

**The Book of Acts (#2);
God's Promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-8)**

Let us turn to Acts 1 and read the passage of God's Word to which we will give our attention this morning. Here is Acts 1:4-8:

⁴And 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; ⁵for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." ⁶Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. ⁸But 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."

It was my original intention for today to address the ascension of our Lord Jesus into heaven as it is set forth in verses 9 through 11 of this first chapter of Acts. But it soon became apparent that if we attempted to do so, we would be unable to address fully these verses we have just read, that we would not be able to give the attention that they warrant. And so, the ascension of our Lord Jesus will be the subject of our next time in this chapter, Lord willing.

Before us in Acts 1:4 through 8 we have a query posed to the Lord by His apostles regarding the kingdom and Israel. Although the Lord had been teaching them regarding the kingdom of God during the forty days following His resurrection, the matter of Israel's part in this kingdom was not clear to them. And so, they asked Him, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Our Lord did not answer their question directly. He told them that it was neither a need, nor their business, to know about such matters. But this question which they posed, is asked to this day. "What place, or when will the kingdom of God be restored to Israel?" And there are different answers that are proposed by the readers of Acts. This warrants our consideration.

As we look over these five verses before us we may discern three divisions. First, our Lord announced the soon realization of the promise of God for the Holy Spirit (vs. 4f). Second, we read of the question posed to Jesus by His disciples and His response to them (vs. 6, 7). And then third, we read of our Lord's instruction for His disciples to wait and pray for the enabling presence and power of the Holy Spirit before the onset of their witness to the world (v. 8).

I. The promise of God the Father of the Holy Spirit (1:4, 5)

The Lord Jesus announced to His disciples that the blessed promise of God the Father would soon be given to them. We read again in verses 4 and 5 these words:

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; ⁵for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

Our Lord spoke these words to His disciples just before He ascended into heaven. He had been with them and had instructed them for a period of forty days after His resurrection. We read last week of the substance of His teaching to them. Acts 1:3 reads that He had been "seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." But although He was about to part from them, they were not to part from one another or from Jerusalem, at least for the short term. For "the promise of the

Father” would soon be given to them. Of course in this context the promise of the Father was God imparting the Holy Spirit to them, who would come upon them, would indwell them, and empower and enable them to accomplish their mission to the world.

Let us ponder this impending event at Pentecost as the realization of the promise of God the Father. When did God the Father promise the Holy Spirit to His people? Some would look to the preaching of John the Baptist for the answer. Jesus Himself referred to John in this context (1:4). Immediately after referring to the Holy Spirit as the gift of the Father, Jesus brought to their remembrance the words of the Baptist. John had given forth, what may be regarded, the promise of God. It was John who announced,

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” (Matt. 3:11-12)

One could understand John’s proclamation to be setting forth God the Father promising the Holy Spirit to the disciples of Jesus Christ.

We could also go back into the Old Testament world in which read in the prophets of God’s promise to send the Holy Spirit into His people so as to transform them and enable them to live in righteousness in the kingdom of God. Here is Isaiah 40:2ff.

Thus says the Lord who made you
And formed you from the womb, who will help you:
‘Fear not, O Jacob My servant;
And you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.
³For 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;
⁴They will spring up among the grass
Like willows by the watercourses.’
⁵One 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.

In Isaiah 59 we read of God’s promise to bestow the Holy Spirit upon His people.

“As for Me,” says the Lord, “this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants’ descendants,” says the Lord, “from this time and forevermore.”

In the prophecy of Ezekiel we read of similar promises regarding God imparting the Holy Spirit to His people. On one occasion God declared through His prophet: “I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them” (Ezek. 36:27). That is in the form of a promise of God.

But we could go back further in biblical history to consider the promise of God to give the Holy Spirit to His people. God gave His promise to the patriarch Abraham that He would bestow the Holy Spirit upon His people. But we will turn to the apostle Paul to read of his exposition and explanation of this Old Testament record. Paul wrote in Galatians 3 of the changeless promise of God of the Spirit. Here are portions of Galatians 3 in which Paul declared these words:

¹³Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree”), ¹⁴that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive ***the promise of the Spirit through faith***.

¹⁵Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man’s covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it. ¹⁶Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ. ¹⁷And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, ***that it should make the promise of no effect***. ¹⁸For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but ***God gave it to Abraham by promise***.

¹⁹What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come ***to whom the promise was made***; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. ²⁰Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one.

²¹*Is* the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. ²²But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that ***the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe...***

²⁶For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, ***and heirs according to the promise***. (Gal. 3:13-22, 26-29)

The gift of the Holy Spirit is God the Father’s promise of “life” that He gives to His people. Through the Holy Spirit the believer may experience true life in its fullness. This was the promise of God to Abraham and the promise of God to all spiritual offspring of Abraham, those who have the same faith as this Jewish patriarch.

Returning to verses 4 and 5 of Acts 1, Jesus gave command to His apostles.

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; ⁵for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

The promise of the Father to give His people the Holy Spirit occurred on the Day of Pentecost, which was but ten more days from the time that Jesus was received up into heaven. On that occasion Jesus Christ, having received royal authority from His Father, poured out the Holy Spirit upon His gathered disciples in Jerusalem.

II. Jesus gave His response to a question posed to Him by His disciples (vs. 6, 7).

Apparently it was on one of the last occasions our Lord met with His disciples before His ascension, we read of a rather puzzling question they directed to the Lord Jesus.

Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.

There are at least two different ways that Bible interpreters explain the nature and reason the disciples posed this question to Jesus. ***First***, it is said that ***the disciples of Jesus were asking Him when the future 1,000 year Jewish millennium (kingdom) would be established***.

This is the most common interpretation today among evangelicals (i.e. Bible believers). It is believed and taught by well-intentioned evangelicals, that God has promised two different and separate kingdoms of the Messiah. One kingdom would be the present “the kingdom of God”, which is a spiritual kingdom, that

was established upon the resurrection of Christ and will continue until the second coming of Christ. But then they teach that there will be a second kingdom established at the second coming of Christ, the kingdom that God has promised to the nation of Israel. This future kingdom--the Jewish millennium--will be 1,000 years in length, a kingdom that will be on this earth ruled over by Jesus Christ who will be reigning as the king from the city of Jerusalem. There He will be seated on a literal, earthly throne of the ancient King David of Israel reigning over the world. It is asserted that upon the second coming of Jesus Christ this earthly Jewish kingdom will be inaugurated, and Israel will reign through Jesus Christ over the Gentile vassal nations of the world for 1,000 years.

Proponents of this view argue that verse 6 before us is certain proof that there are two different and separate kingdoms in God's purpose in history. After Jesus had been teaching these men regarding the things of the kingdom of God for 40 days and after having taught them regarding the nature of the kingdom through His three years of ministry, they nevertheless remained concerned chiefly about this future Jewish kingdom. This is how **Simon Kistemaker** (1930-2017) explains this interpretation of the disciples' question in Acts 1:6:

How do we interpret this question? The usual explanation is that the disciples are still thinking in terms of a political kingdom of the nation Israel in which Jesus would be the earthly king. During Jesus' earthly ministry, the mother of James and John requested that her two sons might receive special place in His kingdom. Shortly before Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, she asked Jesus whether James and John might sit at His left and right in His kingdom (Matt. 20:21). In spite of Jesus' emphasis on a spiritual kingdom, at the time of His ascension the disciples express their burning desire to be liberated from foreign oppression and implore Him to restore the kingdom to Israel. For them, Jesus is their sovereign Lord.¹

Here are a few notes of dispensationalists, who promote this interpretation of Acts 1:6:

Charles Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible* (page 1,666):

Acts 1:6, *the kingdom to Israel* – “The messianic, Davidic, millennial kingdom on this earth. The time of its coming is unrevealed” (Matt. 24:36, 42)

Acts 1:7, “There is no rebuke in Christ's answer, for God is not through with Israel, and the kingdom will eventually come (Rom. 11:26). In the meantime, the gospel must be preached throughout the whole world (v. 8)”.

John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (page 1632:

Acts 1:6, *restore the kingdom to Israel* – “The apostles still believed the earthly form of the kingdom of the Messiah would soon be re-established (cf. Luke 19:11; 24:21). They also knew that Ezekiel 36 and Joel 2 2 connected the coming of the kingdom with the outpouring of the Spirit whom Jesus had promised.”

Acts 1:7, “This verse shows that the apostles' expectation of a literal, earthly kingdom mirrored what Christ taught and what the OT predicted. Otherwise, He would have corrected them about a crucial aspect of His teaching.”

times and seasons – “These two words refers to features, eras, and events that will be part of His earthly kingdom reign, which will be at His second coming” (Matt. 25:21-34).

C. I. Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible* (p. 1147)

¹ Simon Kistemaker, **Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles**, New Testament Commentary (Baker Academic, 1990), 194. He summarized the dispensational premillennial teaching in this paragraph even while he did not believe it himself.

Acts 1:6. "Forty days the risen Lord had been instructing the apostles 'of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God,' doubtless, according to His custom (Lk 24:27, 32, 44, 45), teaching them out of the Scriptures. One point was left untouched, viz., the *time* when He would restore the kingdom to Israel; hence the apostles' question."

John R. Rice, *Filled with the Spirit; A Verse-by-Verse Commentary on Acts of the Apostles*:

"The twelve apostles, then, when they asked, 'Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?' (Acts 1:6) did not refer to the rapture but to the final event of the series of events when Christ shall return with saints and angels and set up His kingdom and reign on the earth after the rapture of the saints, the Great Tribulation, and judgment seat of Christ, etc.

This common explanation of Acts 1:6 is terribly mistaken, in my opinion. Now granted, the Jewish apostles continued to be primarily concerned about the fate of the Jewish people and whether or not the Lord was going to save their people. But it is not plausible that they continued to believe in a future, earthly, political, and ethnic kingdom of Israel. They knew better after all the instruction and correction that Jesus gave them, in which He taught repeatedly through His three year ministry that the kingdom of God would not be a physical, earthly kingdom within this world, but rather the kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom that would be inaugurated through His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension to the throne of God.

This view of the disciples asking Jesus when a Jewish kingdom (millennium) would commence also violates the context in which the question is posed. That view would have "the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" in verse 3--the kingdom that Jesus had been instructing them about for forty days after His resurrection--to be a different kingdom than the kingdom the disciples asked about in verse 6: "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" This is non-sensical. Jesus taught His disciples of only one everlasting kingdom, not two.

B. The second view understands the disciples simply asking Jesus if He was now going to bring salvation to the Jews, bringing them into His kingdom.

This is the much more reasonable interpretation. For clearly the disciples were not so dense as to fail to understand that the promised kingdom of God was anything but spiritual in nature. The Lord had declared that the city of Jerusalem, where the Jewish temple currently stood, would soon be destroyed and razed to the ground. Jesus had declared the Jewish religious system and the Jewish leaders to be under the wrath of God. Jesus had pronounced their "house" desolate. Surely the disciples were not asking Jesus if He were at this time intending to restore that earthly kingdom that was under the wrath of God and soon to be destroyed and the people exiled.

Nevertheless, we can certainly understand that these Jewish apostles and disciples were greatly concerned about their Jewish brethren and that they desired their salvation. These Jewish apostles were asking if the Lord was intending at this time to bring salvation to the Jewish people, to bring them to repent of their sins, to believe on Him as the Lord, their promised Messiah, and thereby secure their entrance and submission to Him as Lord in the spiritual kingdom of God. Their Jewish identity and ethnicity continued to be a preeminent concern for these men. They desired the salvation of (ethnic) Israel.

It would be quite some time, in fact, a number of years before they finally became convinced that their Jewish ethnicity brought no favor for them before God. They had been a greatly privileged and blessed people, but that but aggravated their condemnation before God, for they had broken their covenant with God and lie under God's curse for their transgression. The only way the curse of God could be removed from them is if they believed the gospel, that Jesus Christ atoned for sin when He died upon His cross.

But also, these Jewish disciples were present when Jesus taught them that there would be Gentile believers in union and fellowship with Jewish believers in the kingdom of God, while many unbelieving Jews would be "cast out." They were present when Jesus spoke openly, giving commendation of a Roman centurion's faith:

When Jesus heard it (i.e. the centurion's expression of faith), He marveled, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! ¹¹And I say to you that many will come from east and west (i.e. Gentile lands), and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. ¹²But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matt. 8:10-12)

Now the Jewish apostles and disciples continued for several decades into the Christian era not accepting Gentile believers in Jesus as having equal standing with Jewish believers in Jesus. Even Peter had to be shown a vision three times to convince him that he should not call Gentile believers unclean whom God had cleansed through faith in Jesus Christ. The early Jewish Christians did not understand Paul's later teaching to the church at Ephesus that God in Christ had broken down the wall of hostility that had divided the Jewish people and the Gentiles. Writing to principally Gentile Christians, Paul penned these words:

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—¹²that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ¹⁵having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. ¹⁷And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. ¹⁸For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. (Eph. 2:11-18)

Paul described the equality between Jewish believers and Gentile believers in Christ to be a wondrous mystery, not fully understood or revealed until Paul took his pen in hand. He wrote:

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—²if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, ³how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, ⁴by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), ⁵which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: ⁶that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, ⁷of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

In conclusion we would say that these Jewish apostles were burdened for their own Jewish people. They desired their fellow Jews would embrace Jesus as their promised Messiah and enter the kingdom of God, thereby receiving salvation by the mercy and grace of God.

Now in response to the question of the disciples in verse 6, the Lord Jesus refused to answer their query. We read of our Lord's response to them in verse 7, "***And He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.'***"

These words of our Lord suggest several matters to us. First, there are some things for which the Lord does not want to inform us. This may be simply because we could not handle the truth about some matters. Or the Lord may withhold information from us because He knows that it would do us no good and that it might do us a measure of harm. Jesus once told His disciples, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now" (John 16:12). There are many things we cannot know, for as finite creatures we are incapable of comprehending the wisdom and providential working of our infinite God. Deuteronomy 29:29

reads, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."

But secondly, this particular question of the disciples to Jesus would have been simply too much for them or too soon for them to comprehend. It is impossible for finite and fallen human beings to comprehend the ways of God, unless He condescends to reveal them to us in a manner that we are capable of comprehending. Job wrote,

Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty? ⁸*They are higher than heaven-- what can you do? Deeper than Sheol-- what can you know?* ⁹*Their measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea.* (Job 11:7-9)

Thirdly, the disciples were asking an illegitimate question of Jesus. It assumed that the Lord was not presently saving Jewish people into the kingdom of God, when in fact He was and would continue to do so. The disciples did not see it happening. The Jewish believers were very few in number at this time. Very soon, however, the numbers of Jewish converts will have grown exponentially.

At this stage of their understanding, the disciples desired Israel to be saved. But they were thinking too narrowly. They thought that Jewish ethnicity is what defined them true Jews, members of the people of God. But within a generation the apostle Paul would reveal that the true Jew, that is, the one who is truly a member of the family of God, is so because his heart is circumcised, that it was not due to genealogical descent or physical circumcision that God identified a true Jew. Paul wrote in Romas 2:28 and 29 these words, "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God."

And fourth, God never promised nor purposed to save all Jewish people, that is, all ethnic Israel. Paul had to deal with this charge in his epistle to the church at Rome. He wrote of God's dealings among the Jewish people in the light of the crucified, but risen and enthroned Lord Jesus.

I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. ²God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, ³"Lord, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life"? ⁴But what does the divine response say to him? "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." ⁵Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. (Rom. 11:1-5)

And so, this reality rendered the disciples' question mute. The Lord was indeed saving Israel. In the Old Testament prophets God promised to save but a remnant of Jews through the work of the Messiah. But along with that remnant and through their witness they would bring a multitude from the Gentile nations to embrace their God and Savior.

Fifth, it may be the purpose of God to save a host of Jewish people to Christ at the end of the age (Rom. 11). But for the Lord to express this in detail at this time it would necessitate revealing the lengthy period of history of this church age and when the time of the end would come. It was best and easiest to simply tell His disciples, *'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.'*"

III. Our Lord's instruction for His disciples to wait and pray for the enabling presence and power of the Holy Spirit before the onset of their witness to the world (v. 8).

This section of Scripture concludes with our Lord's instructions to His disciples: *"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 declared that the Holy Spirit would come upon His disciples. The Holy Spirit would empower them. He would give them a holy boldness, a sharpness of mind, and a persuasive manner that would enable them to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom of God to the world.

It is commonly recognized that this verse sets forth a geographical outline to the contents of the book of Acts. First, they shall be witnesses of Jesus Christ to those dwelling in *Jerusalem*. Here the world-wide mission of the gospel would commence. This was declared in prophecy in the Old Testament. We read in the prophecy of Micah these words,

Now it shall come to pass in the latter days
That the mountain of the Lord's house
Shall be established on the top of the mountains,
And shall be exalted above the hills;
And peoples shall flow to it.

²Many nations shall come and say,
"Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
To the house of the God of Jacob;
He will teach us His ways,
And we shall walk in His paths."

***For out of Zion the law shall go forth,
And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.***

³He shall judge between many peoples,
And rebuke strong nations afar off;
They shall beat their swords into plowshares,
And their spears into ^[a]pruning hooks;
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
Neither shall they learn war anymore.

⁴But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree,
And no one shall make them afraid;
For the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.

⁵For all people walk each in the name of his god,
But we will walk in the name of the Lord our God
Forever and ever. (Micah 4:1-5)

But though these apostles would begin at Jerusalem, they were then to take their message to all people throughout that region. Jesus said, "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...***" **Matthew Henry** commented about this range of witness.

In all Judea. Here He sheweth, first, that they must not work for the space of one day only, while that He assigneth the whole world unto them, in which they must publish the doctrine of the gospel. Furthermore, ***He refuteth the opinion which they had conceived of Israel.*** They supposed those to be Israelites only which were of the seed of Abraham according to the flesh. Christ testifieth that they must gather thereunto all Samaria; which, although they were nigh in situation, yet were they far distant in mind and heart. He sheweth that all other regions far distant, and also profane, must be united unto the holy people, that they may be all partakers of one and the same grace. It is evident (John 4:9) how greatly the Jews did detest the Samaritans. Christ commanded that (the wall of separation being broken down) they be both made one body (Ephesians 2:14), that His kingdom may be erected everywhere. By naming Judea and Jerusalem, which the apostles had tried to be full of most deadly enemies, He foretelleth them of the great business and trouble which was prepared for them, that He may cause them to cease to think upon this triumph which they hoped to have been so nigh at hand. Neither could they be a little afraid to come before so cruel enemies, more to inflame their rage and fury. And here we see

how He giveth the former place unto the Jews, because they are, as it were, the first-begotten (Exodus 4:22). Notwithstanding, He calleth those Gentiles one with another, which were before strangers from the hope of salvation (Ephesians 2:11). Hereby we learn, that the gospel was preached everywhere by the manifest commandment of Christ, that it might also come unto us.

But after having evangelized Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, they were to take the gospel of the kingdom “*to the end of the earth*.” The Roman world was evangelized by the early churches. The book of Acts seems to have been organized according to this division of missionary spheres of labor.

1. The gospel proclaimed in Jerusalem (Acts 1-7)
2. The gospel published in Judea and Samaria (Acts 8-12)
3. The gospel taken to the end of the earth (Acts 12-28)

But there is one more matter regarding verse 8 that may be stressed. It is a subtle issue, but it is present. The issue is that our Lord’s words of verse 8 should be regarded as His veiled answer to the disciples’ question of verse 6. In other words, the disciples asked in verse 6, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” Our Lord’s initial response to their question is found in verse 7: “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.” Nevertheless in verse 8 Jesus does answer their question. What He had called them to do—to bear witness of Him to the world, will indeed bring about the salvation of the true Israel, the people of God redeemed by the Lord Jesus. In essence, Jesus was saying, “It is not for you to know precisely when and how He would redeem Israel, but what I am commissioning you to do—bear witness of Me—will indeed bring to pass what you desire.”

Here is a good statement that sets forth verse 8 to be our Lord’s answer to the disciples’ question of verse 6:

Evidence that Jesus is providing an answer to the disciples’ question regarding the restoration of the kingdom and Israel’s inclusion in that kingdom includes the following: First, in the immediate context it is Jesus’ forty-day instruction concerning the kingdom that leads to their question concerning the kingdom. It is unlikely, therefore, that Luke intends us to view the disciples as completely ignorant here. Secondly, Luke has already demonstrated the close tie between Jesus’ teaching about the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in verses 4-5. It is likely, therefore, that Jesus is relating the two again when He refers to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in verse 8 in response to the disciples’ question about the kingdom in verse 6. Thirdly, Israel *is* in fact mentioned in Jesus’ reply. When Jesus refers to Jerusalem as well as to “all Judea and Samaria”, He is of course referring to Israel. Jerusalem was the religious capital of Israel, and the phrase “all Judea and Samaria” was representative of the southern and northern kingdoms of Israel respectively. In the light of the division of Israel almost from the outset of its history under kings (Solomon being the last king to rule over a united Israel) and the prophetic hopes found in passages such as Ezekiel 37 for a united Israel, any talk of restoration would have to include some references to the division between north and south known throughout much of Israel’s history. Fourthly, the language of “restoration” in the disciples’ question recalls the promises and hopes of Old Testament for God’s people. It is the fulfillment of God’s Old Testament promises for His people that Luke repeatedly highlights throughout Acts.²

The command that Jesus gave His disciples to be His witnesses from Jerusalem extending to the world of Gentiles is the onset of fulfilling the Second Servant Song of Isaiah 49, which reads as follows:

“Listen, O coastlands, to Me,
And take heed, you peoples from afar!
The Lord has called Me from the womb;

[“Coastlands” were where the Gentiles lived]

² Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus; Luke’s Account of God’s Unfolding Plan* (InterVarsity Press, 2011), 105f.

From the matrix of My mother He has made mention of My name.

²And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword;
In the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me,
And made Me a polished shaft;
In His quiver He has hidden Me.”

³“And He said to me,
‘You are My servant, O Israel,
In whom I will be glorified.’

⁴Then I said, ‘I have labored in vain,
I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain;
Yet surely my just reward is with the Lord,
And my work with my God.’ ”

⁵“And now the Lord says,
Who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant,
To bring Jacob back to Him,
So that Israel is gathered to Him.
(For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the Lord,
And My God shall be My strength),

⁶Indeed He says,
‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant
To raise up the tribes of Jacob,
And to restore the preserved ones of Israel;
I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,
That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’”

[He would save but a remnant of Jews]

[But He would save Gentiles also from
throughout the world]

The Lord commanded His disciples to be His witnesses throughout the world, and in doing so they would see the elect of Israel saved along with Gentiles from the nations of the world.

In our next study of Acts we will address the ascension of our Lord Jesus, Lord willing.
