

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study guide is to facilitate the study of Acts 1 as a supplement to the sermon. It is based on my (Michael's) study and meditation on the passage. This handout can be used for personal study or community group conversation. (I hope you join a group!)

ACTS 1:6-11 ESV

6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 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." 9 And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, 11 and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

STRUCTURE (from verse 1, which forms a single unit)

- I. Prologue: What Jesus began to do and teach before being "taken up" (1:1-3)
 - a. Address (Luke's second volume): to Theophilus and all God's friends (1:1)
 - b. Summary (Luke's first volume):
 - i. What Jesus *did* before being "taken up": choose apostles, give commands, suffer death, rise again, appear often (1:2-3a)
 - ii. What Jesus *taught* before being "taken up": the kingdom of God (1:3b)
- II. Introduction: What Jesus continues to do and teach since being "taken up" (1:4-11)
 - a. Jesus' ministry will continue by means of Spirit-empowered witnesses (1:4-8)
 - i. Commanded to wait for the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit (1:4-5)
 - ii. Confused about Israel's eschatological restoration (1:6)
 - iii. Received clarity about Israel's eschatological restoration (1:7-8)
 1. Timing: not for you to know
 2. Scope: not just Israel, but all nations
 3. Nature: not just political, but spiritual
 - b. Jesus' ministry will continue until the ascended Christ returns (1:9-11)
 - i. Jesus ascends – a cloud envelops Him, and the disciples witness it (1:9)
 - ii. Angels rebuke – until Christ returns, there's work to do (1:10-11)

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

Two promises frame this passage: first, there is the promise of the Spirit for extending God's kingdom; second, there is the promise of Christ's return, for the consummation of God's kingdom. For NOW, Jesus departs to be with the Father so His Spirit-filled church can continue His mission. This occurs UNTIL enough people have repented (2 Pet. 3) and Jesus says, "Mission accomplished". Put differently, the promise of the Spirit empowers kingdom expansion until the promise of Christ's return punctuates that expansion. Matthew 24:14 makes the same connection between global evangelization and Christ's return: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached to all nations, and then the end will come." When is the end? Prophecy teachers debate it, but Jesus makes it clear: when the Gospel is preached to all nations. In the meantime, we labor in the suspension between two promises—the promise of empowerment for mission, and the promise of a completed mission at Christ's return.

The disciples understood very little of this at first. Their question about Israel's restoration reflected sincere meditation upon Scripture, which promised an eschatological restoration of Israel in conjunction with the Spirit's outpouring. What they failed to understand, however, was the timing, the scope, and the nature of Israel's restoration (detailed below). Rather than endless speculation about eschatology, the angels issue a corrective to all of us. What we really need to know is that Jesus is coming back just like He came, and in the meantime, we have work to do.

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

—"So": This word indicates a connection between the disciples' question about Israel's restoration and Jesus' prior statement about the baptism of the Spirit (1:5). Prophecies like Ezek. 11:16-20, 36:22-37:14, 39:28-29, Zech. 12:9-10, Joel 2-3 intertwine the same three threads: God's physical deliverance from enemies, Israel's restoration, and an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, prophecies like Dan. 2:44; 7:14, 27, would've created the simultaneous expectation that God would establish His kingdom through Israel in order to replace all other kingdoms. In short, the disciples' question is not unreasonable. It reflects a rootedness in the Hebrew Scriptures that is commendable. Nevertheless, Jesus will still need to redirect their understanding of those Scriptures a bit.

—In the least, the disciples are thinking too small. They are thinking about Israel, but God's heart is to restore all nations to Himself. Probably also, they are thinking about a physical/political restoration of the kingdom of Israel. This is the mistake they repeatedly make in the Gospel accounts. Again, God is thinking bigger—about spiritual restoration. Finally, Jesus' response in 1:7-8 clarifies that their expectation of an immanent kingdom is not accurate. It is first of all not for them to know the times and the seasons, and second, it is going to take a long time to reach "the end of the earth" (1:8).

—The disciples' hope for political restoration was not 100% misguided, however. It is fulfilled in Jesus, who reigns from the throne of His father David (Acts 2:29-36), having rebuilt the ruins of David's kingdom (15:14-18). Jesus is king—and that's political! What awaits is not that Jesus will someday become the Davidic king (as some claim), but rather that His kingdom is consummated upon His return (1:9-11), when His enemies become His footstool (2:35), and His reign is at last uncontested.

—Jesus' disciples craved a Jew-centered theocracy, with themselves as the chief executors of the new David. They did not yet know the "mystery" Paul spoke of, which had been kept hidden before Christ (Eph. 3:3-6). Before the "mystery" was revealed, Jews envisioned Gentiles streaming into a Jewish theocracy in the last days, but essentially remaining second-class citizens (some Christians still think this will happen!). After Paul revealed this mystery to "apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (3:5), however, it became clear that "Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the same promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel" (3:6). **Jesus' response to the disciples' question about a Jewish theocracy is thus a reorientation toward the "eternal purpose" of God (3:11), namely, that Jesus' reign from a Jewish throne leads not to a Jewish theocracy, but to a global one, with Gentiles on equal footing.**

7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.

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."

—Some teach that Jesus changes the subject, refusing to be distracted about Israel's restoration, and instead focusing on the Great Commission. In other words, they say, Jesus dodged the question.

—I don't think Jesus is dodging, though. While He predictably avoids giving them a timetable (isn't this always God's way?!), Jesus' response in verses 7-8 is in fact a direct response to their question about Israel's restoration. I say this for the following reasons:

- First, the word "but" suggests that Jesus' next words are in some way connected to the prior ones. He is not totally changing the subject. "But" corrects the mistaken notion that Jesus will give them a timetable, while setting up precisely how Israel will be restored—by Spirit-empowered witnesses who compel Jews (and others) to repent. This is what happens on Pentecost in Acts 2. "But" also corrects other mistaken notions, such as that Israel's restoration is merely political, or that God won't restore "the end of the earth" while He's at it.
- Second, their question is about the "kingdom" (1:6) and Jesus' answer addresses "power" (1:8). Everywhere throughout the Gospels, "kingdom" and "power" closely align (Mt. 4:23; 9:35; 10:7-8; etc.), with Paul even saying that "the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk, but of power" (1 Cor. 4:20). That Jesus answers their question about the "kingdom" by addressing "power" means He follows their train of thought, albeit with redirection. The kingdom is not about political power as we perceive it—kicking Rome's butt, for instance—but rather about spreading the good news that Jesus is Caesar's king, and ours. "All authority in heaven and on earth" has been given to Him (Matt. 28:18).
- Third, we have already identified the close relationship between "kingdom", "Spirit". Since the scene begins by Jesus talking about the kingdom (1:3) and the Spirit (1:4-5), it flows neatly that the disciples' question about the kingdom (1:6) is answered by talking about the Spirit (1:8). The links between these verses are strengthened by connecting words—"and" (1:4), "so" (1:6), "But" (1:8).
- Fourth, the "promise of the Father" (1:4), which is the Spirit (1:5, 8), reminds us of Luke 24:49, where Jesus tells the disciples, just before the ascension, to wait in Jerusalem for "power from on

high." This alludes directly to Isaiah 32:15, where "the Spirit is poured upon us from on high" in the last days, when Israel's "king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule in justice" (32:1). In short, Jesus' response laces together multiple biblical threads. Putting these threads together—how do we know that Jesus' response in 1:7-8 is not a dodge, but rather a direct answer vis-à-vis Israel's restoration? Because: according to Isaiah 32, Israel's kingdom (king and princes / Jesus and apostles) would be restored when power was poured out from on high, and this promise of the Father, repeated in Luke 24 and Acts 1, is fulfilled on Pentecost when the Spirit is poured out and three thousand Jews are restored into fellowship with God by the Spirit.

- Fifth, and along these same lines, Acts 1:8 alludes not only to Isaiah 32:15 (see above) but also to Isaiah 43:10-12 and 49:6, which refer to Israel's restoration. Here are the verses together:
 - [Act 1:8 ESV] 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."
 - [Isa 43:10-12 ESV] 10 "You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. 11 I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior. 12 I declared and saved and proclaimed, when there was no strange god among you; and you are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and I am God.
 - [Isa 49:6 ESV] 6 he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."
- In summary, Jesus directly answers the disciples' reasonable question about Israel's restoration by teaching that Israel will be restored when the Spirit baptizes those in "Jerusalem and Judea" (1:8)—Jews. Rather than dodging the question, it is more accurate to say He redirects the disciples' understanding of this restoration: it will not just be political, but spiritual; it will not just be Jews, but the whole earth; and it is not for you to know the times and seasons for the completion of this global restoration.
- On the last note, while we cannot know the times and seasons, we can at least infer that it will take more than a hot minute for the Gospel to reach "the end of the earth" (1:8). Jesus implies a longer duration than the disciples imagine.

—"times and seasons":

- Scholars say that 'times' refers to pivotal moments in history, and 'seasons,' to longer epochs or dispensations.
- I have been saying that Jesus reigns from the throne of His Father David, and that David's kingdom is restored, and that all of this happened very quickly after Jesus ascended—on Pentecost. "times and seasons" suggests, however, that Israel's restoration will not be prompt. Far from "seasons" passing, in just ten days there would be three thousand converts.
- Jesus has no problem saying that "not many days from now" they will be endued with power (1:5), but then He says Israel's restoration will take "times and seasons" (1:6). It seems, on the surface, that Jesus does not immediately equate Israel's restoration and Pentecost. Have I been overstating my case? Has David's kingdom not truly been restored in Jesus?
- That can't be the case. Acts 2:29-35 and 15:14-18 clearly teach that David's kingdom has been restored, with Jesus reigning on David's throne. If Jesus intends by "times and seasons" to suggest that Israel's restoration is perhaps in the distant future, this would appear to be an already/not-yet sort of formulation. The kingdom is "already" here in Jesus, but it is "not yet," in that the culmination occurs only at His return.
- This would agree with the articulation of Acts 3:21, where Christ is the one "whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of the holy prophets long ago" (Acts 3:21). This refers to their original question in 1:6 about the restoration of Israel. In fact, the same root word for "restore" is used in 1:6 and 3:21.
- In this age, the kingdom of David has indeed been restored, but it is not until Jesus "will come in the same way as you saw him go" (1:11) that the fullness of that restoration is achieved. Only then, will our greater David reign without contest.

—The greatest priority is not WHEN God will restore the kingdom of Israel (or for us, when Jesus will return); the priority is WHAT we are to do in the meantime. We are to be witnesses. Hodges: "They are not to know God's PROGRAM, but they are to know God's POWER."

—The Father is the One who fixes times and seasons by His authority. He is the planner. The Son is the One who sits at the right hand of God, making the fulfillment of that plan possible through His work of redemption and continued intercession. The Spirit is the One who empowers us to live out that plan. In

short, the flow goes from God the Father to God the Son to God the Spirit—to us. That's a chain I want to be part of!

—The Holy Spirit comes to give us power. Before this moment, they had been personally discipled by our Lord, they had seen and witnessed and even participate in Jesus' ministry. They had been adequately instructed, but they needed something more. They needed power. Knowing the right thing to do is not enough to fulfill God's mission.

—Before this moment they do not have power. There have been special moments. In Luke 9 and 10, Jesus gives them power and authority for performing miracles and casting out demons, but this time is different. It will be different in **scope**, for it won't just be the Apostles, but "all flesh" (2:17). It will be different in **measure**, for it will be a baptism—an immersion—in the Holy Spirit (1:5). It will be different in **significance**, for it will mark a new season of redemptive history (1:4-5). It will be different in **aim**, for their mission will be not just to Israel, but to the ends of the earth (1:8). In sum, there's a greater empowerment for a greater number of people to fulfill God's greater mission.

—"Jerusalem... Judea... Samaria... end of the earth":

- Missions is never just either/or. We don't say, "Let's reach OKC, and once we've succeeded there, we move outward." Instead, we reach all at the same time.
- Reaching Samaria was relatively local, but it was cross-cultural. The church needs cross-cultural missionaries.
- Samaria also represented the northern tribes of Israel. Judeans would have viewed Samaritans as "not real Jews," for they were racially mixed with the Assyrians after exile, and they also abandoned most books of the Old Testament. This makes Acts 8 especially significant, for the salvation of Samaria in that chapter fulfills the ancient promise that the northern and southern tribes would be reunited under the Son of David and His new covenant (Ezek. 37:15-28).

—"witnesses":

- A legal word. It references one who has seen and heard, and then relays testimony, so that those who have not seen and heard can discern truth.
- This explains why Acts 1 places such a strong emphasis on seeing and hearing the ministry of Jesus (1:2-3, 9, 11, 21-22).
- The original word, "witness," referred to those who saw and heard Jesus (1:8, 22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39, 41; 13:31; 22:15, 20; 26:16). The last of these references, however, are interesting. Paul did not witness Jesus in the same way that the other apostles did, yet he was called to be a witness to what he had seen and heard from the risen Lord (22:15; 26:16). Even more interesting is Stephen, who is called, "Your witness Stephen" (22:20)—even though he had been a Greek, and had probably not seen the risen Christ until the final vision before His death (7:56-57). That both Paul and Stephen are included among the "witnesses" means that the term included not only the original twelve, but also others who saw Jesus *after* His ascension. What does this mean for us? It means that even though we did not see Jesus literally rise from the grave, we can nevertheless be "witnesses" of Jesus by bearing witness to what we have "seen and heard"—experienced—of Him. Sharing the truth of Jesus is not just a cold presentation of facts. Like an eyewitness at the stand, we tell our story. We tell the story of how we met and continue to meet Jesus, for although He is ascended, He continues to "do and teach."
- If we have no experience of Jesus, we can't be a witness!

—Connection between "power" and miracles:

- The "power" of Acts 1:8 is not just power of conviction or power of sanctification from sin; it is power for performing miracles in Jesus' name. Here are the instances throughout Acts where the Greek word
 - [Act 2:22 ESV] 22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with **mighty works** and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—
 - [Act 3:12 ESV] 12 And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own **power** or piety we have made him walk?
 - [Act 4:7, 33 ESV] 7 And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what **power** or by what name did you do this?" ... 33 And with great **power** the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.
 - [Act 6:8 ESV] 8 And Stephen, full of grace and **power**, was doing great wonders and signs among the people.
 - [Act 8:10, 13 ESV] 10 They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the **power** of God that is called Great." ... 13 Even Simon himself believed, and

*after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and **great miracles** performed, he was amazed.*

- *[Act 10:38 ESV] 38 how 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.*
- *[Act 19:11 ESV] 11 And God was doing extraordinary **miracles** by the hands of Paul,*
- In the 9 references to “power” (Gk: *dynamis*) outside of Acts 1:8, every single one refers to miracles, with the possible exception of 4:33. Perhaps 4:33 refers to powerful conviction from the Holy Spirit, but given the unanimous weight of evidence from other verses that use this word, I understand that verse to also reference miracles. In other words, it would read, “And with great miracles the apostles were giving testimony...”
- The “power” of Acts 1:8 cannot be reduced to conviction of sin or sanctification. It must refer to God’s miracle-working power.
- Because of the connection between “power” and “Spirit” in 1:8, it seems right to also include the Spirit’s revelatory power, as outlined in 2:17-18: dreams, visions, and prophecy. The rest of Acts bears this out. Just about every salvation occurs as the direct result of “power”—either in the form of a miracle, or in the form of a revelation.

—Thompson: “In summary: in Acts 1-2, with descriptions of the Holy Spirit as ‘the promise’, allusions to the prophetic hope of the Spirit in Isaiah, a direct quotation of the prophecy in Joel introduced as spoken by God about the last days’, together with language that recalls Ezekiel’s prophecy for ‘the whole house of Israel’, Luke is emphasizing in a variety of ways that the pouring out of the Holy Spirit is to be understood as the fulfillment of God’s promise for the last days. The fulfillment of this promise of the Spirit is therefore part of the evidence that the kingdom of God has been inaugurated.”

—Stott: The kingdom “would be spiritual in its character (transforming the lives and values of its citizens), international in its membership (including Gentiles as well as Jews) and gradual in its expansion (beginning at once in Jerusalem, and then growing until it reaches the end of both time and earthly space).”

9 And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10 And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. 11 They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”

—Jesus will return. When He returns, He will return bodily, not just spiritually.

—This scene is reminiscent of Elijah being taken up into heaven, leaving behind Elisha with a double portion of the Spirit. The disciples are left behind by Jesus, but they’ve been given the Spirit’s empowerment to further His mission.

—“was taken up”:

- Notably, “was taken up” is the same verb form used in 2 Kgs. 2:11 of the Greek Old Testament to depict Elijah’s ascension into heaven. Jesus, having defeated the false prophets (Pharisees) like Elijah and completed His task, ascends like Elijah into heaven. The ascension reminds us of the Father’s approval. Jesus is our greater Elijah.
- “taken up” forms a bookend with 1:2 so that 1:1-11 forms a single section, framed by the ascension of Jesus. Thus, the structure helps us absorb the centrality of Christ’s ascension. The ascension points to the completion of Jesus’ earthly ministry, the Father’s approval of His earthly ministry, and the beginning of His heavenly ministry—through His Spirit-empowered church.

—Luke’s first volume says of the ascension: “And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.”

—The ascension of Jesus is significant because it signifies Jesus’ enthronement at the right hand of God (Acts 2:29-36), where He waits—for His work is complete—for His enemies to be made His footstool (2:35). Notably, the work of Jesus is complete, but the work of the church is not. We are to be witnesses. Thus, we are to engage in our mission of being witnesses until Jesus returns and restores all things.

—Apostles’ Creed: “He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.”

—“cloud”: We are reminded of Daniel 7:13-14, where the Son of Man (Jesus) appears before the Ancient of Days (God the Father), to receive a kingdom. At the ascension, Jesus received His kingdom; at His return, He consummates the kingdom. Both the ascension and the return are associated with clouds.

—*two men in white clothing stood beside them. 11 They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”*

- This is very similar to the resurrection scene of Luke 24 (below). In both cases, two celestial figures ask a question—"Why...?"—highlighting their doubt and confusion. In both cases, the question is followed by an answer regarding Jesus' whereabouts. In the first case, Jesus was not dead but risen; in the second case, Jesus was not gone forever, but returning like He came. See the verse below:
 - *Luke 24:4 While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. 5 And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? 6 He is not here, but has risen.*
- There are two angelic witnesses to confirm. Their eyes did not deceive them.
- The angelic witnesses also affirm the second advent. Their mission is thus accompanied by hope that they haven't lost Him forever. He will one day return and restore all things (Acts 3:21).
- Interestingly, before the ascension, angelic appearances were always frightful. After the ascension, they are never again frightful—except to unbelievers. What does this mean? That we have entered a new age. With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, God's presence (and God's messengers) no longer fills us with fear (save the proper fear—the fear of God), but love. Now joy is our primary emotional response. Hebrews 12:18 *For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest 19 and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. 20 For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned."* 21 *Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear."* 22 *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, 23 and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*
- On the surface, it is sensible for the disciples to stare at the sky as Jesus ascends into heaven. Where did the angel expect them to look when this happened? At their feet? Of course not. The question is a rebuke, no doubt, but not primarily at where their eyes gazed. Behind the gaze of their eyes was a deeper fixation of the heart. Their hearts were fixated on the spectacle before them instead of the mission ahead of them. Like the disciples who sought the living among the dead—for they failed to discern that the Christ must die and rise—these disciples failed to believe Jesus' words that there was a mission to complete. It is like the angel is saying, "Stop worrying about where He's going, and you—get going! You have a mission to fulfill!"
- Perhaps there is an analogy in our ever-present speculation about end-times events. When our preoccupation with eschatological flip charts precludes our willingness to go and be witnesses, we are missing something. These disciples want to know times and seasons. They want the kingdom now. The angel responds, "Here's what you need to know about the end times: Jesus is coming back just like He came. In the meantime, get to work!"