

ACTS: THE MINISTRY OF THE SPIRIT

January 20, 2016 – Jim Lenahen

- ❖ **AUTHOR:** Luke, a traveling companion of Paul's, a historian, and a physician who wrote both the gospel of Luke and Acts. He is the only Gentile author in the New Testament.
- ❖ He "carefully investigated everything from the beginning" [Luke 1:3] before writing this two-part document (Luke and Acts). In the gospel, he followed the story of Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem ("all Jesus did and taught"), and in Acts from Jerusalem to Rome (all the Spirit did through the apostles). **We are the continuing story...we are being led by the Spirit to complete the work of Christ.**
- ❖ **RECIPIENT:** "Most excellent Theophilus" – name means "lover of God." Many believe he was a Roman government official, and that Luke wrote his gospel and Acts as part of an appeal for Paul's freedom from imprisonment.
- ❖ **GOAL:** "To write an orderly account" of "the things that have been fulfilled among us" [Luke 1:1,3]

Read Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-3

PLACEMENT: Let's drop this story of the Book of Acts into some context. Jesus died around AD 30. The events recorded in Acts occurred between AD 30-60. During that time, Paul wrote all but three of his letters during that time.

- ❖ Jesus born in Bethlehem in Judea (**MAP**) and then his family moved north to Galilee where he grew up (Nazareth). His ministry was largely in Galilee. **It was an obscure, secluded, unimportant town – perfect for incubation of Christianity. Once his disciples began to understand his identity as the Messiah, he made the move to Jerusalem (in Judea), where he came into direct contact with the religious establishment and was ultimately rejected by them. To get there, he went through Samaria (healing of ten lepers).**
- ❖ Nero made emperor at age 16 in AD 54.
- ❖ Peter and Paul executed under Nero by AD 68 (year Nero died).
- ❖ Jerusalem destroyed in AD 70. Christianity would never again be a Jewish-flavored. Transformation begins to being more of a Gentile flavor.
- ❖ Persecution heated up in the final decade of first century under the reign of Domitian (AD 81-96), the emperor demanded to be worshiped as "Lord and God." Biggest conflict between Romans and Christians since 64 when Nero blamed the fire of Rome on Christians. Over the next 200+ years, being a Christian was illegal.

SETTING:

- ❖ The apostles had just lost their leader to a horrific death...a public spectacle
- ❖ The faith of the disciples had been shaken:
 - **Luke 24:11** – they did not believe the women's eyewitness testimony of the risen Christ..."seemed to them like nonsense"
 - **John 20:19** – "the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders"
- ❖ But then Jesus appeared to them and "offered many convincing proofs he was alive" over a period of forty days, "speaking to them about the kingdom of God" – **Acts 1:3**
- ❖ Then he commanded them to wait in Jerusalem for God to give them the Holy Spirit – **Acts 1:4**

PERSONAL APPLICATION #1

Do you have the discipline to wait on God...to not charge into important tasks or missions without the help of God?

- Think of times you regret going on your own strength and not God's strength. Think of the times you were strengthened by God and accomplished something beyond your own ability.
- Consider Samson: Judges 14:6; 14:19; 15:14

Just before he ascended into heaven, they gathered together in Jerusalem and he said these parting words:

Acts 1:8-9 "...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight."

FOCUS FOR WEEK ONE: THE HOLY SPIRIT

- ❖ PURPOSE OF THE SPIRIT
- ❖ PLAN OF THE SPIRIT
- ❖ (AP) PEARANCE OF THE SPIRIT
- ❖ PROOF OF THE SPIRIT

1. THE PURPOSE OF THE SPIRIT

To provide the power that would be required to finish the work of Christ. Jesus did his part – he provided redemption, atonement, and a means of justification. And now it was up to his disciples to spread the good news about Jesus, and offer people the opportunity to be saved.

- ❖ The promised Holy Spirit would not only provide POWER (Acts 1:8), but also COMFORT and COMPANIONSHIP along the way (John 14:16), TEACHING and REMINDERS (John 14:26) when needed, and would add CONVICTION to the message (John 16:9).

PERSONAL APPLICATION #2

Are you feeling worn out...too tired or unmotivated to share your faith? Do you feel lonely, isolated? Are you discouraged over past experiences? Are you uncertain what to share with others? Or do you feel your message does not produce what you desire?

- It is a spiritual issue!
- Consider Psalm 18:4-6; 18:16-17; 18:31-35; 18:46

2. THE PLAN OF THE SPIRIT

To empower Christ's disciples to be witnesses first in Jerusalem, then in Judea and Samaria, and then "to the ends of the earth."

- ❖ God wanted ALL men to be saved:
 - Jews, Half Jews, God-Fearing Gentiles, Proselytes (disciples of John whom he baptized), and even Heathens.
- ❖ To convince the disciples of the breadth of their mission, the Holy Spirit's work was essential. They were too fleshly to do this on their own, but with the Spirit's prodding, the world was turned "upside down" for Christ (Acts 17:6)

PERSONAL APPLICATION #3

To reach out to the Jews whom they feared, or the proselytes they thought were already saved, or the Samaritans whom they loathed, or the Gentiles who were such a long shot...the disciples had to follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit. SO DO WE!

- Have you ever experienced the thrill of having followed the prompting of the Spirit, shared your faith with an unlikely person, and had them become a Christian?
- With whom have you not shared your faith out of fear, lack of sympathy, lack of faith, or lack of conviction? Decide to keep in step with the Spirit!

3. THE APPEARANCE OF THE SPIRIT

John 7:38-39 -- Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

Acts 2:1-4 -- When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Pentecost coincided with the celebration of the first harvest. And what a first harvest there was that day! It seems like the Spirit's timing could not have been more perfect! The approximately ten day wait from the time of Christ's ascension into heaven (when he told them to wait for the Spirit), and the day of Pentecost turned out to be perfect. It was the first-fruits of God's eternal harvest.

4. THE PROOF OF THE SPIRIT

❖ Power Given To Disciples

- The power/ability to communicate with people of foreign tongues (**2:4**) – reversed Babel curse...one language to build something for God
- From hiding in fear to preaching with boldness
- “Dynamic” transformation – from *dunamis* – “power.” Effect?
- Peter heals crippled beggar by the power of the Spirit. Effect?
- Stephen had power to face death without compromising (**7:55**). Effect?

❖ Boldness Given To Disciples:

- Peter & John confidently preach to the Sanhedrin (**4:8**) Effect?
- Disciples hear Peter & John's testimony, prayed to God, and were filled with the Spirit. Effect?

❖ Ability To Perform Miracles Given To Disciples:

- Peter healing crippled beggar (**3:6-8**). Effect?

❖ Communicated God's Will And Direction:

- Phillip and Ethiopian Eunuch (**8:29**) -- Effect?
- Peter responding to Cornelius' call (**10:19-20**) -- Effect?
- Paul decides to head toward Jerusalem (**20:22**)
- Paul protected from reaching Jerusalem (**21:4**) – Effect?

❖ Provided Confidence To Confront Sin:

- Paul confronts Elymas (**Acts 13:9-10**) – Effect

❖ Happened Exactly As Designed:

- Jerusalem – Acts 1-7
- Judea and Samaria – Acts 8-12
- Ends of the earth – Acts 13-28 (ending in Rome...the center of the Gentile world at that time)
- ❖ Each Critical Transition Confirmed By Tongues:
 - When Jews were invited to enter the Kingdom (2:4)
 - When Samaritans were invited to enter the Kingdom (8:14-19)
 - When Gentiles were invited to enter the Kingdom (10:45-46)
 - When Proselytes were invited to enter the Kingdom (Acts 19:6)

HOW DID THE SPIRIT DO?

MAPS

CHANGING ROLE OF THE SPIRIT

Spectacular manifestations of the Spirit much more prevalent in early years. Why?

- ❖ Church needed to grow rapidly. They had to get people's attention. Time was of the essence.
- ❖ Hearers needed to be convinced of authenticity of the apostles' testimony.
- ❖ Disciples needed to be convinced of "all nations"
- ❖ Obstacles and impediments could not slow down/deter/derail the work. **Those with Jewish background in the law were essential to the strength of the early church.**

Day One – Three thousand are added to the number of workers for Christ. Instant army! This had to ramp up quickly...and quickly it did.

WHAT NOW?

Jesus has served his purpose – to provide for men to be saved from their sins. The apostles have served their purpose – to effectively spread the gospel and establish a strong foundation of teaching in the churches

Now it is up to those to whom the gospel message has been entrusted – US! In what ways do we need the Spirit?

- ❖ We, too, still need boldness
- ❖ We, too, still need power – *dunamis* – (power to destroy the flesh and be transformed into the likeness of Christ...all the fruits of the Spirit evident in our lives so the world will know we are his disciples...modern version of apostle's power to do the spectacular)
- ❖ We, too, still need deep convictions
- ❖ We, too, still need the Spirit's direction
- ❖ We, too, still need confidence

PERSONAL APPLICATION #4

We must be committed to finishing the work of Christ – to give all men the opportunity to be saved. In order to do that, we must be full of the Spirit.

- In what ways does your flesh hinder the spread of the gospel?
- Recognize the role of Scriptures and prayer in unleashing the power of the Holy Spirit in your life! Commit yourself to becoming like Christ. Commit to prayer. Commit to His Word.
- Strive to keep in step with the Spirit