



[Ascension part I – Acts 1:1-11]

Have you ever wondered what role you play in the plan of God? Like some, maybe you have accepted Christ as Savior and Lord and you think that's it. You believe Jesus died according to the Scriptures, you believe that the Messiah rose again on the third day, and you affirm by faith that He will one day return to ransom His people! Praise God for your faith! **But is there more? How do you fit into Yahweh's redemptive plan?**

Today we begin a brand new series in the Book of Acts: Model Church. I can't think of a better series to begin following Easter. If the resurrection is true, and by faith you believe, now what?

You might know this Scripture by its extended title Acts of the Apostles. It has a more personal and appropriate title: Acts of the Holy Spirit through His holy people-the church- you!

Read [Acts 1:1-11]

Continuance of the Mission. The author launches the entire letter with a formal greeting, "I wrote you Theophilus." Theo (God)- Philus (love of/dear to). This Theophilus could have designated the Christian reader. Some have suggested it was a well known individual in the church or even someone famous in the empire (Titus Flavius Clemens). Most likely Theophilus was the one who supported Luke (patron) as he wrote the Word of the Lord.

This is what the author says: I wrote you in part I (Book of Luke) all that Jesus began to do, his virgin birth, miraculous ministry, crucifixion, his death, and resurrection. But Theophilus, the mission and work is not finished. He still lives and is still active, today through the Holy Spirit! This is why the community of faith is a vibrant living community, because we have a living Savior! **Luke reminds us that without Jesus and His work, one cannot make sense of the church's existence and activity.** Others should look at you and say "wow only God could do that."

When others look at you, they should immediately see the continuance of the Mission of Christ. You are not God's plan B to change the world and to get the word out that Jesus is King. Church, those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb- **you are plan A!** The church is the vehicle for the power of God working through the Spirit to impact the world! I want to be part of something great than myself, a community of faith that is seeking the face of our Father.

What a huge responsibility we have. But, what a greater **reward**. Even more, Yahweh has already equipped you. Formerly (v.2) the Apostles had experienced the Spirit through the presence of Jesus. After Pentecost, now, they/we experience Jesus through the presence of the Spirit. Four times in this passage Luke references the Spirit. **Effective ministry requires God's direction and enablement.**

Throughout Acts new converts experience **repentance-baptism-and the gift of the spirit**. All three elements are essential parts of the conversion experience. Have you **experienced true conversion?**

What and when is baptism of the Holy Spirit? I hold the traditional evangelical view that you are baptized into the Holy Spirit when you are baptized into Christ and into one body (1 Cor. 12:12).

Whatever one may call it and however one may enter it, all Christian must experience the fullness of God's Spirit and power in witness. You- Church- are God's plan A to bring the whole Gospel to the whole person to the whole world! The Mission Continues- (Belong-Thrive-Go)

Kingdom of Heaven (1:6). Amazingly, the disciples get it. They are ready to live on mission for Christ and change the world so they **ask: are you restoring the kingdom at this time?** To answer Jesus rebukes, them softly. **Why?** Possibly, they wanted power and authority. God, we have left all to follow you- **when are we going to get ours?** Or, they wanted inside knowledge. Look at what "I know." Jesus corrected this erroneous thinking by directing them away from times or dates. FYI- anytime anyone gives you a "time" or a "calendar invitation" of the second coming- point them to Acts 1:7. "It is not for you to know.

Jesus rejects speculation about the when and brings us to a more relevant subject, the Christian **task** in the interim period before the full consummation of the Kingdom and return of Christ. Again the reminder- the **Kingdom of Heaven is unlike any earthly kingdom** or political empire you have ever seen or known. It is more powerful, more authoritative, and more subversive. Nothing can stop the kingdom of Christ. Not even you- because it's not about you. But Yahweh's wants you to be a part of His kingdom. This is why Christ followers live as exiles in a foreign land, as if we are from a distant kingdom. **Are you part of the Kingdom of Christ? Are you living for the Kingdom?**

Cloud of Glory (1:9) As Jesus was teaching on this new kingdom, we have taken up as they were watching. The cloud is not merely a vehicle for their ascension (like the cloud on super Mario 3 or Yoshi's world). It is a powerful sign of God's heavenly glory and divine presence. It's the same cloud which envelopes the shekinah glory of the Lord, the same one which rested above the Mosaic tabernacle and Solomon's temple, and the same cloud that guided Israel by day.

Without the ascension, the picture of Jesus is incomplete. W/out the ascension we fail to see that the head of **crowns in now crowned in glory**. The ascension displays Jesus' **current and future authority**. Such executive power involves the distribution of salvation's benefits now and the exercise of judgment in the future.

Right now- because of the ascension, Jesus is currently sitting at the right hand of the Father. Just as the Messiah promised, "and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power (Mark 14:62). What is Jesus currently doing? **Romans 8:34 Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is the one who died, but even more, has been raised; he also is at the right hand of God and intercedes for us.** What is intercession? **"To intercede on behalf of someone, with specific emphasis upon the fact that what is being done is for the sake of someone."** What a beautiful picture, Jesus seated in the position of power constantly speaking to the Father on your behalf. What a friend we have in Jesus.

But he will not stay there forever. Two angels (the minimum # for credible witness bearing) relay this message: Messiah will come in the same way that you have seen him going into heaven. Not subtly. Not quietly. This return will not be like anything you have ever seen.

Rev. 19:11 Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse. Its rider is called Faithful and True, and he judges and makes war with justice. **12** His eyes were like a fiery flame, and many crowns were on his head. He had a name written that no one knows except himself. **13** He wore a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called the Word of God. **14** The armies that were in heaven followed him on white horses, wearing pure white linen. **15** A sharp sword came from his mouth, so that he might strike the nations with it. He will rule them with an iron rod. He will also trample the winepress of the fierce anger of God, the Almighty. **16** And he has a name written on his robe and on his thigh: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

And at this return, Satan will be defeated and thrown into the lake of fire forever. And at his return he will sit at a Great White Throne and all will be judged: dead, great, and small. And at His return the only things that matters is this: is your name written in the book of life?

For Luke, the death and resurrection of Jesus are important, but more importantly is his reign, both presently and in the age to come. For Luke, Jesus is not passively sitting in heaven awaiting his

return. He lives, administers the benefits of salvation, and rules in anticipation of a more visible rule to come.

Conclusion (1:11)

A mild rebuke is expressed in the question “why do you stand looking into heaven?” ***Are you grinding in the Spirit or heaven gazing?*** His departure means that **they now have work to do**. We are assured that Christ will return. And when He does, it will complete the messianic task of restoring all things to Himself. And the church is called to engage in mission because of this assurance!

Are you making a difference in the world? **Great Day Offering, Nashua?** Are you making a difference here in this local faith community?

We believe you will receive the greatest joy in Christ when you serve, and serve through the Holy Spirit’s power.

I will serve the ministry of my church by...

- ✓ Discovering my gifts and talents.
- ✓ Being equipped to serve.
- ✓ Developing a servant’s heart.

When Christ returns, and all are judged, will your name be written in the Book of Life? Only Christ can write in that Book.

Apostles Creed:

suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

Notes

The book of Acts has been aptly called the 'Acts of the Holy Spirit' for all that the church achieves is through the Spirit (Fernando, 52).

W/out the ascension the picture of Jesus is incomplete. W/out the ascension we fail to see that the head of crowns is now crowed in glory.

The ascension displays Jesus' current and future authority. Such executive power involves the distribution of salvation's benefits now and the exercise of judgment in the future (Bock, 68).

Luke's gospel closes with Jesus' ascension to heaven. Where Luke ends, the book of Acts begins. The narrative has made one thing clear: God has vindicated Jesus and has taken him to share in the promised rule of the kingdom with its accompanying promise of salvation through forgiveness that comes in response to repentance and the gifting of the indwelling, enabling Spirit, who gives life. Theophilus can be assured that Jesus is who he claimed to be and is what eh church proclaims about him (Bock, 79).

Luke is the only NT author to describe the ascension (Bock, 204).

The ascension stands as a key divine act vindicating Jesus and placing him in authority at the right hand of God.

What the early church said and did was rooted in and connected to activity in which the risen Jesus was involved. Without Jesus and his work, one cannot make sense of the church's existence and activity (Bock, 53).

1 Tim 3:16 And most certainly, the mystery of godliness is great: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

1 Pet. 3:21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you (not as the removal of dirt from the body, but the pledge of a good conscience toward God) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

For Luke, the death and resurrection of Jesus are important, but more important is his reign, both presently and in the age to come. For Luke, Jesus is not passively sitting in heaven awaiting his return. He lives, administers the benefits of salvation, and rules in anticipation of a more visible rule to come (Bock, 205).

Acts 1:1 I wrote the first narrative, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach

Theophilus- “dear to God.” Some have suggested that he was no particular individual, but is used here to designate the “Christian reader.” The use of the honorific title “most excellent” makes this improbable.

Another suggestion is that the name Theophilus masks the identity of some well-known person, such as Titus Flavius Clemens, cousin of the Emperor Domitian (Bruce, 29). This is unlikely as Theophilus was a perfectly ordinary personal name, attested from the 3rd BC onward.

This much is certain, that Theophilus had already learned something about the rise and progress of Christianity, and Luke’s aim was to put him in possession of more accurate information than he already had (Bruce, 29).

Though Luke surely intended his work for the whole Christian community, Theophilus may have received the special dedication for being a patron who helped defray some of the costs of Luke’s writing (Polhill, 79).

2 until the day he was taken up, after he had given instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. **3** After he had suffered, he also presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

Formerly they had experienced the Spirit through the presence of Jesus. After Pentecost, they would experience Jesus through the presence of the Spirit (Polhill, 81).

Luke had already given vivid examples of these proofs in his Gospel: the Emmaus road (24:13-32) to Peter (24:34), and to the disciples (24:36-43). The appearances to the apostles are absolutely essential for their primary role in Acts of being witnesses to his resurrection (Polhill, 81).

The picture is that of a continual coming and going of the risen Lord rather than of one extended stay (Polhill, 81).

The mention of the Spirit reinforces the role of this key figure in Acts for the church's mission. Jesus and the Spirit operate in concert on behalf of God (Bock, 54).

Proof- Tekmerion

Refers to 'that which causes something to be known in a convincing and decisive manner, proof' (Bock, 54).

Kistemaker lists 10 appearances of Jesus: to the women at the tomb, Mary Magdalene, the Emmaus disciples, Peter in Jerusalem, 10 disciples, 11 disciples, 7 disciples fishing in Galilee, 11 disciples in Galilee, the 500, and James the Lord's brother (Bock, 56).

Teaching then revival. Historian J. Edwin Orr has said that a theological awaking must precede a revival of religion. Dr. John Mackay, "First the enlightened mind, then the burning heart. First a revival of theological insights, and then the revival we need (Fernando, 53)."

A spiritual awakening always sours on the wings of the Word. No matter how long people neglect the truth of God, one day it will surface and accomplish its wonder work (Fernando, 63).

Kingdom

God's promised rule that comes with Jesus's messianic program and activity. It appears 32 times in Luke and 6 times in Acts. Jesus' resurrection allows the kingdom to be preached (Bock, 56).

According to the Gospels, the kingdom of God came with the events of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and it finds its consummation in the return of Christ as Judge and King (Fernando, 51).

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

Acts 1:4 While he was with them, he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father's promise. "Which," he said, "you have heard me speak about; **5** for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit in a few days."

The time was now drawing near when the words of John would be fulfilled. According to OT prophecy, the days of fulfillment would be marked by a widespread outpouring of the Spirit of God. John's water baptism not only prepared his repentant hearers for the coming judgment but also pointed them on to that spiritual baptism of which the prophets had spoken (Bruce, 35).

Joel 2:28 After this I will pour out my Spirit on all humanity; then your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your old men will have dreams, and your young men will see visions. **29** I will even pour out my Spirit on the male and female slaves in those days.

Baptized. The reference is to the unique, unrepeatable event at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples in a visible form like fire (Polhill, 83).

Throughout Acts new converts experience repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Spirit (Polhill, 83). All three are essential elements of the conversion experience. Although the Spirit cannot be tied to a mechanistic pattern, these patterns show that repentance and the gift of the Spirit are essential to the conversion experience.

Baptism of the Holy Spirit

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

Some see this baptism as a second definite work of grace, distinct from conversion, one that usually takes place some time after conversion. Wesleyan holiness emphasizes holiness of heart and life. Charismatics and Pentecostals: power for witness and sign gifts. D.L. Moody and Torrey" emphasized power for service. Lloyd-Jones: seems to use this expression to refer to revival, when the power of God comes on groups of people through the outpouring of the HS (Fernando, 54).

One of the strongest arguments for the conversion-initiation position is the apparent use of this expression for every in 1 Cor. 12:13

1Cor. 12:12 For just as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of that body, though many, are one body—so also is Christ. **13** For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and we were all given one Spirit to drink. **14** Indeed, the body is not one part but many.

The danger with the conversion-initiation interpretation is that it can take away a yearning for God's fullness and create a class of half-baked Christians who are not experiencing everything that God wishes them to enjoy (Fernando, 63).

An emphasis on mission can neglect the great command for holiness. The Wesleyan position can give rise to an unhealthy perfectionism, with unbiblical measures (Fernando, 63).

2nd century: Spirit was the agent of apostolicity

16th century: Spirit witness to interpret the Word

20th century: because of a renewed study of Luke-Acts: missionary character.

The early church showed that being filled with the Spirit was mandatory for Christians by making it a basic qualification for those who were to administer the distribution of food (Acts 6:3).

Whatever one may call it and however one may enter it all Christians must experience the fullness of God's Spirit and power in witness.

Spirit

Effective ministry of requires God's direction and enablement. The mission command provides the direction for the church, and the Spirit gives the enablement (Bock, 56).

Acts 1:6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?"

The coming of the Spirit does not mean the completion of the kingdom promise. Acts 2-3 will make this quite clear (Bock, 61).

Verses 6-8 are closely linked together. In v. 6 the disciples asked Jesus about the time of the kingdom. In v.7 Jesus rejected speculation about 'times' altogether and in v.8 replaced this with the relevant subject—the Christian task in the interim period before the kingdom's coming (Polhill, 84).

Jesus corrected the disciples by directing them away from the question about 'times or dates' (v.7).

Acts 1:7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.

This knowledge I reserved to the Father alone (Mark 13:32).

Jesus makes no commitment at all as to when the end comes; He simply points out that there are things to do in the meantime (Bock, 62).

Set- the verb in the middle active voice means fix or establish something.

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

This progression, going as far as Rome, is what Acts will cover (with Jerusalem and Syria Antioch as hubs).

As Jesus had been anointed at his baptism with the Holy Spirit and power, so his followers were anointed and enable to carry on his work (Bruce, 36). This work would be a work of witness-bearing.

The promised the disciples two things: power and witness (Polhill, 85).

The role of the apostles is that of 'witness' (martys).

The Spirit is tied to power which refers here to being empowered to speak boldly by testifying to the message of God's work through Jesus (Bock, 63).

The geographical scope of Acts 1:8 provides a rough outline of the entire book: Jerusalem (1-7), Judea Samaria (8-12), the ends of the earth (13-28).

Acts 1:9 After he had said this, he was taken up as they were watching, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

It is Luke's mention of this period of 40 days that is responsible for the arrangement in the Christian calendar by which Ascension Day falls on the fortieth day after Easter (Bruce, 37).

One should not get the picture that the ascended Christ is was no longer active among believers. He continued to reveal himself to such as Stephen (7:56) and Paul (9:5).

Cloud

The transfiguration (Luke 9:34-6), the ascension, and the Parousia (Mark 13:26) are three successive manifestations of Jesus' divine glory. The cloud in each case is to be understood as the cloud which envelops the glory of God (The shekhinah) that cloud which, resting above the Mosaic tabernacle and filling Solomon's temple, was the visible token to Israel that the divine glory had taken up residence there (Bruce, 38).

The cloud is not merely a vehicle for their ascension but probably is also a sign of God's heavenly glory or the divine presence (Bock, 67).

10 While he was going, they were gazing into heaven, and suddenly two men in white clothes stood by them.

Luke intends his readers to understand these men to be angelic messengers, like the two men who appeared to the women at the empty tomb of Jesus in dazzling apparel (Luke 24:4). Two was the minimum number for credible witness bearing (Bruce, 38).

11 They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen him going into heaven."

Jesus was taken up in the clouds; two angels declare he will return in the same manner as he departed. Luke alone narrates this ascension and its picture of being the reverse of the return.

Christ is ascended, but his abiding presence and energy fill the whole book of Acts, and the whole succeeding story of his people on earth (Bruce, 39).

A mild rebuke is expressed in the question "why do you stand looking into heaven?" His departure means that they now have work to do.

The angels do not the disciples' question of when, but it assures the that a return will complete the messianic task.

In sum there is one central application for the unit: the church is called to engage in mission to the world, knowing that Jesus' return is assured.

Illustrations

Apostles Creed:

suffered under [Pontius Pilate](#),
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

Christ has ascended upon high. Think you He would have returned thither with unexpiated sin red upon His garments? Do you suppose He would have ascended to the rest and to the reward of an accomplished work? What! sit at his Father's right hand to be crowned for doing nothing, and rest until His adversaries are made his footstool, when He has not performed his Father's will! Absurd! Impossible! His ascension in stately pomp, amidst the acclamations of angels, to the enjoyment of His Father's continued smile, is the sure proof that the work is complete. –Spurgeon

“I don't want my life to be explainable without the Holy Spirit. I want people to look at my life and know that I couldn't be doing this by my own power.” – Francis Chan

“Why would we need to experience the Comforter if our lives are already comfortable?” Chan

“It is easy to use the phrase 'God's will for my life' as an excuse for inaction or even disobedience. ... My hope is that instead of searching for 'God's will for my life' each of us would learn to seek hard after 'the Spirit's leading in my life today.' May we learn to pray for an open and willing heart, to surrender to the Spirit's leading with that friend, child, spouse, circumstance, or decision in our lives right now.” –Francis Chan

Application

The ascension is a visual reminder that Jesus has entrusted His kingdom on earth to the church to proclaim the true reign of the Messiah.