

SCRIPTURE STUDIES

ACTS CHAPTER 1

DECISIVE DAYS FOR THE DISCIPLES**Sight turns to faith.**

A transition is taking place as we begin our journey through the Book of Acts. For over 3 years the disciples had been in the physical presence of Jesus Christ, God in the flesh. They had walked and talked with Him daily and now He was missing! Would they quit and go home? Would they throw up their hands in despair? Would the fishermen return to their nets, Matthew to his tax collecting, etc.?

How would they adjust and make the transition without His physical presence? Once they saw and then believed. Now they must believe in order to see. They had walked and worked by sight, now they must walk and work by faith. Let's watch and learn from what happens throughout this book beginning in the very first words!

Dear Theophilus. v.1

"The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach...."

The name "Theophilus" means, "A friend of God." In Luke 1:3 He calls him, "*most excellent Theophilus.*" That was a title usually reserved for high Roman officials. Theophilus evidently was a high ranking official and both of Luke's volumes were addressed to him.

Luke's reference is to his first book, which he calls "*The former account*" is a reference to the Gospel of Luke which was about "*all that Jesus began both to do and teach....*"

Show and tell time. v.2-3**Show:**

"until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days...."

Luke's Gospel covers the period from when Jesus "*began*" to "*the day in which He was taken up....*" At this point, Luke continues the story in his second volume, the Book of Acts. For 40 days after the resurrection Jesus appeared to His disciples only. "He appeared and disappeared during these forty days." (Wiersbe) He proved His reality by "*many infallible proofs.*" What "*proofs*" they were, we do not know. Doubtless, the doubters doubted no longer!

Tell:

"and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."

What wonderful lessons He must have taught them during these days. Two things He told them are in verses four and five.

Put first things first. v.4

“And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me....”

When the disciples saw the risen Christ their enthusiasm reached an all-time high. They had good news to spread – He is alive! They were eager to “go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere.” There was the word to spread, a world to win, work to do.

Maybe they planned how to do it: “Peter, You are the Press Agent. Get the media people together. Tell them, “We told you so!” Thomas, you are in charge of making believers out of doubters. Get the grave clothes and show them! Phillip, You are an evangelist. Set up some city-wide meetings. John, You out-ran Peter to the tomb. Get the T.V. networks and get shots of the empty tomb. Matthew, you are an ex-tax man. You are in charge of printing handbills and newspaper ads. James, you’re from Galilee – you’re Chairman of the Galilee Committee and Andrew, you tell the Greeks” And so on. The place was a bee-hive of activity.

Then Jesus said, *“Wait!” ... wait for the Promise of the Father.*” He did not suggest that they “wait” but He “commanded” them to “wait.” They were not ready. They had a promise that had not yet been realized.

Unction before action. v.5.

(“Unction”: “The act of anointing.”) *“John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”*

The Holy Spirit had not yet been given for Jesus had not yet left the earth. *“I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.”* (John 16:7)

Zeal is needed but zeal is a human emotion and they needed divine power. To attempt to do the work of God in the energy of the flesh instead of the dynamic of the Spirit is to utterly fail and also bring reproach upon the name of Christ. There must be power before proclamation; we must be energized before we can effectively evangelize. Without spiritual TNT in the lives of the members of Christ’s church there can be no powerful impact upon a Christless society.

Get the big picture! v.6-7

“When they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.”

They asked, “Where is that ‘everlasting kingdom’ (Ps.145:13) you promised?” They were not free. They were under Roman rule. Don’t you ever want to ask God some questions about His timing? Jesus’ answer is very interesting, He said in essence “Don’t be a clock-watcher. The Father controls the clock. You keep your focus on your task. Keep your eyes on the Big Picture of reaching your world with the Good News about Me. Do my work until I return.”

The disciples needed a broader vision. They asked Jesus about Israel and the kingdom. But Jesus, at this time, was interested in the church and the world. Being for the most part Jews, naturally they were interested in the establishment of their kingdom. Jesus was interested in establishing His church. He focused their attention upon a much greater challenge and promised them the power to accomplish it in the next verse.

Ready, set, go! v.8

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

Jesus told these early church members:

- What they were to be - *“witnesses”*;
- Where they were to do it - *“Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*
- How they were to do it - *“you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come.....”*
- Why they were to do it - Jesus said so!

Up, up and away! v.9-11

“Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”

The Lord Jesus’ ascension was bodily, visible and instantaneous. So shall His return be for those who watch for Him. (Heb.9:28) Luke begins his Gospel with the supernatural entrance of Christ into the world and begins his second book, the Book of Acts, with His supernatural exit from the world.

The “Left Behind” series of semi-fiction books by authors Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, focused upon people who were left behind after the Rapture. However, there are, at the very least, five non-fiction, life-changing and world-changing qualities that Jesus left behind when He ascended back to heaven, and these are not fictitious! They are:

1. An Unfinished Task.

The Great Commission (Matt.28:19) must be carried out.

2. An Unequaled Message.

Jesus is alive! Jesus saves! Jesus is coming again! Satan doesn’t like it, atheists don’t believe it, cults corrupt it but it is still “The power of God unto salvation.” (Rom.1:16)

3. An Unrivaled Partner.

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you....” (Acts 1:8)

4. An Unmistakable Plan.

Go around the globe and gossip the Gospel!

5. An Unfailing Promise.

“I will come again and receive you unto myself....”(John 14:3)

Let’s get on with the task Jesus left us! The church of today has its work cut out for it. And what a great work it is with eternal rewards for those who are faithful. Jesus is coming again and He said, *“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one*

according to his work.” (Rev.22:12) I want to get all the rewards I can get!

Upstairs in a downstairs world. v.12-13a & 14

“Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey. And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.” Also verse 24 *“And they prayed....”*

Don’t miss this statement: *“they went up into the upper room where they were staying.”* (v.13) Ten days of prayer in an upstairs room preceded the launching of the world’s greatest movement – the birth of the Church of Jesus Christ. A 10 day prayer meeting? Yes! Jesus spent 40 days with the disciples and 10 days later was the Feast of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came. (Acts 2:1)

While they were waiting for the promise that Jesus made – *“you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now”* (v.5) - they prayed. They did not “pray down the Holy Spirit”! The Holy Spirit did not come as the result of their praying but because Jesus had promised them that He would send the Holy Spirit. (John 14:16-18 & 26; 15:26-27; 16:7-15) The Holy Spirit would have come if they had not prayed! However, in the context of the dramatic events of the last few weeks and in obedience to Christ’s command *“not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father”* (v.4), they spent the time in prayer. Someone has commented that “If that same command were given to the church today, it would have a party instead of a prayer meeting!” Yes, and that is why the church generally is limping along instead of leaping ahead!

The early churches were big on praying. Prayer is mentioned 31 times in the Book of Acts. The church was born in a spirit of prayer and it must be borne along by prayer. Instead of being downstairs in the Supper Room we need to spend more time in the Upper Room!

Henry Drummond was right: "Ten minutes spent in the presence of Christ every day, aye, two minutes, will make the whole day different." A. J. Gordon adds, "You can do more than pray after you have prayed; but you can never do more than pray until you have prayed."

Internals before externals.

“And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said, “Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry.” (v.15-17)

The Moderator is Simon Peter. and he calls for a Business Meeting to select a replacement for Judas. This must have been a Baptist church because they had to call a special business meeting! Business meetings have to be – they are an essential part of doing all things *“decently and in order.”* (I Cor.14:40) And the first recorded business meeting of the church was conducted in an orderly fashion. This was a somber business meeting to replace the traitor Judas who had committed suicide.

The church must deal with internals before it focuses upon the externals of the task before it. Peter later wrote, *“For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?”* (1 Peter 4:17)

All in favor say “aye.” The assembly in the attic apartment that day voted by casting lots. *“They cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.”* (v.24)

Wrap Up

Whew! It was a busy time for the disciples. So much had happened in Jerusalem and in their lives in the last few weeks. Their world had been turned upside down. For over 3 years their lives had been built around the physical presence of Jesus. All that had changed.

When they came back down to street level, when their sandals hit the sidewalk, they knew that they would be the target of the same government officials that had crucified their Savior and Lord.

They knew that they had a humanly impossible task ahead of them apart from the enabling power of the promised Spirit of Christ. If they were to launch an invasion of the world they would have to wait a little while longer for the coming of the Holy Spirit. And they waited. And they waited. And that is what we find them doing when we come to the next scene in the continuing saga: *“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.”* (Acts 2:1)

Sight Turns To Faith.

For more than 3 years the early disciples had been students in Christ’s College, now they must practice the lessons they had been taught. For 3 years they had witnessed the works of the son of God. Now they must go to work. Everything was changing. They were going through a traumatic transition. Nothing would ever be the same again.

We are on the outside looking in upon these scenes. We are going to watch them transition and we are going to learn how to accept and adjust to change. We are going to observe as these students as they transition from Old Testament law to New Testament grace; as these believers take to the streets, by-ways and highways of their world; as they face opportunities and opposition; as they organize and evangelize; as they live in community as the church and cope with cultures not sympathetic to their mission. And, we’re going to learn and follow their good examples if we desire God’s blessings upon us.

The church is about bodies, not buildings. It is about the people, not the steeple! It is about loving and ministering with and to people, empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit. That is what we find in the Book of Acts. Let us get into the Book of Actions – the actions of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the early Christians. SO, LET’S CONTINUE WITH CHAPTER TWO!

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