

## Acts 1.1-26

### The Promise and the Mission

#### INTRODUCTION / CONTEXT / CONNECTIONS

- 1/ We are beginning a new course with this lesson. We'll be doing another survey / summary study of the **Book of Acts**. We'll call it simply '**CHURCH ON MISSION**.' As with our other courses, we can't and won't attempt to do anything even resembling a detailed study of the contents of the book. Rather, we'll seek to cover, at least in a survey/summary way, the entirety of the text of **Acts** and show how the first church obeyed Jesus' initial command in **ch 1.8**: "**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 end of the earth.**" That is, after all, Luke's thematic purpose that he intends to relate to us under the inspiration of that same Holy Spirit – and it is the strategic, literary outline he will follow in this narrative.
- 2/ We will be introducing many more details in our class sessions than we can include here in these Lesson Notes / Talking Points. But that's also why we call these notes by that name. We have allotted ourselves twenty-six lessons over the next six months – two quarters. And since **Acts** has twenty-eight chapters, that means we will be combining some chapters together when the events of those chapters are a continued event or story, so as not interrupt the context and flow of thought from one week to the next.
- 3/ In all of these efforts, let me remind you of one of my primary purposes as your teacher: *that is, so we can all learn together how to read God's Word*. We all read the same Bible, and we all must read and conduct our lives in unity together – especially in our church – by the principles taught to us by the Spirit of God in the Word of God. *As I repeatedly tell you, I don't want to just teach you lessons from the Bible; I want to teach you the Bible!* And so, we'll conduct this portion of that aim from this very significant and deeply essential **Book of Acts – Church On Mission!**
- 4/ We will begin here in **ch 1**. And rather than spend a whole lesson 'setting up' the **Book of Acts** with introductory material [such as author, date, intended audience, outline, purpose, etc.], I will introduce those significant contextual subjects as they come up in the text....
- 5/ **Ch 1** breaks itself up into three sections: **vv 1-5; 6-11; and 12-26**. So that's how we will develop it...

#### I / vv 1-6 | The promise of the Holy Spirit

- 1/ Luke doesn't name himself as the author, but all the earliest contemporary pastors, leaders, and writers of that era recognize and name him as such. Luke reminds the first and primary recipient of this book, a brother by the name of Theophilus [which means 'Lover of God'] that he had written a 'first book,' which is the Gospel of Luke. Luke reminds Theophilus that, in his first book, he "**dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up, after He had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen.**" Of special note are the words "**Jesus began to do and teach...**" So we are to understand that this book will take up where the Gospel of Luke left off. And so he does. In fact, this first section is not just a continuation of the ending of Luke; it is also an overlap. Compare **Acts 1.4 with Luke 24.49**. Jesus repeats this same promise both there and here in the opening of **Acts**.
- 2/ Also, we could insert here that neither did Luke name this book '**Acts**' or '**The Acts of the Apostles**.' It was the 'acts' of the apostles from the most obvious horizontal, human perspective – but it is also the '**continuing acts of Jesus Christ through the Person and power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of His apostles**.' That is a more specific and comprehensive way to view this book. But we'll stick with '**Acts**.'
- 3/ Jesus also **presented Himself alive to them after His suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days...** This was so they would know that He was, in truth, the very same Jesus they had accompanied, lived with, and learned from during the days of His pre-crucifixion death. He had been resurrected! He was alive! And when He does ascend into Heaven, He will be the very same Jesus – as He is today [see **v 11 and 1 Timothy 2.5**]!

4/ As Jesus accompanied His apostles for forty days following His resurrection **until the day when He was taken up**, He taught them intently to prepare them for the days and age of their ministry between His ascension back to Heaven and His coming again – this very age in which we live and serve! That’s why this Book is so essential and important to us! Jesus’ primary subject was **speaking about the Kingdom of God**. This is the same Kingdom Jesus introduced during His earthly ministry: “...Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the Gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel’” [Mark 1.14]. The **Kingdom of God** is the rule and reign of God – God’s sovereign authority and Providence in all the events of the world and its history ... and especially pertaining to His invincible fulfilling His redemptive purposes in the New Covenant in Christ’s blood – saving His people from their sins through the preaching and witnessing of Christ’s Gospel. See some examples of what He must have expounded upon, reiterated, gone over again, and impressed upon them in Luke 24.26-27, 44-48 – and also what He had ‘begun to teach and do’ in the many parables and sermons He gave them concerning ‘the Kingdom’ [like Matthew 5-7, 13, 20-25, and many others]. And to emphasize how central the proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God is here in the Book of Acts, this same **Kingdom of God** message ‘bookends’ this book. It is here at the beginning, and when the book ends, we’ll find Paul in Rome [‘the end of the earth’ at that time]. And what is his message? “...proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” [ch 28.31]. We call this the ‘*already*’ / ‘*not yet*’ Kingdom.

5/ What we do have to especially note also is that Jesus continually reminded them that, at that time, they were not properly equipped and sufficiently empowered to do what He will command them to do after His ascension back to Heaven. They [and we] would not be able to function in obedience to the mission He would give them [and us] *without the power of the Holy Spirit*. And so since Jesus emphasized this, and Luke reiterates it from his Gospel [Luke 24.49], we must give this special attention. *This will become one the primary themes of Acts ... and the key to all the effectiveness of all the acts that are recorded in this book: it will all be done by Jesus Himself in the Person of the Holy Spirit given by the Promise of the Father!* They [nor we] will do anything in the power and energy of ourselves *apart from the Holy Spirit*. The Father knows this – that’s why He promised the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus knows this – that’s why He ‘ordered’ them **not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father**. John the Baptist had prophesied this promise when he baptized Jesus in Matthew 3.11. This ‘**baptized with the Holy Spirit**’ will be fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost in ch 2. In ch 1, it hasn’t happened yet; but they must wait for the ascended Jesus to ‘**pour out**’ the power of the Holy Spirit upon them. I know we haven’t come there yet, but I must fast-forward to ch 2.33: **Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the Promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. Then, they will be properly equipped and sufficiently empowered to begin their world-wide commission to ‘preach the Gospel’ and ‘make disciples of all the nations.’**

## II / vv 6-11 | The Ascension of Jesus to Heaven – with the promise to return again

1/ This occasion “**So when had come together**” seems to refer to this very last encounter they had with Jesus before His ascension back to Heaven. Remember: Jesus had appeared to them, presented Himself alive to them, met with them, ‘ate’ [see v 4] and fellowshiped with them, and taught them intensely over the past forty days since His resurrection. But on this occasion, as Jesus is again ordering them to wait for the baptism or ‘**pouring out**’ of the Holy Spirit to empower them to be His witnesses ... they now ask Jesus about **the Kingdom** He’s been emphasizing: “**Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?**” We don’t know what they were thinking when they ask Jesus about ‘**restoring the Kingdom to Israel**.’ And since Luke doesn’t tell us any more, then we don’t need to know any more about what aspect of the **kingdom** they may have been entertaining in their minds. But what we can be sure of is that Jesus had given them a much fuller and clearer understanding of His Kingdom during those same forty days of **speaking about the Kingdom of God** [v 3]. This **Kingdom of God** will be the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies of the New Covenant Kingdom which Jesus came to fulfill in Himself. Just a few

of these **Kingdom** prophecies will be found in **Isaiah 2.1-5; Ezekiel 37; and especially Isaiah 49**. There are many, many others; but these **Kingdom** prophecies all foretell that, indeed, **Israel will be restored [including the reunification of the estranged northern and southern kingdoms of Samaria and Judah] and the promised Kingdom of God will be restored to Israel ... and more, the nations of the Gentiles will be saved, ‘restored,’ and included in the New Covenant ‘Israel.’** This new ‘Israel’ is Jesus Himself ... and all those who will be saved through the New Covenant Gospel that the church will proclaim in His Name as His witnesses.

2/ I say again, Jesus doesn’t reiterate all that commentary here in vv 6-8, but He surely expounded upon all these **New Covenant Kingdom** truths during the previous forty days as **He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself**. But in order for all those Scriptures to be fulfilled, first the Gospel of His death and resurrection must be proclaimed to all the nations – to call them to repentance from their sins and faith in Christ [Matthew 24.24]. So Jesus’ reply was to call them to leave all the matters of the timing of the full and final revelation of **the Kingdom** with the Father and attend to the mission He will assign them to carry out: **He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’**

3/ v 8 / What we will find in this charge from Jesus to His church is yet another reiteration of ‘The Great Commission.’ We also need to understand that ‘the Great Commission’ was not given by Jesus to the church just one time. We’re all familiar with the **Matthew 28.18-20** account: **“Go and make disciples of all the nations.”** But even that account is not this account. That ‘Great Commission’ charge was delivered in Galilee; this **Acts 1.4-8** account was in Jerusalem. We have no doubt that, during those forty days of ‘boot camp’ mission preparation, Jesus impressed upon His apostles many times that before **the Kingdom of God** comes in its final and eternal fulfillment, **“And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come”** [Matthew 24.14].

4/ v 9 / **“And when He had said these things, as they were looking on, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight.”** This has to be one of the most awesome displays of Jesus’ Deity and Glory in all the Scriptures. This was an actual, physical occurrence. Jesus, in His resurrected and glorified human body, supernaturally levitated from the physical earth and ascended back to the Father and eternal Glory from whence He came when He was incarnated in the womb of the virgin Mary. **Clouds** have always been a symbol of the Presence of God in His creation. See **Exodus 14.19; 19.9; 24.15; 40.34, 36-38; Luke 9.35 & Matthew 17.5 & Mark 9.7 for just a few...** Jesus also promised that when He comes again, it will be **‘in a cloud with power and great glory’** [Luke 21.27; Matthew 24.30 & 26.64; Mark 13.26].

5/ vv 10-11 / This is what the angels promised the apostles as they witnessed Jesus’ ascension: **And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes,<sup>11</sup> and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”** Pay special note to the four-fold repetition of the word ‘*heaven*.’ This is not just a reference to the atmospheric upper levels of the stratospheric space into which Jesus ascended until He disappeared from their sight; it is a reference to the Presence of the Father in Glory where Jesus is now – seated at the right hand of the Father, enthroned in sovereign power and authority. See **Ephesians 1.20; Colossians 3.1; Hebrews 1.3; 8.1; 10.12; 12.2; 1 Peter 3.22**. And what is Jesus doing there? He is ruling over everything that transpires here on earth from that moment until He comes again. And He is especially interceding with the Father on our behalf [Hebrews 4.14-5.10; 7.1-10.39]. *We do not need to fear anything that will befall or happen to us ... or how fiercely the powers of Hell will assail and oppose us! Jesus is interceding on our behalf! He is praying to the Father for the effectiveness and success of everything He has commanded and sent us to do!*

6/ I just want to point out also that, when Jesus connects earth and Heaven here in His ascension and His promise to come again **in the same way you saw Him go into Heaven**, what He is demonstrating is that

***His Second coming will be the final and eternal fulfillment of the designs and purposes of the Kingdom of God in the original creation. This will be the reunification of Heaven and earth in the New Creation.***

Allow me to include this quote from Brian J. Vickers in the ESV Expository Commentary:

“Jesus went up and ascended to the presence of the Father, in heaven. We are faced with a description of a supernatural event, namely, the meeting of heaven – the place where God Himself dwells – and earth. Whereas the cloud denotes God’s presence in the Exodus, here we not only see a cloud depicting God’s presence; the incarnate Lord is Himself present. At the ascension, a way is made from the earthly realm to the heavenly realm. How Jesus moves from one to the other is beyond our perception and experience, but it is clear that Scripture speaks of heaven as a place, *God’s place*, that will one day be joined with a new heaven and a new earth. Here the focus is on heaven as the destination to which Jesus ascends as the divine King. It is a place of finality and authority from which King Jesus directs His kingdom work on earth.”

And, if I may add, according to Jesus’ own promise here, when He returns, He will bring that *perfected* and reunified New Creation – the eternal meeting place of Heaven and earth, God and His redeemed people – back with Him [see **Revelation 21.1-7**].

### **III / vv 12-26 / Matthias is chosen to replace Judas Iscariot – the church’s first order of business**

1/ **vv 12-14** / As we make our way through Acts, we will note many instances where the first church presents us with models and examples for us to emulate and follow. Here is a primary one [maybe with the exception of the ‘casting of lots’: when the disciples returned to Jerusalem after just witnessing Jesus’ ascension to Heaven, they went straight to **the upper room** where they had already begun to gather with one another. There were not only **the apostles whom He had chosen**, but there were other committed believers and followers of Jesus, including His mother, Mary, and NOW also Jesus’ brothers who have now believed in Him following His resurrection. Note their commitment to *unity* and *prayer*: **All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer...** These two themes of *unity* and *prayer* will continue to be the pattern of their activities all throughout the Acts narratives. This is also what we must commit ourselves to and continually practice: ***unity, worship, mutual fellowship, and prayer.***

2/ But the order of business that needs to be conducted is the apostolic replacement of Judas Iscariot. Jesus chose twelve; now there are only eleven. Judas, of course, had betrayed Jesus to the Jewish chief priests and the Romans. He had bargained Jesus away for thirty pieces of silver. After being overcome with guilt over what he had done, he brought the silver back to the chief priests, threw it down in the temple, and then committed suicide by hanging himself. [They bought the burial field.] **See Matthew 27.3-10.**

3/ ***Everything the church does must be governed by the Scriptures.*** We have here another one of the themes of Acts: ***the authority and sufficiency of the Scriptures.*** Judas had fulfilled the Holy Spirit-inspired words of David **concerning Judas in Psalm 41.9** – besides numerous other related Old Testament Scriptures: **Psalm 69.25; 109.8; Zechariah 11.13; 19.1-13.**

4/ We also have here the Scriptural qualifications for a true apostle – one who was chosen by Christ to speak with His authority to the churches: ***So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when He was taken up from us – one of these men must become with us a witness to His resurrection.*** When we summarize **ch 1** with these words which give us an over-all summary of Jesus’ preparation of His apostles for the mission He was sending them to accomplish, we can see at least three of Luke’s primary emphases that he will highlight throughout this narrative – and they all center, focus, and concentrate on Jesus Christ: ***resurrection, Holy Spirit, witness.*** That is still our mission today, here and now: Jesus Christ has called and commissioned us to be His Gospel ***witnesses*** of His redemptive death and ***resurrection*** in [and only in] the life-giving power of His ***Holy Spirit!*** These apostles and this first church obeyed Christ and began to carry His Gospel of saving grace into all the world.

**“You shall be My witnesses!”**