

FPFWC Christian Development



The Birth of the Church

April 2023

Spring Quarter

April 29, 2023

Lesson #5 – Jesus Makes a Promise

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Acts 1:1-11

ICE BREAKERS-

1. How do we experience the power of God?
2. What are key principles in witnessing?

Key Verse: “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you”. —Acts 1:8a

LESSON BACKGROUND –

We may find it surprising that a Gentile who was not an apostle wrote more of the New Testament than anyone else. We’re talking about Luke the physician (Colossians 4:14). His writings of the Gospel that bears his name and the book of Acts total 37, 932 words in Greek across 2, 158 verses. By comparison, Paul wrote 32, 408 words across the 2, 033 verses of his 13 epistles.

The sheer volume of Luke’s writing also explains why the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts are separate. Writings were frequently on scrolls in Luke’s day, and the maximum practical length of a scroll was about 10 yards. Luke’s Gospel and the book of Acts have about two scrolls’ worth of material, making a physical division necessary. Luke did this thoughtfully by dividing the books into his account of Jesus and his account of the church. The bridge between the two is the ascension of Jesus, found in Luke 24:50–53 and repeated in Acts 1:6–9.

Careful study of these two books shows that Luke maintained high standards for accuracy. Where we can corroborate his historical details, he has proven to be completely reliable. For example, Luke refers to the magistrates of the city of Thessalonica by the Greek word *politarchas* (Acts 17:6, 8), a term not found elsewhere in ancient literature. This had led earlier scholars to wonder if Luke made up this word. However, archaeological excavations have since found inscriptions that use this title, confirming Luke’s attention to accurate detail.

LESSON COMMENTARY

Luke introduces the major themes of the book—the resurrection as the non-negotiable message of Jesus’ witnesses, the mandate to witness to the ends of the earth, the strategy for the growth of the church under the sovereign direction and power of the Holy Spirit, and the obedience of the witnesses to the instructions of the Lord. Jesus gave the apostles the divine strategy for advancing the kingdom of God.

1:1–2. Luke’s reference to **the first account I composed** connects Acts with the third gospel. Like the Gospel of Luke, Acts is addressed to Theophilus (cf. Lk 1:3), whose name means “lover of God.” Some have suggested this is a spiritual title for all believers, whom Jesus called friends in the upper room discourse (see Jn 15:14). The title “most excellent,” (Lk 1:3), however, may identify Theophilus as a government official (see Ac 23:26; 24:3; 26:25) who may have served as Luke’s patron, underwriting his expenses while he researched and wrote his gospel and its sequel. Another possibility is that he was a Roman official who had made inquiries about this new faith and therefore was the receptor of the book written to defend the faith for the Greco-Roman world. **All that Jesus began to do and teach** refers to Jesus’ actions and ministry recorded in Luke’s gospel. After His resurrection, Jesus continued His earthly ministry by instructing His apostles **by the Holy Spirit**. “By the Spirit” refers not to the delivery of the instruction by Jesus to the disciples in the power of the Holy Spirit, but anticipates Jesus’ promise of the Holy Spirit to empower His followers in their witness to the world.

B. The Means of Preparing the Disciples for the Mission (1:3–26)

1:3. Luke focused on two important truths Jesus emphasized in His teaching prior to His ascension. First, after His suffering, Jesus appeared to His disciples and gave them **many convincing proofs** that He was alive. **Convincing proofs** (*tekmerion*) is used only here in the NT and means “that which causes something to be confirmed or verified in a decisive way” (see BDAG, 994; L&N, 1:339). It refers to evidence that is so credible it could be used in an official trial. **Over a period of forty days** means that Jesus appeared on multiple occasions to His followers and not merely once or twice. Because the message of the resurrection is crucial to the “gospel,” it was absolutely essential for Jesus to convince His followers that He is alive.

Second, during His earthly life, the theme of the kingdom of God dominated Jesus’ teaching. Now, in preparation for taking the gospel to the world, Jesus again taught about the kingdom. The kingdom of God theme brackets the book of Acts. The book opens with Jesus teaching about the kingdom in the city of Jerusalem (1:3) and ends with Paul teaching about the kingdom of God in the city of Rome (28:31). For an explanation of “the kingdom of God,” see the comments on Mt 3:1–4).

Christians debate the exact time of the inauguration and fulfillment of the kingdom. The gospels, especially Mark, make it clear that Jesus inaugurated the kingdom (Mk 1:15; and see the comments on Mt 13:10–17); however, the complete establishment of the kingdom is future. If the messianic kingdom were only a spiritual kingdom equated with the church, it seems strange that Peter would continue to emphasize Israel’s hope for a future literal and geo-political kingdom in his preaching to the Jewish people (see the comments on 1:6 and 3:19–21).

1:4–6. Though Jerusalem was a place of danger, Jesus commanded His followers to stay in the city to wait for the Spirit whom God had promised (cf. Jn 2:28–32; Ezk 36:24–28) and Jesus had taught them that they would receive (Jn 14:16–17). For the phrase **baptized with** [better “in”] **the Holy Spirit**, see the comments on Mt 3:5–12; 1Co 12:12–13

The apostles asked, **Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?** The apostles naturally interpreted Jesus' teaching as referring to the full and immediate establishment of the messianic kingdom for Israel, promised for the Jewish people in the Hebrew Scriptures (see Is 2:2–4; Jr 31:27–34; Am 9:11–15). The disciples correctly understood that the promises made to Israel about the restoration of the kingdom under the Messiah were not fulfilled in the fullest sense by the church. For the relationship of the church to the kingdom of God in the present era (before the second coming of Christ), see the comments on Mt 13:10–17.

1:7–8. Nothing in Jesus' answer suggests that the disciples' question was in error, other than their fixation on the time of the restoration. Israel would have a full restoration under the Messiah. But Jesus did not specify when this would happen, and instead presented the mission that must preoccupy His disciples before the kingdom is established.

Some believe that the promises in the OT to Israel about restoration to the land have been fulfilled in Christ for the church. Therefore they interpret Jesus' words as a rebuke for the apostles for misunderstanding the nature, the extent, and the timing of the kingdom. In contrast others believe that Israel will be literally restored to the land during the future millennial (thousand-year) reign of Christ on earth. According to this interpretation, Jesus did not rebuke the apostles for anticipating a literal kingdom but rather for their desire to know **times or epochs**. This view is more plausible since Jesus did not actually deny that there would be a future kingdom for Israel. Rather He maintained that the disciples just could not know when it would come. Moreover, this view is supported by Peter's continuing expectation for a future "restoration of all things" at the second coming of Christ (cf. 3:19–21).

As further clarification of their kingdom mission, Jesus promised His followers the gift of the Spirit. The promise confirmed Jesus' previous promise in Jn 14:16, 25. Its fulfillment would provide the witnesses supernatural power for proclaiming the gospel.

Jesus enlarged the vision of His followers by removing all geographical boundaries for ministry. Instead of waiting for the nations to come to Jerusalem (see Is 2:2; 51:11; Mc 4:1–2), Jesus commissioned His followers to go to the nations. Like the ripples that widen from the place where a stone is tossed into a pond, the gospel will radiate from its origination in Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, and ultimately to the ends of the earth. In the context of the book of Acts, the ends of the earth may be a reference to Rome, though it should not be restricted to it.

1:9–14. After commissioning the apostles, Jesus ascended to heaven enveloped in a cloud. God guided Israel in the wilderness and hovered above the tabernacle in a cloud, and when he revealed His deity at the transfiguration, Jesus was surrounded by a cloud. It was appropriate then for Jesus to return to heaven in a cloud, symbolizing the presence of God. The bewildered apostles responded like a convention of stargazers until two angels appeared and promised them that Jesus would return in the same way. This promise (v. 11) is pivotal for a proper understanding of the second coming. Preterists believe that the second coming

has already taken place in AD 70. According to this view, Jesus' return to earth was not physical but rather a return in judgment against Israel and Jerusalem (see the comments introducing Mt 24–25). In light of Ac 1:11, however, the preterist view is untenable. Jesus will descend visibly, physically, and literally to the Mount of Olives, parallel to how He ascended (see the comments on Zch 14:1–5). The ascension gives assurance of God's approval of Christ's life and work and the certainty of His second coming.

As the Lord had commanded (cf. 1:4), the apostles courageously and obediently returned to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem they gathered in an upper room, probably in the home of Mary (see Ac 12:12, though it is impossible to be certain). It is unlikely that this was the same room used by Jesus and the disciples on the night He was betrayed. Different words are used for that location (in Mk 14:15 and Lk 22:11–12). Both men and women prayed. Luke gave two essentials for effective prayer. **These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer.** They prayed with “with one mind and purpose” (*homothymadon*) (BDAG, 706), and they were “devoted to” (*proskartereo*, “to persist in some activity, to be busily engaged in” something) (see BDAG, 880) prayer. They were united and prayed constantly. This kind of devotion to prayer indicated total confidence the Lord would soon send the Spirit and they would become His witnesses.

LESSON NUGGET – Christ is the Head of the church (Ephesians 1:22; 4:15) and supplies life to His body, giving direction to His people. What He began to do and teach, the church continues as He guides and empowers through His Spirit. God's power is available to God's people who want to do His will and be His witnesses. You do not have to be an apostle to have the power of the Spirit in your life (Ephesians 5:18).

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, The Word For Today Bible, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary*