through the Holy Spirit to be witnesses.  Having said this, our Lord ascended into heaven.  They watched Him rise until a cloud obscured their vision.  They stood there, transfixed. (I wonder if they were waiting for that cloud to move out of their line of sight.)

Two angels suddenly appear near them. It was a gentle rebuke, if a rebuke at all.  What were they standing there for, looking into the sky?  Jesus was coming back, just as they saw Him depart.  The inference is, “Don’t just stand here; get going!”[5](https://bible.org/seriespage/2-preparation-pentecost-acts-11-26" \l "P53_15903)

In the midst of all of the “gnats,” let us not miss the “camel” of this text, namely that the Holy Spirit was soon (**“not many days from now,”** verse 5) to come upon them, empowering them to carry out the Great Commission.  They must not attempt to carry out the Great Commission without Pentecostal power.

#### What to Do while You Wait [Acts 1:12-14](javascript:%7b%7d)

12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mountain called the Mount of Olives (which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away). 13 When they had entered Jerusalem, they went to the upstairs room where they were staying. Peter and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James were there. 14 All these continued together in prayer with one mind, together with the women, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers ([Acts 1:12-14](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The apostles did as the angels implied; they returned to Jerusalem to wait. I do not think that verses 12-14 describe only the activity of the believers during the 10-day gap between our Lord’s ascension and Pentecost, however. I am inclined to think that verses 12-14 are an apt description of the apostles’ activity during the entire 50-day period preceding Pentecost.  Let me explain why I have reached this conclusion.

First, I note the wording of the first part of verse 13:

When they had entered Jerusalem, they went to the upstairs room**where they were staying**([Acts 1:13](javascript:%7b%7d)a, emphasis mine).

It appears to me that this upper room may well be a place well known to the apostles, perhaps a room owned by someone close to Jesus.  It would further seem that this is the room where the apostles had been staying the previous 40 days.

Not only the wording of verse 13, but also what we know of these 40 days, suggests that this is where the apostles had been staying since our Lord’s death.  Prior to His death, the disciples were constantly with Jesus.  Some of the women mentioned in [Acts 1:14](javascript:%7b%7d) may well have been those who accompanied Jesus and His disciples, and who also contributed to His support ([Luke 8:1-3](javascript:%7b%7d)).  When Jesus arose from the dead, He did not remain with them continually, as He once did. Instead, He would come and go. This is implied in [Acts 1:3](javascript:%7b%7d), but it is clear in particular instances, such as when Jesus appeared to the disciples who went fishing with Peter in [John 21](javascript:%7b%7d).  The apostles were all Galileans (see [Acts 1:11; 2:7](javascript:%7b%7d); see also [Matthew 26:73](javascript:%7b%7d)), so they could not stay in their own homes.  I believe that this upper room became headquarters for them during the entire 50-day period after our Lord’s resurrection.

What we have in verses 12-14, then, is a description of where the apostles stayed and what they did from the time of our Lord’s death till Pentecost.  The apostles stayed in Jerusalem, as instructed, and they devoted themselves to prayer, along with those who were closely associated with Jesus in His earthly ministry.  We should also observe that among this group were the brothers of our Lord ([Acts 1:14](javascript:%7b%7d)).  From this, we can infer that Jesus’ unbelieving brothers ([John 7:5](javascript:%7b%7d)) had come to believe in Jesus, no doubt largely due to His resurrection.

It seems to me that these loyal followers of Jesus are at their finest in verses 12-14. While it is not plainly stated, it would seem that from a human point of view the events at Pentecost were partially a response to the prayers of these saints.

#### A Replacement for Judas [Acts 1:15-26](javascript:%7b%7d)

15 In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty people) and said, 16 “Brothers, the scripture had to be fulfilled that the Holy Spirit foretold through David concerning Judas—who became the guide for those who arrested Jesus— 17 for he was counted as one of us and received a share in this ministry.” 18 (Now this man Judas acquired a field with the reward of his unjust deed, and falling headfirst he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out. 19 This became known to all who lived in Jerusalem, so that in their own language they called that field Hakeldama, that is, “Field of Blood.”) 20 “For it is written in the book of Psalms, ‘Let his house become deserted, and let there be no one to live in it,’ and ‘Let another take his position of responsibility.’ 21 Thus one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time the Lord Jesus associated with us, 22 beginning from his baptism by John until the day he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness of his resurrection together with us.” 23 So they proposed two candidates: Joseph called Barsabbas (also called Justus) and Matthias. 24 Then they prayed, “Lord, you know the hearts of all. Show us which one of these two you have chosen 25 to assume the task of this service and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” 26 Then they cast lots for them, and the one chosen was Matthias; so he was counted with the eleven apostles ([Acts 1:15-26](javascript:%7b%7d)).

This united prayer lasted for another ten days after our Lord’s ascension.[6](https://bible.org/seriespage/2-preparation-pentecost-acts-11-26" \l "P67_21057)It was during this ten-day period that a replacement was chosen for Judas.  The mystery of this paragraph is to explain why Luke went to so much effort (and space) to describe an event which appears to have little impact on the events that follow Pentecost.  Verses 15-26 immediately precede Pentecost, but do not appear to have any profound impact on the apostles or on the community of believers.  Why, then, does Luke include these verses?

Let us seek to answer this question by observing what happened. We know that unified prayer preceded this process (1:14); indeed prayer was a part of the process (see 1:24-25).  We learn that it was Peter who provided the leadership (1:15).  The search for Judas’ replacement was prompted, at least in part, by the consideration of some Old Testament Scriptures ([Psalm 69:25; 109:8](javascript:%7b%7d)).  From [Psalm 69](javascript:%7b%7d), they recognized that Judas’ betrayal was part of the divine plan.  The betrayal of our Lord was no accident, and it did not catch God off guard.  In particular, Judas’ death was seen to be a part of the divine plan.  The events surrounding Judas’ death[7](https://bible.org/seriespage/2-preparation-pentecost-acts-11-26" \l "P69_22350)were interpreted as the fulfillment of the prophecy of [Psalm 69:25](javascript:%7b%7d). The decision to proceed with the process of replacing Judas was seen as obedience to [Psalm 109:8](javascript:%7b%7d), thus leading to its fulfillment.

In days gone by, I have sided with those who found the selection of Matthias as an example of fleshly action hastily taken. Like others, I have pointed to Paul as the most likely candidate for Judas’ replacement.  Like others, I have called attention to the fact that after this account, the name of Matthias is never found again in the New Testament.[8](https://bible.org/seriespage/2-preparation-pentecost-acts-11-26" \l "P71_23288)I also called attention to the fact that Jesus told His apostles to wait until the coming of the Spirit.[9](https://bible.org/seriespage/2-preparation-pentecost-acts-11-26" \l "P72_23486)

Others have sought to justify this action on the part of the apostles. They remind us that most of the twelve apostles disappear in Acts and the Epistles, and not just Matthias. They call attention to references to**“the twelve”**after this ([Acts 6:2](javascript:%7b%7d); [1 Corinthians 15:5](javascript:%7b%7d)). They also point out that Luke’s account depicts this selection in a favorable light, and that nothing negative is said about the action taken here.

In the end, I think we must acknowledge that we must “read between the lines” a great deal to conclude that the replacement of Judas was wrong.  I think there are two things that are clear, and that should dominate our thinking. First, the replacement of Judas occurs prior to Pentecost.  And second, the replacement of Judas is carried out in a way that is very “Old Testament.”

After Pentecost, the selection of leadership (as well as the seeking of divine guidance) is heavily dependent upon the presence and power of the Holy Spirit:

But carefully select from among you, brothers, seven men who are well-attested,**full of the Spirit**and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this necessary task ([Acts 6:3](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

Here,**“the twelve”**addressed a problem of inequity in the care and feeding of their widows.  They determined that others needed to be appointed to oversee this ministry.  They left the selection of these leaders to the people, but they did set the qualifications. One of these qualifications was that each man manifested evidence of the Spirit’s presence in his life.

1 Now there were these prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius the Cyrenian, Manaen (a close friend of Herod the tetrarch from childhood) and Saul. 2 While they were serving the Lord and fasting,**the Holy Spirit said**, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” 3 Then, after they had fasted and prayed and placed their hands on them, they sent them off. 4 So Barnabas and Saul,**sent out by the Holy Spirit**, went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus ([Acts 13:1-4](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

In [Acts 13](javascript:%7b%7d) while those at the church in Antioch were fasting, the Holy Spirit indicated that Barnabas and Saul should be set apart and sent out as missionaries.  The church acknowledged the leading of the Spirit and laid their hands on these men, and then sent them off.  Luke then tells his readers that these two men were sent out by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit designated Barnabas and Saul. No lots were cast here, nor did they need to be.

9 But Saul (also known as Paul),**filled with the Holy Spirit**, stared straight at him 10 and said, “You who are full of all deceit and all wrongdoing, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness—will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? 11 Now look, the hand of the Lord is against you, and you will be blind, unable to see the sun for a time!” Immediately mistiness and darkness came over him, and he went around seeking people to lead him by the hand. 12 Then when the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, because he was greatly astounded at the teaching about the Lord. 13 Then**Paul and his companions**put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia, but John left them and returned to Jerusalem ([Acts 13:9-13](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

Barnabas and Saul arrived at the island of Cyprus and had traveled as far as Paphos. There they encountered the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. He was interested in the gospel, but a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus (or Elymas) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the truth. Up until this point, Paul (known as Saul until now) was clearly Barnabas’ assistant.  But the Holy Spirit enabled Paul to see what this false prophet was doing and prompted him to pronounce a curse on Bar-Jesus. From this point on, with very few exceptions ([Acts 14:14; 15:12, 25](javascript:%7b%7d)), it was always Paul and Barnabas, or Paul and Silas, or**“Paul and his companions.”**It was evidence of the Spirit’s working through Paul that seems to have triggered this exchange in roles of Paul and Barnabas.

28**For it seemed best to the Holy Spirit and to us**not to place any greater burden on you than these necessary rules: 29 that you abstain from meat that has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what has been strangled and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from doing these things, you will do well. Farewell ([Acts 15:28-29](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

When the Jerusalem Council met to determine what should be required of Gentile converts, they determined that Gentiles must not be placed under the law, and that they observe only a few restrictions.  And when they reached their decision, they made it clear that their decision was guided by the Holy Spirit.

28 Watch out for yourselves and for all the flock**of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers**, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son ([Acts 20:28](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

In his last face-to-face meeting with the Ephesian elders, Paul spoke to them about their responsibilities as shepherds. He made it clear that the Holy Spirit played a key role in their appointment.  Thus, whether it was the selection of leaders or making important doctrinal distinctions, the Holy Spirit played a key role from Pentecost on.

### Conclusion Lessons to be Learned

Our text has much to teach us, which is why Luke designed this chapter as his introduction to the Book of Acts.  Let us consider what some of these lessons might be.

I began this lesson by suggesting that it is an example of a “before and after” presentation. The selection of Matthias as the twelfth apostle is clearly a “before,” clearly an Old Testament method of seeking God’s will. This process will never be seen again in the rest of the New Testament.  After seeing how God works through His Spirit in [Acts 2](javascript:%7b%7d) and beyond, who would ever want to go back to the old?  As the writer to the Hebrews constantly emphasized, the New Covenant is vastly superior to the Old.  In [2 Corinthians 3](javascript:%7b%7d) and 4, Paul makes the same point, showing how much more glorious the New Covenant is to the Old and that New Testament ministry is to the old, because of the Holy Spirit.

4 Now we have such confidence in God through Christ. 5 Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as if it were coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, 6 who made us adequate to be servants of a new covenant not based on the letter but on the Spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 7 But if the ministry that produced death—carved in letters on stone tablets—came with glory, so that the Israelites could not keep their eyes fixed on the face of Moses because of the glory of his face (a glory which was made ineffective), 8 how much more glorious will the ministry of the Spirit be? 9 For if there was glory in the ministry that produced condemnation, how much more does the ministry that produces righteousness excel in glory! 10 For indeed, what had been glorious now has no glory because of the tremendously greater glory of what replaced it. 11 For if what was made ineffective came with glory, how much more has what remains come in glory! ([2 Corinthians 3:4-11](javascript:%7b%7d))

Let us never consider going back to the old.

Our text also reminds us that whenever God commands us to do something, He will provide all that we need to carry out His command. Our Lord gave His apostles the Great Commission, appointing them as witnesses of His resurrection, and as His ambassadors, to proclaim the gospel to all the world.  Not only did Jesus give them 40 days of continual confirmation of His resurrection; He also gave them His Spirit, who likewise bears witness to the resurrection through them.

The Great Commission was not only given to the apostles; it was given to the church. We can be certain that He will provide us with everything we need to carry out His command.  In the context of Acts (and the Epistles), we should see that the Holy Spirit is a significant part of the enablement we need.

[Acts 1](javascript:%7b%7d), consistent with the rest of the Book of Acts, reminds us that it is not about us; it is about God.  Acts is not the account of God choosing the best and most talented and godly people on the face of the earth, so that He can accomplish the Great Commission. Acts is the record of how our Lord is fulfilling the Great Commission by using weak and fallible men.  The religious leaders were quick to take note of the limitations of the apostles, and yet had to reluctantly acknowledge something powerful about their ministry:

13 When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and discovered that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed and recognized these men had been with Jesus. 14 And because they saw the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say against this ([Acts 4:13-14](javascript:%7b%7d)).

It isn’t about us, my friend; it is about God.  It is the Spirit of God working through weak and even foolish (in the eyes of the world) men that reveals the power of God, and brings glory to Him, not us:

26 Think about the circumstances of your call, brothers and sisters. Not many were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were born to a privileged position. 27 But God chose what the world thinks foolish to shame the wise, and God chose what the world thinks weak to shame the strong. 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, what is regarded as nothing, to set aside what is regarded as something, 29 so that no one can boast in his presence. 30 He is the reason you have a relationship with Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord” ([1 Corinthians 1:26-31](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Let me last observe that [Acts 1](javascript:%7b%7d) is the beginning of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in Acts. Consider these elements:

*First we find the doctrine of the Trinity*in the first chapter, which speaks of the Father (1:4), the Son (1:4, etc.), and the Holy Spirit (1:2, 5, 8, 16).  Before long ([Acts 5:3-4](javascript:%7b%7d)), the Holy Spirit will be identified as God.  This should come as no surprise because the Great Commission of Matthew also referred to all three members of the Godhead:

18 Then Jesus came up and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,**baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit**, 20 teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” ([Matthew 28:18-20](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

*Second, we learn that the Great Commission, which our Lord commanded His apostles, was given through the Holy Spirit (1:2).*

Third, Luke makes it emphatically clear that the power to carry out the Great Commission is the power that the Holy Spirit will bestow (1:4-5, 8).  The Holy Spirit confirms the apostles’ testimony, especially their claim that they have seen Jesus Christ risen from the dead.  We see this confirmed in [Acts 5](javascript:%7b%7d):

“And we are witnesses of these events, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him” ([Acts 5:32](javascript:%7b%7d)).

*Fourth, the Holy Spirit is portrayed as the Author of the Old Testament Scriptures.*He is the One who inspired the words of David in the psalms:

16 “Brothers, the scripture had to be fulfilled that the Holy Spirit foretold through David concerning Judas—who became the guide for those who arrested Jesus— ([Acts 1:16](javascript:%7b%7d)).

This truth is buttressed by [John 14-16](javascript:%7b%7d), [2 Timothy 3:16-17](javascript:%7b%7d), and [2 Peter 1:20-21](javascript:%7b%7d).

[Acts 1](javascript:%7b%7d) is the “before” section of this great book.  Things will only get better from here.  Let us eagerly look forward to the changes Pentecost will bring for the “better.”

[1](https://bible.org/seriespage/2-preparation-pentecost-acts-11-26" \l "P6_80)Copyright © 2005 by Community Bible Chapel, 418 E. Main Street, Richardson, TX 75081. This is the edited manuscript of Lesson 2 in the*Studies in the Book of Acts*series prepared by Robert L. Deffinbaugh on September 25, 2005.  Anyone is at liberty to use this lesson for educational purposes only, with or without credit.  The Chapel believes the material presented herein to be true to the teaching of Scripture, and desires to further, not restrict, its potential use as an aid in the study of God’s Word.  The publication of this material is a grace ministry of Community Bible Chapel.

[2](https://bible.org/seriespage/2-preparation-pentecost-acts-11-26" \l "P9_947)Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the NET Bible. The NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION, also known as THE NET BIBLE, is a completely new translation of the Bible, not a revision or an update of a previous English version.  It was completed by more than twenty biblical scholars who worked directly from the best currently available Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts.  The translation project originally started as an attempt to provide an electronic version of a modern translation for electronic distribution over the Internet and on CD (compact disk).  Anyone anywhere in the world with an Internet connection will be able to use and print out the NET Bible without cost for personal study.  In addition, anyone who wants to share the Bible with others can print unlimited copies and give them away free to others.  It is available on the Internet at:[www.netbible.org](http://www.netbible.org).

[3](https://bible.org/seriespage/2-preparation-pentecost-acts-11-26" \l "P44_12708)You will note that I do not use the term**“disciples”**to refer to the eleven here, or the twelve elsewhere in Acts.  The reason is that Luke ceases to use the term**“disciples”**to refer to the eleven or twelve in the Book of Acts.  He now consistently refers to them as**“apostles.”**The term**“disciple”**is now employed when reference is made to new believers in Acts.

[4](https://bible.org/seriespage/2-preparation-pentecost-acts-11-26" \l "P45_13482)This is much like Adam and Eve, who sought knowledge outside of the boundaries of their authority.

[5](https://bible.org/seriespage/2-preparation-pentecost-acts-11-26" \l "P53_15904)In this regard, it is similar to the words of the two angels to the women at the tomb, as seen in [Luke 24:4-7](javascript:%7b%7d).

[6](https://bible.org/seriespage/2-preparation-pentecost-acts-11-26" \l "P67_21058)We can easily deduce this since Pentecost was 50 days after Passover.  Jesus was appearing to the apostles for 40 days until His ascension, and so there had to be 10 days left until Pentecost.

[7](https://bible.org/seriespage/2-preparation-pentecost-acts-11-26" \l "P69_22351)The apparent contradictions between this account and that of [Matthew 27:3-10](javascript:%7b%7d) are not insurmountable.  If all the facts were known, I believe that these two accounts would perfectly compliment each other.  It is not my purpose here to allow these matters to sidetrack our consideration of the argument of this text.  Other scholars have tackled this problem and have proposed solutions.

[8](https://bible.org/seriespage/2-preparation-pentecost-acts-11-26" \l "P71_23289)We do, however, find a reference to**“the twelve”**in both [Acts 6:2](javascript:%7b%7d) and [1 Corinthians 15:5](javascript:%7b%7d).

[9](https://bible.org/seriespage/2-preparation-pentecost-acts-11-26" \l "P72_23487)He does not forbid taking any action until Pentecost; He merely forbids the apostles to leave Jerusalem (in carrying out the Great Commission) until after Pentecost.

# Witnessing Better Than Knowing the Future

[(No. 2330)](http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/index/c39.htm) at [*http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/sermons/2330.htm*](http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/sermons/2330.htm)  
C. H. SPURGEON,  
At the [Metropolitan Tabernacle,](http://www.metropolitantabernacle.org/index.html) Newington  
*On Thursday Evening, August 29th, 1889.*

"When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."—Acts 1:6-8.

Logo

Description automatically generatedHESE ARE AMONG THE LAST WORDS of our Lord. We greatly prize the last words of good men. Let us set high store by these later words of our ascending Lord. It is very curious to my mind that Jesus should make mention of John the Baptist and of John's baptism in these last words. Read the fifth verse: "John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." It is very usual for good men's memories, in their last hours, to go back to their first hours. I trust that some of us will think of our baptism even when we are dying.

"High heaven, that heard the solemn vow,  
That vow renew'd shall daily hear:  
Till in life's latest hour I bow,  
And bless in death a bond so dear."

Our Lord began in such a way that he could afford to look back on his beginning. Some do not commence so; their beginning is so undecided, so imperfect, so hesitating, that they may well wish to have it forgotten. But our Lord, at the close of his sojourn on earth, thinks of John the Baptist, and pays him a dying word of respect just before he is taken up into glory. I like to notice that interesting fact.  
But, now, to come more to the text, a question was put to our Lord. Many questions were asked of him by his disciples, some of them not very wise ones. We are very glad that they asked them, for they have extracted from the Savior a great amount of instruction; and although this question about restoring the kingdom to Israel may have been a mistaken one, and they may have meant a more material and carnal kingdom than our Savior intended to establish (of that I am not sure), yet the question brought to us a reply which we may well store up in our memories and hearts: "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."  
We have three things to talk about to-night; first, *some things which are not for us;* secondly, *some things for us to receive;* and thirdly, *something for us to be.*  
I. First, then, let us consider SOME THINGS WHICH ARE NOT FOR US. It is not for us to know the times and the seasons, and to be able to make a map of the future. There are some great events of the future very clearly revealed. The prophecy is not at all indistinct about the facts that will occur; but as to when they will occur, we have no data. Some think that they have; but our Lord here seems to say that we do not know the times and the seasons, and that it is not for us to know them. I pass no censure upon brethren who think that, by elaborate calculations, they find out what is to be in the future; I say that I pass no censure, but time has passed censure of the strongest kind upon all their predecessors. I forget how many miles of books interpreting prophecy there are in the British Museum; but I believe it amounts to miles, all of which have been disproved by the lapse of time. Some of the writers were wonderfully definite; they knew within half-an-hour when the Lord would come. Some of them were very distinct about all the events; they had mapped them all within a few years. The men who wrote the books, happily for themselves, had mostly died before the time appointed came. It is always wise to pitch on a long period of prophecy, that you may be out of the way if the thing does not come off; and they mostly did so. There were very few of them who lived to suffer the disappointment which would certainly have come to them through having fixed the wrong date. I let time censure their mistake. God forgave it, for they did it with a desire for his glory. The bulk of them were most sincere students of the Word, and herein are a lesson to us, even though they were mistaken in their calculations; but, beloved, it is not for you to know the times and the seasons.  
First, *it is not proper for you.* It is not your work. You are not sent into the world to be prophets; you are sent into the world to be witnesses. You do not come here to be prognosticators of the events of tomorrow about yourself, or about your children, or about your friends, or about the nations of the earth. A veil hangs between you and the future. Your prayer is to be, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." You are told to look for the coming of your Lord, and to stand in perpetual expectation of his return; but to know the time when he will come, is no part of your office. You are servants who are to look for your Lord, who may come at cock-crowing, or at midday, or at midnight. Keep you always on the tiptoe of expectation. It would be wrong for you to profess that you need not watch until such and such a time, for he would not come until such a date arrived.  
As it is not proper for you, so *it is not profitable for you.* What would you be the better if you could make a map of all that is yet to be? Suppose it were revealed to yon to-night, by an angel, in what respect would it alter your conduct for to-morrow? In what way would it help you to perform the duties which your Master has enjoined upon you? I believe that it would be to you a very dangerous gift; you would be tempted to set yourself up as an interpreter of the future. If men believed in you, you would become eminent and notable, and you would be looked upon with awe. The temptation would be to become a prophet on your own account, to head a new sect, to lead a new company of men to believe in yourself. I say that that would be the temptation. For my part, I would rather not know any more than my Lord pleases to reveal to me; and if he did reveal all the future to me, I should feel like the prophets who spake of "the burden of the Lord." Neither would it ensure your salvation to be able to foretell the future, for Balaam was a great prophet, but he was a great sinner; he was an arch-rebel although he was an arch-divine. Nor do I know that, by foretelling the future, you would convince your fellow-men; for Noah told them that the world would be destroyed by the flood, he could give them a very accurate account of the time when the rain would descend, and yet they were not converted by his preaching, neither did they come into the ark. Those truths which God has revealed, you must accept for yourselves and proclaim to others; they are profitable for all purposes, and sufficient for your work; but the future is known only to God.  
And as it is not proper or profitable, so *it is not possible for you* to know the times and the seasons. You may study as you will, and pray as you please; but the times and the seasons are not committed to you. Our Lord, as man, spoke of one great event of which lie did not know the time: "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." He does not say that now that he has risen from the dead, but he seems to hint that he did not know so as to tell his disciples; he must keep secret, even from them, that, which the Father hath put in his own power."  
Notice, next, dear friends, that *it is not good for you* to know the times and the seasons. That is what the Savior means when he says, "It is not for you to know." For, first, it would distract your attention from the great things of which you have to think. It is enough for your mind to dwell upon the cross and the coming glory of your Lord. Keep these two things distinctly before you, and you need not puzzle your brains about the future. If you did know that something important was going to happen very speedily, you might be full of consternation, and do your work in a great hurry. You might be worked up into a frenzy that would spoil all your service. Or, if there was a long time to elapse before the great event, you might feel the indifference of distance. If our Lord were not to come for another hundred years, and he may not, we cannot tell,—then we might say, "My Lord delayeth his coming," and so we might begin to sleep, or to play the wanton. It is for our good to stand ever in this condition, knowing that he is coming, knowing that he will reign, knowing that certain great events will certainly transpire; but not knowing the exact times and seasons when those events are to be expected.  
But there is something better than knowing the times or the seasons; *it is good for us to know that they are in the Father's power:* "which the Father hath put in his own power." The events will come to pass, then, in due time. The future is all in God's hand. No prophecy will lack its mate. No word of God will fall unfulfilled to the ground. Possess your souls in patience: the things that are foretold are sure to happen. "Though the vision tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." I am persuaded that God never is before his time, but he never is too late. He never failed to keep tryst with his people to the tick of the clock. The future is in the Father's power.  
And especially let it be remembered that it is in his power as our Father. He must arrange it rightly; he must arrange it in infinite love to us. It cannot be that, in some dark hour yet to come, he will forget us. He is our Father; will he forget his children? If the times could be in my hand, how earnestly would I pray that Christ would take them into his hand, or that the Father would take away from me the dangerous power, and wield it all himself! Did we not sing just now,—

"All my times are in thy hand,  
All events at thy command"?

The time of birth, the time of the new birth, the time of a sore trial, the time of the death of your beloved one, the time of your sickness, and how long it shall last, all these times must come, and last, and end, as shall please your Father. It is for you to know that your Father is at the helm of the ship, and therefore it cannot be wrecked. It may rock and reel to and fro; but, since he rules the waves, the vessel will not have one more tossing than his infinite love permits. Let us, then, not seek to unroll the map of the future, but calmly say,—

"My God, I would not long to see  
My fate with curious eyes,  
What gloomy lines are writ for me,  
Or what bright scenes arise;"

but just leave it all with God. The Father hath it in his own hands, and there we wish it to be.  
So much concerning some things which are not for us.  
II. And now, secondly, there are SOME THINGS FOR US TO RECEIVE. The Savior said to the eleven that they were to wait at Jerusalem till they had received power by the Holy Ghost coming upon them. This is what we want; we want the Holy Ghost. We often speak about this; but, in truth, it is unspeakable, the power of the Holy Ghost, mysterious, divine. When it comes upon a man, he is bathed in the very essence of the Deity. The atmosphere about him becomes the life and power of God. There is an old proverb that knowledge is power; Christ has taken away the knowledge that is not power. He said, "It is not for you, child; it is not for you." But he gives you the knowledge that is power; or, rather, that power which is better than all knowledge, the power of the Holy Spirit. Gotthold, in his parables, speaks of his little child who wanted to come into his room; but he was doing something there which he did not wish the child to see, and so he went on with his work, when, to his horror and surprise, he found that his child had in some way climbed up outside the window, and was standing on the sill trying to look in to see what his father was doing hazarding his life in the attempt. You may guess that it was not long before that child was taken down with a pat, and Something more, to teach him not to pry into his father's secrets. It is so with some of us; we need just a little pat, and perhaps more than that, to keep us from looking into things that do not belong to us. We may be comforted even if we do not know the times and the seasons, for we may get something vastly better, namely, the Holy Spirit to give us real power for our life-work.  
The Holy Spirit gives to his people power which may be looked at from different points. He gave to some of them in the olden times *miraculous power,* and they went forth, having received the Spirit of God, to do great signs and wonders in the name of Christ. If you have not that, you may hope to have *mental power.* The Holy Spirit does not educate us, or give us culture after the common method of men, and yet there is an inner education and a higher culture which is much more to be desired, which comes from him. He leads us into all truth; he makes us feel the force of truth; he gives us a grip of truth; he writes truth upon the heart; he applies it to the understanding. Many a man has become quick of understanding in the fear of the Lord, who was very slow of understanding in other respects. The Holy Spirit takes the fool, and makes him know the wonders of redeeming love. It is amazing how persons, of very scanty gifts, and very small attainments, have, nevertheless, become wise toward God, their mental faculties being quickened with regard to heavenly things in a very remarkable manner.  
The power of the Spirit is also, in part, *moral power.* He gives to men qualities that make them strong and influential over their fellow-men, he imparts dauntless courage, calm confidence, intense affection, burning zeal, deep patience, much-enduring perseverance. Many other hallowed influences besides these are graces of the Spirit of God, which form in men a moral power exceedingly useful and exceedingly forcible. I have known men who have been slow of speech, and who have exhibited very few gifts, who have, nevertheless, been very strong men in our assemblies, true pillars of the church, for piety is power, and grace is power.  
Besides that, there is a more secret, subtle power still, *spiritual power,* wherein, in the spiritual world, a man is made a prince with God, and hath power with God; and learning how to prevail with God for men, he catches the art of prevailing With men for God. He is first a wrestler alone by Jabbok; then he becomes a wrestler in the midst of the host of sinners, conquering them for Christ, taking them captive in the name of the Most High. Power in prayer is the highest form of power; and. communion with God is power; and holiness, above all things, is a great power among the sons of men.  
This spiritual power makes a man influential, in a sense very different from that in which the world uses the word "influential"—a disgraceful use of the word. We want men who have influence in the divinest sense, men who, somehow or other, cast a spell over their fellow-men. In their presence men cannot do what they are accustomed to do elsewhere; when these men are in any company, they check sin without a word, they incite to righteousness almost without a sentence. They carry everything before them, not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord who dwells in them. Have I not seen some, decrepit and bedridden, yet ruling a house, and influencing a parish? Have I not seen some tottering old woman who, nevertheless, has been a very queen in the circle in which she moved? Have I not seen some poor, humble rustic from the plough who, nevertheless, has worn a coronet in the midst of his fellow-men by the holiness of his life, and the spiritual power that God the Holy Ghost had imparted to him?  
Now, beloved, I have not time fully to describe this endowment; I have only mentioned one or two points in which it is seen, but this endowment is what we need before we can do anything for Christ. Do you always think enough of this? The teacher prepares her lesson; but does she also prepare herself by seeking the power of the Holy Spirit? The minister studies his text; but does he ask for a baptism of the Holy Ghost? I am afraid that this spiritual qualification, the most essential of all, is frequently overlooked. Then, the Lord have mercy upon us! The soldier had better go to battle without sword or rifle, the artilleryman had better wheel up his gun without powder or shot, than that we should attempt to win a soul until first of all the Holy Spirit has given us power. Power must go with the word that is preached or taught if any large result is to follow; and that power must first be in the man who speaks that word.  
For this power the disciples were to wait. The world was dying, bell was raging, yet they must tarry at Jerusalem till they had that power. Impetuous Peter must hold his tongue, and loving John must be quiet and must commune in secret with his Master. None of them must go out into the street or stand in the temple to proclaim the words of this life. They must stop till God should see fit to pour out his Spirit upon them; and I would to God that sometimes we could be quiet, too. It were better to be dumb than to speak only in the power of our own spirit. It were better to lay the finger on the lip than to begin to talk before our message has been burnt into us by the Holy Ghost. Wait for the live coal from off the altar to blister thy lip, for then only canst thou speak with power when thou thyself hast felt the fire of the Spirit.  
III. Now we pass on to the third point, which is a very important practical one, SOMETHING FOR US TO BE. If you are a disciple of Christ, you are not to look into the times and the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power; you are to receive the Spirit of God, and then there is something for you to be. Did you expect me to say that then there is *something for you to do?* Well, there is a great deal for you to do; but the text says, "Ye shall be witnesses"; not "Ye shall act as witnesses" only, but "Ye *shall be* witnesses." Every true Christian should, in his own proper person, be a witness for his Lord. "Here I stand," says he, "myself a proof of what my Lord can do. I, his servant, saved by him, and renewed by him, washed in his blood, it is I who, while I live, whether I speak or not, am a monument of his love, a trophy of his grace." "Ye shall be Witnesses unto me."  
Dear friends, we are to be *witnesses of what Christ has done.* If we have seen Christ, if we believe in Christ, let us tell it honestly. These apostles had a great deal to tell. They had been with Christ in private; they had seen his miracles; they had heard his choicest and more secret words; they had to go and bear witness to it all. And you, who have been let into the secrets of Christ, you who have communed with him more closely than others, you have much to tell. Tell it all, for whatever he has said to you in the closet you are to proclaim upon the housetop. You are to witness what you have seen, and tasted, and handled, concerning your Lord.  
You are to *witness to what he has revealed,* to make known to others the doctrine that he preached, or taught by his apostles. Mind that you do not tell any other. You are not sent to be "an original thinker", to make up a gospel as you go along; you are a witness, that is all, a retailer of Christ's truth, and you miss the end of your life unless you perpetually witness, and witness, and witness to what you know of him, and to what you have learnt from him. Let this be your prayer and your resolve,—

"Give me thy strength, O God of power!  
Then let winds blow, or thunders roar,  
Thy faithful witness will I be:  
'Tis fixed: I can do all through thee."

You are to *witness to what you have experienced concerning Christ.* Now, what is that? I will just run over this witness, feeling that there are many hundreds of dear friends here to-night who could bear the same testimony, and who will do so as they have opportunity.  
First, I beg to say to all present here, to-night, that the Lord Jesus Christ can remove despair, and every form of spiritual distress. He did so to me. I was full of darkness, the shadow of death was upon me, and I found no comfort till I heard that blessed text, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." I looked unto him, and was lightened, and my face was not ashamed; and I am here tonight to bear witness that it load was thus taken from me, which I could not get rid of in any other way, and my midnight was, in a single moment, turned into the blaze of midday. Neither have I ever gone back to that darkness, nor have I again had reason to cry, "Woe is me that ever I was born." Nay, there is in the name of Jesus a balm for every mental wound, a relief for all the agony of a tortured spirit. I am sure of it; I am not saying to you what I have merely heard from other people, but what I have myself felt, and there are many here who can endorse my testimony that there is no relief to a sinner's aching heart Like that which Jesus brings. I wish that you would all prove this truth for yourselves; but, at any rate, we are witnesses that it is so.  
And, next, our Lord Jesus is a great transformer of character. I do not like to speak of myself, but I will speak of many a man whom I know. He came into this Tabernacle a drunkard, a swearer, a lover of unholy pleasures, and while the Word was preached, the Lord broke him down, and melted his heart. Now he hates what once he loved; and as to those pursuits which were once distasteful to him, so that he cursed and swore at the very mention of them, or at least poured ridicule upon others who loved them, he now loves them himself, and it is a wonder to himself to find himself where he now is. He never dreamt of being what he is. Ask his wife whether there is a change in him; ask his little children whether there is a change in him; ask his workmates, ask his employer, ask anybody, and they will all say, "He is not the same man." The Lord Jesus Christ has turned everything upside down with him. It was the wrong way up before, and so he has put it all right. He can turn the lion into a lamb, the raven into a dove; and he has done so to many of our friends who are sitting in this house to-night, as they would willingly bear witness. Oh, if there are any here, to-night, who would learn the way of righteousness, and quit the paths of sin, let them believe my testimony, which comes not out of feigned lips! "I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not." The Lord is able to transform character in a very wonderful way; he has done it for many of us, and if thou believest in him, he will do it for thee also.  
Next, we should like to bear witness to the sustaining power of Christ under temptation. After being saved, we have been tempted, and we are men of like passions with others. I speak for my sisters as well as for my brothers here. We have all been tempted, and we have been well nigh thrown back to our old condition; but when we have fled to Christ, and trusted in him, our feet have stood firm even upon the brink of the precipice. We have passed through fire and water by way of trial and temptation, and yet we stand, for Christ is able to guard us even from stumbling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with In exceeding joy. We are not talking to you of things that we have dreamt. O sirs, we would not like to tell some of you how we have been tempted, how hard it has gone with us, how we have been saved by the skin of our teeth; but saved we have been, to the praise of God's mighty grace. Let his name be praised for ever and ever. That is our witness. If you would be kept from temptation, come and trust him, too.  
We wish also to say that the Spirit of God coming from Christ moves men to high and noble thoughts. Selfishness no longer rules the man who believes in Christ; he loves his fellow-men, he desires their good, he can forgive them if they persecute him, he can lay down his life for them. Have we not had many who have gone forth among the heathen, and laid down their lives for Christ? I was speaking with a brother from the Congo on Monday, and I spoke of the many deaths there, and he said, "Yes, it looks a sad. thing that so many missionaries should die; but, sir," he added, "that is the first thing that we have done in Africa that is really hopeful. I have often heard the natives say to me, 'These men must believe a true religion, or else they would not come here to die for us poor black men.' Men begin to believe this new kind of evidence. The blood of the missionary becomes the seed of the Church." I do not doubt that it is so and, beloved, if you and I can live wholly and alone for Christ, if we can live nobly, if we can get out of ourselves, if we can rise superior to worldly advantages, and prove that we believe all we say, we shall convince our fellow-men of the truth of our religion. This is what the Holy Spirit would have us to be, and we desire to obey his promptings more and more.

"Holy Spirit, dwell in me;  
I, myself, would holy be."

# I will not detain you many minutes more; but I must bear my testimony to the supporting power of Christ in the time of trouble. There are many here, who would have been in the asylum, in their time of trial, if it had not been that they could carry their grief to Christ. There are some of us who are not strangers to very acute pain, and to a long continuance of it, too; and we have found no comfort in the world like going to our Lord when racked with anguish, and torn with pain. There is a power about him to charm us into joy; when everything would drive us to distress, and almost to despair. And, specially, I want to bear my witness, not of course a personal one, but that of an observer, as to the power of our holy religion in the hour of death. I have been at many death-beds; I have seen many Christians just about to die. There it is that the power of our holy religion comes in. How calm, how resigned, sometimes how triumphant, how ecstatic, is the frame of mind of the departing believer! I never heard one of them regret that he was a Christian. In times when men sift what they have done and believed, and when they tell no lies, for the naked truth comes up before them, I have heard them glory in belonging to Christ, and in resting in him; but I have never heard them regret that they did so. Our religion is not all of the future; it is not a thing that dreams concerning the world to come. It gives us present joy, present strength, present comfort, and we commend it to you most heartily, for this is our duty, to be witnesses for Christ. There are some who can give their evidence-in-chief, but the pity is that, when they come to be cross-examined, when they get among the ungodly in the world, they make a mess of it. The Lord have mercy upon some who come in among us, and even profess to know Christ, and do not; it is their lie that taints the testimony of the true in the judgment of mankind! Be you the more zealous to overbear their treachery by your consistency. Be you the more full of integrity, and stern truthfulness, and boundless love, to make up for these wounds which your Lord receives so often in the house of his friends. May the Spirit of God rest upon you, beloved in the Lord, and may you hear your Master say to you, Ye shall be witnesses unto me"! Amen.