

### **The Gospel of Luke (#109); Jesus' Final Equipping of His Disciples**

We have come to the end of Luke's Gospel in which the resurrection of our Lord Jesus is set before us. We arrive today at this concluding episode, which read as follows:

<sup>36</sup>Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, "Peace to you." <sup>37</sup>But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit. <sup>38</sup>And He said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? <sup>39</sup>Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have."

<sup>40</sup>When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. <sup>41</sup>But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, "Have you any food here?" <sup>42</sup>So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. <sup>43</sup>And He took it and ate in their presence.

<sup>44</sup>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." <sup>45</sup>And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

<sup>46</sup>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, <sup>47</sup>and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup>And you are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup>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."

<sup>50</sup>And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. <sup>51</sup>Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. <sup>52</sup>And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, <sup>53</sup>and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen.

We have arrived at the last section of Luke's Gospel which we have been studying for the past three years.<sup>1</sup> As we consider Luke's account before us, it might appear that we have a record of a single meeting between our Lord and His gathered disciples which occurred on the day of His resurrection that culminated with His ascension to His throne in heaven that very evening (cf. 24:51). It appears that everything described in these verses transpired over the course of several hours, on the first day of His resurrection from the dead. But actually, the events recorded here are a compacted account of what occurred over the course of 40 days. Luke himself recorded that this was the case in the first chapter of Acts, which is volume 2 of his writing. There we read in Acts 1:1-3 these words:

The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, <sup>2</sup>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, <sup>3</sup>to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, *being seen by them during forty days* and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

Luke then recounted our Lord's departure from His apostles ascending into heaven (Acts 1:9).

The point is this: the writers of Scripture were not concerned about writing an account of all details, and they were not necessarily concerned about relating their events in a precise historical chronology. Details of time and historical sequence were not their primary concern; rather, they related the details so as to

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<sup>1</sup> We began our study of Luke on September 11, 2022.

instruct their readers on matters which the Holy Spirit deemed essential and helpful for disciples of the Lord Jesus.

Much of the so-called scholarly (higher) criticism of the Bible is perpetrated by “scholars”, so-called, who wrongly and unjustly impose standards of historical writing developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries to the books of Holy Scripture. But the biblical writers had no desire or design to write as modern critics presume they should have written. These “scholars”, who are often faithless, Bible skeptics, and deniers of scriptural truth, impose an unjust standard of assessment and evaluation on the ancient books of the Bible. God Himself inspired our biblical writers, as they were born along by the Holy Spirit, to pen the very words that were written. As the apostle Peter had declared,

“And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, <sup>20</sup>knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. <sup>21</sup>For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Pet. 1:19-21)

We should read and study the Scriptures with this settled conviction.

We may consider this concluding section of this Gospel with the help of the following outline:

1. Jesus proves to His gathered disciples that He is risen from the dead (24:36-43)
2. Jesus prepares His witnesses to bear His message to the Gentile world (24:44-49)
3. Jesus departs from His witnesses, promising to send the Holy Spirit to them (24:50-53)

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## **I. Jesus proves to His gathered disciples that He is risen from the dead (24:36-43)**

We read again of His appearance to His disciples in verses 36 through 43.

<sup>36</sup>Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, “Peace to you.” <sup>37</sup>But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit. <sup>38</sup>And He said to them, “Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? <sup>39</sup>Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.”

<sup>40</sup>When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. <sup>41</sup>But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, “Have you any food here?” <sup>42</sup>So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. <sup>43</sup>And He took it and ate in their presence.

We read that the appearing of the risen Jesus was sudden and unexpected. The Eleven and the others were in a closed room and while they were speaking of the events that had transpired, the Lord abruptly appeared in their midst. It was not how He looked to them that startled them, but that He suddenly and unexpectedly materialized before them.

It is apparent that Jesus revealed Himself in His human nature (body and soul); He stood among them as one of them. The manner in which He appeared to them was itself an act of mercy. Had Jesus revealed Himself in His resurrected body in its full glorified splendor, it would have resulted in them becoming all the more “terrified and frightened”; they might have all fallen as dead men before Him. We do read of Jesus in His fully glorified appearance in the opening words of the Revelation, when He appeared to John on the island of Patmos. John recorded what He heard and saw:

Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, <sup>13</sup>and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. <sup>14</sup>His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; <sup>15</sup>His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a

furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; <sup>16</sup>He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. <sup>17</sup>And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. <sup>18</sup>I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen.” (Rev. 1:12-18)

Had the Lord shown Himself in this manner to His disciples on this first occasion, it might have overwhelmed them. But in this first appearance of the risen Lord to all of His assembled apostles, He looked to be as one of them, as they had known Him throughout His earthly ministry.

The first words which Jesus spoke to them are recorded: “Peace be unto You.” “This was a form of salutation among the Hebrews denoting a wish of peace and prosperity.”<sup>2</sup> The Lord Jesus used this expression on this occasion not only to greet His disciples, but to soften the surprise and fear that His sudden appearance caused and perhaps also to express His delight in being with them, after the events of the previous three days. **J. C. Ryle** (1816-1900) expressed what must have been the atmosphere of this meeting, when Jesus spoke these words, “Peace be unto you”:

This was a wonderful saying, when we consider the men to whom it was addressed. It was addressed to eleven disciples, who three days before had shamefully forsaken their Master and fled. They had broken their promises. They had forgotten their professions of readiness to die for their faith. They had scattered, “every man to his own,” and left their Master to die alone. One of them even denied Him three times. All of them had proved backsliders and cowards. And yet behold the return which their Master makes to His disciples! Not a word of rebuke is spoken. Not a single sharp saying falls from His lips. Calmly and quietly He appears in the midst of them, and begins by speaking of peace. “Peace be unto you.”

We see in this touching saying, one more proof that the love of Christ “passeth knowledge.” It is His glory to pass over transgression. He “delighteth in mercy.” He is far more willing to forgive than men are to be forgiven, and far more ready to pardon than men to be pardoned. There is in His Almighty heart an infinite willingness to put away man’s transgressions. Though our sins have been as scarlet He is ever ready to make them white as snow, to blot them out, to cast them behind His back, to bury them in the depth of the sea, to remember them no more.

What was the reaction of the disciples to our Lord appearing suddenly to them, even after He greeted them in such a gracious manner? They were startled and frightened of what they thought was a fearful apparition. They thought they were seeing a ghost; however, there is no New Testament reinforcement of the idea of ghosts of dead people that appear to live people.<sup>3</sup> But these disciples were influenced by contemporary superstitions of that time. The Lord Jesus dispelled their error and fear by permitting and encouraging a careful inspection of His body.

And He said to them, “Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? <sup>39</sup>Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.” (vs. 38f)

Jesus showed them His hands and feet, apparently the places where he had been pierced with the nails of His crucifixion. Now nothing is said in detail of the nature or graphic appearance of our Lord’s wounds from His crucifixion. We do not know if they were scars or if they were open wounds (but without bleeding). John’s Gospel does record the case of doubting Thomas, however, the incident that took place a

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<sup>2</sup> Albert Barnes, **Note on the New Testament; Luke and John** (Baker Book House, 1954), 165.

<sup>3</sup> The Old Testament story of the witch of Endor and the appearance of Samuel who had died is another issue which we need not address at this time (cf. 1 Sam. 28).

week later, the second Lord's Day when Jesus appeared to His disciples. Thomas had not been present with the other apostles on the night of the resurrection.<sup>4</sup> John's Gospel relates the account for us:

Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord."

So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

<sup>26</sup>And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" <sup>27</sup>Then He said to Thomas, "**Reach your finger here**, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and **put it into My side**. Do not be unbelieving, but believing."

<sup>28</sup>And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

John's account would suggest that the marks of our Lord's crucifixion were open and visible. Seeing them and touching them was sufficient to convince Thomas that the Lord had indeed risen from the dead.

By the way, Luke 24:39 devastates the Jehovah Witnesses' claim that Jesus did not rise bodily, but that He only rose spiritually from the dead. Jesus declared, "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." Jesus Himself declared that He was not just a spirit, but it was in His human body that He stood before His disciples on this occasion.

But we read that they still doubted. Verse 41 records, "But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled..." To them it was too good, too remarkable, to be true! Now apparently on this first appearance of Jesus to His disciples, the disciples seeing His body was not sufficient for them to embrace the truth that it was really He, so Jesus gave a further proof. We read in verses 41 through 43,

But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, "Have you any food here?"  
<sup>42</sup>So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb.<sup>5</sup> <sup>43</sup>And He took it and ate in their presence.

This seemed to satisfy them. Apparently they must have believed that ghosts do not eat. It was indeed He! Their Master had risen from the dead! He was in a real, physical body.

However, there was a difference from the body in which Jesus manifested Himself before His crucifixion and the body that stood before these disciples on the evening of His resurrection. His resurrected body enabled Him to do things that are not possible this side of the resurrection. He could suddenly appear and disappear. It would seem that He could transport Himself from one place to another place at will. And in Luke 24:51 we read, "Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven." He could fly up, or levitate, into heaven. However, to be precise, Luke recorded the verb of Jesus ascending in the passive tense. It literally reads, "He was parted from them and was carried up into heaven" (24:51). How He was carried up is not stated. But the passive tense of the verb hints that it was God the Father, or perhaps the Holy Spirit, that had taken Jesus into heaven.

The Word of God teaches quite clearly that Christians will one day be resurrected and glorified, and they will then possess immortal bodies fitted for eternal life. What characterized our Lord's resurrection body will characterize our future resurrected bodies. Paul wrote to the church at Philippi,

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<sup>4</sup> Yet we read of the two disciples coming from Emmaus, "So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found **the eleven** and those who were with them gathered together" (Luke 24:33). Luke must have been using the expression, "the Eleven" in a formal sense referring to the apostles, as the term "the Twelve" is used elsewhere for the twelve apostles, but here without Judas Iscariot. But we also know that Thomas was not among them on this first occasion of our Lord's appearance to them.

<sup>5</sup> The phrase, "and honeycomb" was probably not originally penned by Luke but is found only in later Greek manuscripts.

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup>who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. (Phi. 3:20f)

Upon our bodily resurrection from the dead, our glorified bodies will no longer experience pain or sickness. There will be neither sorrow, nor aging, nor weariness, nor mental decline, nor deficiency, nor physical need or limitation. We will not be omniscient, but neither will we be limited by our present propensity to sin and error. We will know, even as we are known. Paul wrote these words in 1 Corinthians 15:35-55 regarding our future glorified bodies.

But someone will say, “How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?” <sup>36</sup>Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. <sup>37</sup>And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other grain. <sup>38</sup>But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body.

<sup>39</sup>All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind <sup>□</sup>of flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and another of birds.

<sup>40</sup>There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. <sup>41</sup>There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory.

<sup>42</sup>So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. <sup>43</sup>It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. <sup>44</sup>It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. <sup>45</sup>And so it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being.” The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

<sup>46</sup>However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. <sup>47</sup>The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. <sup>48</sup>As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. <sup>49</sup>And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.

<sup>50</sup>Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. <sup>51</sup>Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— <sup>52</sup>in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. <sup>53</sup>For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. <sup>54</sup>So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”

<sup>55</sup>“O Death, where is your sting?  
O Hades, where is your victory?”

After Jesus revealed Himself and convinced these men that it was He who had risen from the dead, He began to prepare them for their future witness of Him to the world.

## **II. Jesus prepares His witnesses to bear their message to the World (24:44-49)**

<sup>44</sup>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.” <sup>45</sup>And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

<sup>46</sup>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, <sup>47</sup>and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup>And you are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup>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.”

The Lord had given His disciples proof of the fact that He was alive. They were eyewitnesses that God had raised Him from the dead. But although eyewitness testimony was important, Scripture testimony was also important. If they were to be faithful witnesses of Him they must understand the Scriptures. Jesus spoke to His apostles of God's revelation of Himself and His purposes in Holy Scripture (24:44). He declared that the Old Testament Scriptures testified of Him.

These words of Jesus have significant importance in enabling us to understand several important truths.

### **A. The canonization of Holy Scripture**

Verse 44 is one of the most significant verses in Luke's Gospel, even within the entire New Testament, respecting the Holy Scriptures. Verse 44 defines for us what the Lord Jesus regarded as the canon of Old Testament Scripture.

The word, **canon**, is derived from a Latin word, which means rule, or standard.<sup>6</sup> The Scriptures are our canon, or rule, by which all beliefs and practices are to be measured. When one speaks of the canon of Scripture, one is speaking of what books are regarded as authoritative Scripture.

Now when we speak of **canonization**, we are referring to the work of God through history in making known which books He inspired, and which books are authoritative for matters of faith and practice. Canonization speaks of the process by which the people of God come to recognize and acknowledge God's inspired, written, and authoritative Word to His people.

Why do we hold to our 39 books of the Old Testament and only 39? Why do we reject the teaching of the Roman Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox traditions which add the books of the Apocrypha to the canon? Even in the first century the Jews were not unified in their understanding of the canon. The Sadducees only accepted as authoritative Scripture the five books of Moses, Genesis through Deuteronomy. In contrast the Pharisees accepted the three-fold division of Scripture which is still retained in the Hebrew Bible. This includes:

1. the Law -- Genesis through Deuteronomy
2. the Prophets --Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve (Hosea through Malachi),
3. the Writings (all the rest, which includes the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah).

The Hebrew Scriptures are the same content of our Protestant Old Testament, although the Hebrew Scriptures are set forth in 24 books and our Protestant Old Testament contains 39 books. But they are identical in content.

Here in Luke 24:44 the Lord Jesus identified the Scriptures as containing this three-fold division, the Law, the Prophets, the Psalms (Writings). He agreed with the Pharisees in their understanding of what constituted the canon of Scripture. Of course He denied and rejected the Pharisees' additional authority of the Tradition of the Fathers, or the rabbinic teaching regarding the Scriptures. Similarly we reject the authority of the Tradition of "the church" as an equal authority as the Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox denominations espouse.

Let our Roman Catholic and Orthodox friends, who wish to add additional books to the Old Testament, which are called the Apocrypha, let them find warrant in the words of our Lord Jesus for doing so. When He was confirming to His apostles that collection of books which He regarded as authoritative, He identified those books which were contained in the Hebrew Bible, and no others. He asserted as authoritative those books that Protestants acknowledge to be the books of the Old Testament. And again, similar to Jesus

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<sup>6</sup> "Canon" is not to be confused with "cannon", an artillery weapon.

rejecting the oral tradition of the Jewish Fathers, Protestants reject the claim of Roman Catholicism that their Church Tradition has equal authority to the Holy Bible. We do not reject tradition wholly, but we do submit and subordinate tradition to be validated or invalidated by the Holy Scriptures alone.

## **B. God's illumination of His people respecting Scripture (24:45)**

We read in **verse 45**, “*Then He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.*” It is good to know what constitutes Scripture—what books are canonical—but knowing this alone is not enough. We must be instructed in the truth of the Scriptures or merely possessing them or even reading them will bring us no benefit. When true understanding of the Scriptures is determined, it is due to a work of God—Jesus opened their minds so they could understand. He must open our minds if we are to understand the Scriptures.

Now, when we speak of God having given us holy Scripture, we speak of the revelation of Himself through *inspiration*. The apostle Paul asserted this to young Timothy: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). But the mere possession of the Scriptures will not save a person from sin. Even believing the Scriptures to be the Word of God is not sufficient to save. One must believe and act upon the message of Scripture to experience God's saving power through it. And in order to believe and act upon its message, you need to understand its message.

Paul went on to write to Timothy in the very next verse, “from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:17). God inspired the Scriptures and has given them to us, but then He must through them “make us wise unto salvation.” And so, when we speak of God having given us Scripture, we speak of the revelation of Himself through *inspiration*. But when we speak of God giving us understanding of Scripture, we speak of His *illumination*. God must open our minds to hear and understand Scripture, or we will remain in darkness and confusion.

But how are we illuminated by God?

### **1. We must have the desire to be illuminated.**

### **2. We must study the Holy Scriptures in order to be illuminated by the Holy Spirit as to the truth of Scripture.**

We must read, analyze, and meditate, we must ask questions and seek answers, comparing Scripture with Scripture, so that we might arrive to settled convictions as to what is taught. Our study must be performed with diligence. God only illuminates those who diligently seek Him. He does not reward the casual and the careless, for He reveals His will to them who truly long to know Him. We are commanded to be diligent in our study.

Our study must be performed with discretion. The Bible is a book that must be read and studied rightly, or not only will no benefit result, but great problems may possibly result. We read again, Paul's words to Timothy, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). This is important, for we read that there are some who are “untaught and unstable” who “twist” the Scriptures “to their own destruction” (2 Pet. 3:16).

All Christians have a right and a duty to study the Scriptures. And every Christian has the sufficient means to be able to study the Scriptures and receive sufficient truth as is necessary to know God and serve Him rightly. The understandability of Holy Scripture has been historically referred to as the perspicuity of Scripture. This is what drove the Reformers to translate the Bible into the language of the common man. **William Tyndale** (a. 1490-1536), who first translated the Bible into English, told a skeptical clergyman one day, “If God spare my life, ere many years pass I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scriptures than thou dost.” But this may only be achieved if the Scriptures are studied rightly.

The Bible is God's Word, having been inspired by Him. But the Bible is also a book which was delivered by God through human writers in historical and cultural situations. We must study with discretion,

knowing that the Bible did not drop out of heaven last month in its present form addressed to us personally and directly. The Scriptures were written for us, but not to us, directly. It was given by God in history by writers who were addressing their readers.

It was not written in code which requires a divine interpreter to give us some secret meaning that only he can impart to us. The Scriptures are understandable if read rightly. But we must understand the historical situations in which the various books were written. We must understand the various literature styles and forms through which these men wrote. And after understanding what they were saying to the readers to whom they wrote, we then make a reasoned application to our present situation in the light of the authoritative and abiding principles and teachings.

Thankfully we live in a day where there are many tools to assist us in our study. And there are good books which set forth in plain language the proper methods which should be employed so that we do not lead ourselves or others astray.

### **3. During our diligent study we must pray for illumination**

Prayer must be continually offered that God would illuminate the truth of Scripture to our understanding. For although a man apart from God's illumination may be able to determine accurately the words of Scripture and what is being said in any given passage, one cannot, apart from the illumination of the Holy Spirit, experience a true spiritual apprehension of its truth so that the truth moves and instructs one to apprehend the reality of God and His present will for His people. One can be "ever learning but never be able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (cf. 2 Tim. 3:7). In short, people may be able to conclude what the human writers wrote, but they will not be able to discern the words as truth about God and His ways, unless He opens their understanding. But for this to occur, prayer must be offered. As David, we should pray, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Psalm 119:18).<sup>7</sup> Paul prayed that God would illuminate the new Christians so that they might perceive truth.<sup>8</sup>

But some pray and God does not answer. They remain in darkness. Why? To whom does God reveal Himself? Who is the one that the Holy Spirit illuminates His truth?

**a. *He opens the eyes of those who are regenerated.*** Those who have been born again, that is the life of God has been given to them and they have been made into new persons, who love God, love His Word, love His people, love righteousness, hate unrighteousness, detest sin and every evil thing, these are the ones whom God discloses His Word.

This Bible was a "sealed" book to me until I was converted, but then it became something wholly different. I could understand clearly, not fully, but clearly that which was obscure days before. I had been born again, and all things had become new, including this book.

**b. *The Holy Spirit enlightens the humble to the truths of Holy Scripture.*** The Lord Jesus prayed to His Father: "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight" (Luke 10:21).

**c. *The Holy Spirit will illuminate His truth those who will make known His Word.*** The Lord opened the understanding of His disciples because they were to be His witnesses. What God reveals to us in our privacy, He would have us proclaim openly. If we fail or refuse to do so, we close ourselves off from the light of further illumination.

**d. *The Holy Spirit illuminates the minds of those who purpose to obey His Word.*** Jesus taught, "If any man's will is to do His will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on My own authority" (John 7:17). You can pray all day long for guidance, for illumination

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<sup>7</sup> See also Psalm 119:26f, 33f, 73, 125, 144, 169.

<sup>8</sup> Eph. 1:15-19; Col. 1:9, 10.



respecting the will of God, but if you are not willing to obey whatever He discloses to you, you will remain in darkness. The will of God is given to those who really want to know what He would have them do. He does not reveal His will to them who have an agenda which is contrary to Himself and His ways. They may search, and they will most certainly find what they think and will claim to be His will, but it will not be so. For the Lord will harden them in their determination to rebel against Him, even to the extent of sending them a strong delusion to believe a lie. Some are in darkness today because they are not characterized by these things. Perhaps they had been illuminated in the past, but because of their failure and refusal to obey, darkness has closed in upon them. The Bible is as a sealed book to them.<sup>9</sup>

Our Lord warned His followers of this consequence of refusal to obey: “A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going” (John 12:35). The Lord God blinds the disobedient, but He opens the eyes of His own. Here in Luke 24, in verse 45, we see our Lord illuminating His disciples to the truth of the Scriptures.

### **C. God’s emphasis in the Scriptures (24:46-47)**

Here in verses 46 and 47 we see the main emphasis of Scripture.

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, <sup>47</sup>and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

1. The Old Testament speaks of Christ’s sufferings, death, and resurrection (24:46)
2. The Old Testament speaks of the gospel being taken to the world (Gentiles) (24:47)<sup>10</sup>

What is the content of this gospel? In the light of Christ’s suffering and death and His resurrection,

- (1) Repentance is to be preached.

Repentance means to turn from serving sin to believe, serve, and obey God. Repentance involves sorrow for having sinned, but sorrow only is not repentance. A godly sorrow over sin leads to true repentance, which is a turning from serving sin to serving God (see 2 Cor. 7:8-11).<sup>11</sup>

- (2) Forgiveness of sins

Praise be to God there is remission of sins. “All manner of blasphemy and sin shall be forgiven unto men.” There is forgiveness of sins for everyone who repents. The authority of the Lord Jesus assures that it is so. Could there be any more wondrous, glorious, good news than this? Free and full pardon to any and all for any and all offences. How can this be so? Only on the basis of God’s own Son’s death in the sinner’s place.

### **D. The commission of His disciples (24:48, 49)**

Jesus declared to His apostles,

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<sup>9</sup> An Old Testament example of this occurring is expressed in Isaiah 29:9-11.

<sup>10</sup> There are some who say the Old Testament never once speaks of this church age, but that it was a thing hidden from the Old Testament saints. The Lord Jesus taught His disciples that they would be fulfilling the Old Testament Scriptures in taking their gospel to the Gentiles, beginning from Jerusalem.

<sup>11</sup> Some wrongly claim that repentance in Scripture does not have anything to do with turning from sin, rather they say it is a synonym for faith. They say to repent is to change one’s mind about the identity of Jesus Christ. It has nothing to do with turning from sin. But this is false. Biblical repentance is turning from unbelief and serving oneself, to believing and serving the living God. There is no forgiveness of sins apart from turning from sin.

And you are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup>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.”

1. They were witnesses (24:48). They were to bear witness to the fact of all that they had seen and heard throughout their time with the Lord Jesus, and it would be through this means that God would accomplish the salvation of His people.

2. The promise of the coming Holy Spirit (24:49)

(1) The Old Testament promise of the Holy Spirit

God had promised in the Old Testament Scriptures that the time would come when He would visit His people with salvation. The supreme gift that He would bestow upon them was the Holy Spirit Himself. Through Him they would experience transformation in their whole being. They would encounter peace and joy. And they would receive power which would enable them to live godly lives before Him. This was the promise of salvation-- life-changing power.

(2) The power for witness

They were witnesses, but to be effective witnesses they would need power. This would come to them through the Holy Spirit. As the Spirit of God came upon men of old times enabling them to do great physical feats, so the Holy Spirit would come upon Christ's disciples, which would enable them to perform the great spiritual feat of bearing witness to the gospel to all nations. When the Scriptures speak of “power”, it may be regarded as an infused confidence, courage and boldness to bear witness in a clear concise manner the message of God. This occurred with the event of Pentecost.

What is very important for us today is that we be faithful witnesses to what has been revealed in Scripture, and that we be filled with power in our witness through the Holy Spirit, whom Christ gives to them who obey Him.

### **III. Jesus departs from His witnesses, promising to send the Holy Spirit to them (24:50-53)**

<sup>50</sup>And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. <sup>51</sup>Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. <sup>52</sup>And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, <sup>53</sup>and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen.

The Lord Jesus left them, ascending into heaven, having first blessed them. The Lord went into heaven and there encountered a grand reception (cf. Rev. 5). He received power and authority from His Father (cf. Dan. 7:13f). He was seated at the Father's right hand. And His first act of authority was the sending of the Holy Spirit upon His disciples.

The disciples worshipped Him. They were filled with joy. The kingdom of God had come, for they were presently enjoying peace and joy and righteousness. They had a peace the world knew nothing of, a peace that no one could take from them.

### **Conclusion**

The apostles are long gone. Their witness abides in the Scriptures. But now we are left here to carry on their witness. We are to publish this gospel as fully and widely as He enables us. We need power for this task. And He will empower us as we pray and trust Him to fill us with the blessed Holy Spirit.

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