

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – The Book of Acts

(SB_Acts_Chapter 1 Continued)

In our previous lessons, I have introduced some terminology that will arise frequently in this study of the book of Acts. Also, we have covered the typical introductory information associated with the beginning of a study of any book of the Old or New Testament – date, theme, author, purpose, scope, recipients, etc.

In addition to providing you with a survey of the book, I am interested in insuring that you are exposed to the different interpretations that have arisen about key passages in this book. I hope to show how those interpretations are either: 1) influenced by OR 2) how they influence one's interpretive paradigm related to other key Biblical issues.

[Please note that 1 and 2 are very distinct influences in that 2 is referring to an interpretive paradigm applied to Scripture whereas 1 is a reference to an interpretive paradigm derived from Scripture].

In our previous study, we also began to examine chapter 1. The focus of our study was centered upon verses 1-8 which addresses some of the activities of Jesus and His apostles between His resurrection and ascension. I would like to make one additional observation that was not made in the previous lesson about the promise of the Holy Spirit mentioned in verses 4-5.

The “Promise of the Father”

In Jesus' post-resurrection ministry to His disciples recorded in Luke 24.36-49 prior to His ascension, Jesus states that He is to send the “promise of My Father” upon them (v. 49). In Acts, 1.4, Luke reflects back upon Jesus' instruction and makes reference to the “promise of My Father” mentioned by Jesus during His 40 day post-resurrection and pre-Ascension ministry to His disciples.¹

Then He said to them, “**These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.**” And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, “**Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.**” (Lu 24.44-49)

And being assembled together with them, He commanded them [recorded in Lu 24.44-49] not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “**which,**” He said, “**you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.**” (Acts 1.4-5)

¹ Jesus seems to allude to this “*promise of the Father*” during His public ministry also. For instance, in His commissioning of the twelve apostles to Israel recorded in Matthew 10, Jesus makes the interesting statement that “it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you” (Matt 10.19b-20 cf. Mk 13.11 and Lu 21.15).

Several questions arise from these two passages. The manner in which one answers these questions depends upon the interpretive paradigm that one has embraced. Furthermore, these questions are the same questions with which theologians from both a covenant/Reformed persuasion and a dispensational persuasion have wrestled for years.² Some of the questions that arise include:

- ✓ What was the “*promise of the Father*” and how is it related to the baptism of the Holy Spirit that these disciples were to receive?
- ✓ Does the OT document this “*promise of the Father*” anywhere?
- ✓ If so, is there a connection between those OT passages and Pentecost – the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to which Jesus refers in Luke 24.49 and Acts 1.4?
- ✓ If there is a connection between the OT passages that document the “*promise of the Father*” and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, then how does that reconcile with the position of the Acts 2 dispensationalist that the Church Age was a mystery³ age not prophesied in the OT?
- ✓ If there is a connection between the OT passages that document the “*promise of the Father*” and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, then is there a connection to the “kingdom” that we find in Jesus’ instruction of the disciples per Acts 1.3 cf Acts 1.6-8?
- ✓ If the Acts 2 dispensationalist is correct to believe that the Church Age began on the day of Pentecost in ca. A.D. 33, then what is the connection between the “promise of the Father” that is based in several OT references; the beginning of the Church Age; and the kingdom?
- ✓ Do those dispensationalist theologians known as “ultradispensationalists” have a point when they claim that the Church Age did not begin on the day of Pentecost? They base their position, at least in part, on the connection between these OT passages and the events associated with the establishment of the Messianic kingdom?

I am not going to attempt to answer all of these questions for you at this time. Rather, I am going to approach this study of Acts, as much as possible, in an investigative manner whereby we examine what Scripture has to say, raise the questions and various positions, and at the end, attempt to objectively lay it all on the table, so to speak, so you can decide.

In several passages in the OT, the promise of the Holy Spirit and/or Spirit baptism is associated with events leading up to the beginning of the messianic (millennial) kingdom and the messianic kingdom itself.

Until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is counted as a forest. Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever. (Isa 32.15-17)

² Please note that I am using two terms to define very broad categories of interpretive thought within conservative theological circles. It is very rare, at least in this geographical locale, to find a theologian, pastor or teacher who is pure “Reformed” without some dispensational aspects to his eschatological perspective. On the other hand, it is almost equally as rare to find a dispensational theologian who does not have traces of Calvinistic or Reformed influences in some aspects of his theology. The tragedy is that whenever one “Christian” brother wants to discredit another “Christian” brother, he simply finds the one element with which he disagrees and paints the whole barn with the same brush, so to speak. This practice ends up promoting nothing more than self-righteousness instead of an honest and forthright dealing with facts in a spirit of love. The rule: if there is to be a division, let Truth divide. We don’t have to aide the process. Knowledge alone promotes arrogance; whereas, love has an edifying quality.

³ Paul’s term per Ephesians 3 and Colossians 1.24-2.3.

For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring; they will spring up among the grass like willows by the watercourses. One will say, 'I am the Lord's'; another will call himself by the name of Jacob; another will write with his hand, "The Lord's," and name himself by the name of Israel. (Isa 44.3-5)

When I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them out of their enemies lands, and I am hallowed in them in the sight of many nations, then they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who sent them into captivity among the nations, but also brought them back to their land, and left none of them captive any longer. And I will not hide My face from them anymore; for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel says the Lord God." (Ezek 39.27-29)

And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. (Joel 2.28-31)

In that day the Lord will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; the one who is feeble among them in that day shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the Angel of the Lord before them. It shall be in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they have pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. (Zech 12.8-10)

Tie-In to Prior Lesson

This section of Acts 1 (Acts 1.1-8) closes with Jesus' response to the Apostle's question regarding the timing of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel.⁴ As I indicated, the question likely provides us with insight into just what the disciples believed that their fulfillment of Jesus' commands would lead to. After all, Jesus had taught them that He was going to restore the Kingdom to Israel and He told them to pray for that Kingdom to come (e.g. Matt 6.9-13 cf. 10.7). Jesus did not answer for a reason. It may be possible that Jesus in His resurrected, but not yet ascended body did not know. It is also possible that Jesus knew the answer as a result of the Holy Spirit's ministry, but couldn't disclose it to the Apostles. If so, then the reason was most likely due to the fact that there was a condition which needed to be met in order for that kingdom to be restored to Israel. We'll eventually look at this question in greater depth. Until then, let us continue our study of Acts 1 where we ended in the prior lesson – Acts 1.9.

Acts 1 – Continued – the Ascension (1.9-11)

⁴ One's understanding of the nature of the kingdom in this present Age of the Church is affected by how one interprets Acts OR how one allows Acts to shape their understanding of that issue – two somewhat mutually inclusive positions in part at least. The subject of the kingdom's relation to the Church Age (or vice versa) and the subject of the New Covenant mentioned by Jeremiah and Paul are two of the most controversial subjects that end up shaping one's interpretive paradigm OR that are interpreted in light of one's paradigm. Almost, no matter what position one takes, those of a different persuasion will be prone to raise charges of "eisegesis" and eventually, charges will be leveled, rightly or wrongly, that the distinction between Israel and the Church has been compromised.

In this passage, I want to focus our attention on a few key phrases and terms in order to highlight the mindset of Jesus' disciples.

- ✓ First, note that Luke's narrative in the book of Acts begins where his Gospel narrative ended – with Jesus' Ascension.
- ✓ A "cloud" received Jesus – in His previous post-resurrection appearances, Jesus had vanished from the disciple's sight instantly (Lu 24.31); however, on this occasion Jesus departed gradually in a cloud.
- ✓ Most likely, this "cloud" is a reference to the shekinah glory of God, i.e. the visible presence of God that guided Israel through the desert (Ex 40.34-38), departed from the Temple (Ezek 10.1-2, 4, 15-22; 11.1), and which manifested itself at Jesus' transfiguration (Matt 17.5).
- ✓ The "cloud" that received Jesus in His Ascension represents God's approval of Jesus in a resurrected human body and His entrance into the very glory and presence of God.
- ✓ We must reconcile Jesus' promise that He would not leave nor forsake His disciples, but would be with them to the end of the age (Matt 28.20). How can this be if He is now ascending away from them into heaven? Some indicate that Jesus maintained a presence with His disciples through the Holy Spirit which was to be poured out upon them shortly. This is true, but the HS and the Son are distinct members of the Trinity. Paul teaches Church Age believers that all three members of the Trinity indwell them – including the Son. Regardless of one's position of when the CA began, could the same indwelling of the Trinity be true of these disciples also?
- ✓ The disciples were said to have looked intently or steadfastly at Jesus' Ascension. During Jesus' 40 day post-Resurrection ministry, He had made numerous appearances and instantaneous departures. Each time, He reappeared. The disciples had no reason to suspect otherwise on this occasion. The two angelic messengers confirmed this expectation thus giving rise to a hope that is prevalent throughout the 1st Century believing community – the imminent return of Christ. This hope is manifest throughout Acts and the NT epistles.