

## “YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES”

Acts 1:1–11

Key Verse: 1:8

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

What do you think you need? When we think we need something, we get serious about it. Many think they need money. Many try to be stronger, smarter, more disciplined. Training and education are important. Jesus himself taught and trained his disciples. But even all his teaching and training wouldn't work without one crucial thing. What is it? It's the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus calls the Spirit's coming “the promise of the Father” (1:4). It's a promise not just for his first disciples, but for everyone the Lord our God calls to himself (2:33,39). How does the Holy Spirit come upon us today? Why do we all need the Holy Spirit? And how should we respond to this promise? May God open our hearts and speak to us through his word.

Look at verse 1 (ESV). The Book of Acts is part of a two-volume set; the first book is Luke's Gospel. Luke addressed both books to a man named “Theophilus,” meaning “lover of God.” Luke 1:3 calls him “most excellent Theophilus.” It means he's a high ranking person in society, and probably a Gentile. Luke wrote to help him “have certainty concerning the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:4). Theophilus already had been taught about Jesus and had come to believe in him. But Luke wanted to help him be sure about it. And he was writing to help many others who would read these two books.

In the first book Luke recorded “all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1). Many people can speak well, but frankly, their actions don't match what they say. Jesus actually obeyed God's will, depended on God in prayer, and resisted the devil's temptations. So he didn't just talk well; he could drive the evil spirits out of people (Luke 4:32–36). He became known as someone “mighty in deed and word” (Luke 24:19; cf. Acts 7:22). Later Peter says, “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and

healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him” (Acts 10:38). Yet Luke says here it was just the *beginning* of what Jesus would do and teach.

Look at verse 2. Jesus was “taken up” when he ascended into heaven, which is mentioned at the very end of Luke’s Gospel (24:50–51). Verse 2 continues, “...after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.” Jesus gave commands not with mere human authority; he spoke them through the Holy Spirit. And whom did he command? First of all, it says Jesus chose certain men, and Luke often calls them “apostles.”<sup>1</sup> Literally, this word means Jesus was planning on sending them out. And his “commands” seems to refer to what he said right before he left: “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:46–48). Jesus commanded his apostles to proclaim repentance for the forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations. It was the message both John the Baptist and Jesus proclaimed. It was not supposed to stop with them. Jesus commanded his apostles to proclaim it, too. It was so that the ministry of word and deed would not just begin with Jesus but continue through his apostles, until he comes again.

Luke continues his summary. Read verse 3. This is really good news. “His suffering” refers to what Jesus went through during his arrest, trial and crucifixion. All his followers witnessed it. But after that, he gave many proofs that he is alive. He let them touch him, see where the nails were, and even ate a piece of fish in their presence. The Risen Jesus appeared to them not just on that first Sunday, but over a period of forty days. He wants them and us to be sure that he is alive. There’s one more thing he emphasized during that time. He spoke to them about the kingdom of God. He wanted this kingdom to be their hope. Jesus is alive, and the kingdom of God is real. Everything else is perishing, defiled and fading. Only this kingdom is our true and living hope (1 Pet.1:3–4).

But Jesus was doing more than just helping these men have personal hope in heaven. Read verses 4–5. He said the same thing at the end of Luke’s Gospel: “And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). Here in verse 5 he says it’s the baptism John had predicted. John said, “I baptize you

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 6:13; 9:10; 17:5; 22:14; 24:10

with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Luke 3:16). Jesus repeatedly calls the coming of the Holy Spirit as “the promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4; Luke 24:49). It happens in Acts chapter 2, on the day of Pentecost, fifty days after Passover when Jesus was crucified.

But why did God wait to fulfill his promise to send the Holy Spirit? There are several reasons. First, it’s the mystery of the sovereign rule of God. God the Father, in his wisdom, decides when to fulfill his promises. Secondly, before the Spirit’s coming, Jesus had to accomplish the work of salvation. He had to suffer and die, then rise from the dead, to make purification for sins possible (Heb.1:3b). Because of his death and resurrection, the Holy God can now forgive our sins. If we repent and turn back to him through faith in Jesus, our sins can be wiped out, and our souls can be ready to be refreshed by the Holy Spirit (Acts 3:19). Thirdly, for the Spirit to come, Jesus had to go away and ascend to heaven. Only after he was gone would his disciples stop depending on him humanly and truly be ready to receive the Holy Spirit (John 16:7).

In Luke 24:49 Jesus told them to “stay in the city.” Here in verse 5 he tells them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to “wait for the promise of the Father.” Sounds easy, but it’s harder than it seems. First of all, this place is not their home; they’re from Galilee, not Jerusalem. More than that, Jerusalem is where Jesus was rejected and crucified. It happened just forty days earlier. Those who did it were still there, determined to snuff out the Jesus movement. So the threat against Jesus’ followers there was real. As the city had become hostile to Jesus, so it would be hostile to them. Still, Jesus commanded them to stay there and wait. We’d all like to stay and wait at a place where we’re welcomed and treated well, not where rejection and threat are imminent.

So why does Jesus order them to stay there? It’s part of God’s plan in history. In Luke’s Gospel we see again and again how Jesus had to suffer and die in Jerusalem. Now, Acts shows that God wanted the apostles to begin their ministry in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was where God himself had chosen to put his temple. Jerusalem was the only place where sacrifice for sin and true worship of God were possible. Jerusalem was the place where God’s people could be made holy, by being in his presence. Jerusalem was the place where God finally made the new covenant in the shed blood of Jesus (Luke 22:20). Jerusalem would be

the place where people would first call on God through faith in Jesus and where God would pour out his Spirit on them (Acts 2:16–21; Joel 2:28–32). Jerusalem would be the place where God’s salvation would spread to all the nations. God is about to do a new thing, but he is very faithful to his promises.

And there’s one more thing here. The apostles need to obey Jesus’ order to stay in Jerusalem if they want to receive the Holy Spirit. Then as now, God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey him (Acts 5:32; cf. John 14:15–17). To be sure, the Bible calls the Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives a “gift” (Acts 2:38); it’s never something we earn. We believe in Jesus and receive the Spirit only by God’s grace. As believers, the Bible says the Spirit is already within us, even though we may not feel him (1 Cor.6:19). But in Christian living, it’s only when we walk by faith in obedience to Jesus that we can be filled with the Spirit (Eph.5:18). To be filled with the Spirit, we need to listen to Jesus, stay, and wait.

How do they respond? Read verse 6. What’s going on here? While waiting, their real hope finally comes out. They’ve been waiting for Jesus, their Messiah, to restore the kingdom to Israel. It’s the same hope the two followers told the Risen Jesus on their way to Emmaus (Luke 24:21a). It’s understandable for them to have this hope for Israel, based on all the prophecies about it. In fact, Luke himself had expressed this hope for Israel and Jerusalem in the first two chapters of his Gospel (1:69–74; 2:25,38). But in light of the Risen Jesus just speaking to these men for forty days about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3b), it’s discouraging. They didn’t get his point at all; it seems they hadn’t even been listening.

How does Jesus respond? Read verses 7–8. He’s so kind and patient. He doesn’t deny that God still has a plan to restore Israel. He just wants his followers to know that they shouldn’t sit around trying to figure out the times or seasons. Sadly, so many people have ignored these very words of Jesus and spent so much time and energy trying to predict what God is going to do. Bad idea.

Jesus has a different direction for us. Read verse 8 again. It has been God’s plan all along, ever since he called Abraham (Gen.12:2–3; Gal.3:16; Isa.49:6). From the beginning, these followers of Jesus had been eyewitnesses of all that he did and taught, and everything that happened to him, his suffering, death, resurrection and ascension (1:21–22). God gave them that experience to

prepare them to tell others about what it all meant. So the witness of the original apostles is special. But in a broader sense, as we turn to Jesus in faith today and learn to devote our lives to the apostles' teaching and prayer, their story becomes ours. What direction does our Lord Jesus Christ have for us? He says it's to be his witness. This word "witness" is repeated many times in Acts.<sup>2</sup> It's also Jesus' conclusion in Luke's Gospel (24:48), our new identity in Jesus. He wants us all to live as his witnesses, wherever we are, with whoever we're around, at all times.

But how? He says we receive power to do it when the Holy Spirit comes on us. To be his witness is not about gaining knowledge, strategies, or techniques; it's about being transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. It's not the power to speak loudly; it's the power to have the inner fruits of the Spirit. Then, when people get close to us, they don't sense inner chaos, confusion or insecurity, or self-righteous pride or anger. They get a sense of the very nature of Jesus within us. Through the Holy Spirit's power, we're changed from self-glory seeking hypocrites, scary people, into authentic witnesses of Jesus. The Holy Spirit drives out our fear. The Holy Spirit gives us spiritual understanding of the gospel message and the word of God. The Holy Spirit guides us where God wants us. The Holy Spirit gives us words and wisdom to say what God wants in any situation. The Holy Spirit helps us stay focused on Jesus. And as we'll see in our study of the Book of Acts, the Holy Spirit helps us come out of our comfort zone, cross any barrier in the way, and go beyond our human limits to share the good news of Jesus with people. The Holy Spirit gives us God's vision for the people of the whole world. It's not just about going to unreached people in the remotest places on the planet. It's about seeing the people around us with hope and vision because of Jesus. To be his witnesses, each day we need the Holy Spirit's help. We need the Holy Spirit's presence not to get engrossed in the things of this world or distracted by lesser things. We need the Holy Spirit's inspiration to give people not our own ideas but the message of Jesus, repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name. We need the Holy Spirit's wisdom and help to pray for each person, to make us real shepherds and overseers who truly care for the church of God (Acts 20:28). We don't need any special degree, sophisticated education or elite status. We just need personal repentance and the gift of the Holy Spirit to be a bold and true witness of Jesus.

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<sup>2</sup> 1:22; 2:32,40; 3:15; 5:32; 10:32,41; 13:31; 22:15,20; 26:16.

In verses 9–11 Jesus ascends into heaven, right before their eyes. Probably they really want him to come back. And the angels promise that he will. But what they really need to do is get on with the task that the Risen Jesus, who is still alive, has given them. The same is true for us.

Read verse 8 again. Honestly, we all have so many weaknesses, problems and challenges in our lives. We can feel so powerless, so overwhelmed by life, so helpless and hopeless. But may God help us believe his promise of the Holy Spirit and empower even us with his vision to live as Jesus' witnesses to the end of the earth.