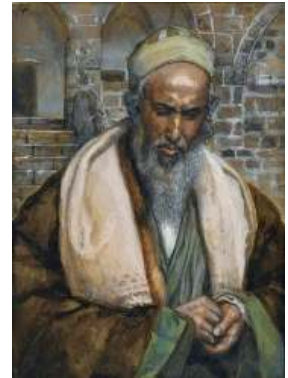


I. Introduction

Good morning! Today we are starting an exciting adventure; we are beginning a study through the Book of Acts. The Book of Acts records authentic history, but there is so much action that it is almost like reading a novel. There are good guys and bad guys, dark plots and wonderful miracles, imprisonments and escapes, and more. Acts even includes the most detailed description of a shipwreck in all of ancient literature. I am confident that we will all be blessed by studying Acts and that we will have a lot of fun as well.

The author of Acts is Luke; the same Luke who wrote the Gospel of Luke, and the two books can be regarded as a single work of two volumes. Luke was a gentile believer, a doctor, and, probably a follower of Jesus from early in Jesus' ministry. The Bible does not record the names of the seventy disciples that Jesus sent out in Luke 10, but lists of the names from church tradition include Luke as one of the seventy. In the late 19th century, James Tissot painted Luke as a thoughtful old man. But, at least at the beginning of Acts, I think we should imagine Luke as young and energetic. Acts records the history of the early church from its beginning up to about 63 AD, spanning a period of about 30 years. Since Acts says nothing of later events, it is very likely that Luke finished writing it at about that time.



Both Acts and the Gospel of Luke are addressed to a man called Theophilus. Scholars are not sure who Theophilus was, but Theophilus means, "friend of God," and although Luke was clearly referring to a particular individual, we can also see ourselves as, "friends of God", and read Acts as if it were written especially for us. Acts ends with Paul being imprisoned in Rome awaiting trial and some scholars believe that both Luke and Acts were written as defense documents for use in Paul's trial. If this is so, then Theophilus may have been Paul's lawyer, or an official of the court in Rome. I think this theory is very interesting and might be correct, but there is no proof, it is really just a guess. Let's read Acts 1:1-5.



II. Scripture Reading

1 In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach 2 until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. 3 After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. 4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

III. Teaching

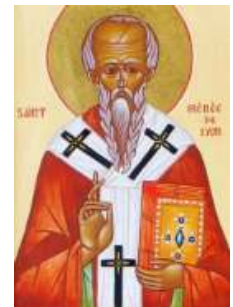
In these verses we can sense a pause between two momentous events. The earthly ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus are past; Pentecost and the baptism of the Holy Spirit are future, only a few days away. Luke strongly emphasizes the fact of the resurrection; Jesus was with the disciples for forty days after He rose and during this time He provided many convincing proofs that He was alive. But, as Luke describes a few verses after this, forty days after His resurrection Jesus ascended into heaven, returning to the Father. After Jesus returns to the Father, there is, in effect, a ten day pause between the ministry of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit with power.



Most people think of Acts as the Acts of the Apostles, the record of what Jesus' apostles did and said during the early days of the church. Some Bible translations, including the Japanese translations, even name the book as, "The Acts of the Apostles." That is okay; Acts certainly records a great deal of what the apostles did and said. However, I think it might be even more accurate to describe the Book of Acts as the, "Acts of the Holy Spirit." In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus was the hero of the story. But in Acts, the hero of the story is not the Apostle Peter or the Apostle Paul; the hero of the story is the Holy Spirit.



It would be perfectly reasonable, in fact, to call the Gospel of Luke, "The Acts of Jesus," and the Book of Acts, "The Acts of the Holy Spirit." This is not what we normally call the books, but such names would point out the continuity of the New Testament in Luke's writings. Such names would also remind us of the Trinity nature of God. One of the early church bishops in what is now France was a man named Irenaeus. Irenaeus lived from 130 AD to 202 AD and wrote extensively about Christian doctrine. In his writings, Irenaeus spoke of Jesus and the Holy Spirit as being like the right hand and left hand of Father God. As a description of the Trinity, this explanation is a bit lacking, but it does portray the essential similarity of Jesus and the Holy Spirit as being equal and similar in essence.



As we begin our study of Acts, I want to encourage us to notice the similarities between the work of God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. It is easy for us to think of Jesus as a person who feels sorrow and joy. But sometimes people have trouble understanding that the Holy Spirit, like Jesus, is also a person. The Holy Spirit also feels sorrow and joy, and makes decisions and takes action. The Bible consistently describes the Holy Spirit as a person, not as an abstract power.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the three persons of the One Trinity God, all have personality; they all act, think, feel, and decide. The God of the Bible is one God in three persons, individual in personality, but perfect in unity and the identical in essence. Some Christians love Jesus but are a little afraid of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps this is because most cultures teach people to be a bit afraid of spirits. But we should not be afraid of the Holy Spirit. Like Jesus, the Holy Spirit is our advocate. If we are friends of Jesus, then the Holy Spirit is also our friend and ally.



Take a look at **1 John 2:1 (NIV 2010)**, "**My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.**" Notice that Jesus is our advocate; that means Jesus is active in helping us and defending us against the accusations of the enemy. Now take a look at **John 14:16 (NIV 2010)**, "**And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—**" In this verse, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit our advocate. As you can see, the new 2010 edition of the NIV, uses the same word, "advocate," in both of these verses. Other translations may use different words, such as Counselor, Helper or Comforter, but in the original Greek the same word, *parakletos*, is used in both verses. We have two Advocates to help us, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Take a look at **Romans 8:34**, "**Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.**" Here we see that Jesus is interceding for us, that is a good description of the work of an advocate. Now, compare this with **Romans 8:26**, "**In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.**" The Holy Spirit is also our Advocate, and like Jesus, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us.



We have two advocates who are continually interceding for us and helping us. That's good, because we need a lot of help. Jesus died for us on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins so that we can receive the free gift of

salvation and eternal life through faith in Him. But even after we are saved through believing in Jesus, we still need a lot of help because we are continually wandering away from the path of righteousness like lost sheep. We fall into sin and we need Jesus and the Holy Spirit to intercede for us continually.

We looked at John 14:16 a minute ago; let's look again, and this time we will read verse 17 as well. This time I will read the 1984 NIV that we usually use. **John 14:16-17, "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever-- the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you."** In this translation, the Greek word, *parakletos*, is translated Counselor instead of Advocate, so we see there is a range of meaning and various translations are possible, but all of them describe someone who comes alongside to help when we are in need. Jesus promised that after He left the disciples and returned to heaven that He would ask the Father to send another *parakletos*, one who would be with the disciples forever, the Holy Spirit.

The disciples already knew the Spirit, because He has been with them all along. But now Jesus is saying that the Holy Spirit will come and live in the believer's heart. And since the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus, through the Spirit, Jesus is always in the believer's heart as well. Let's move forward a few chapters in the gospel of John to the place where Jesus appears to the disciples after His crucifixion and resurrection. **John 20:19-22. "19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. 21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."**

In this passage, Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to the disciples. But there is still more to come, because in today's passage, in **Acts 1:4-5**, we read, **"On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.""** The disciples already had the Holy Spirit, but they had not yet been baptized in the Spirit. That is coming up in Acts 2, a very exciting chapter.

What does this mean? Well, the word baptized refers to being immersed, or even to soaking in something until it completely permeates and fills the whole. When we baptize in water, we dip the new Christian briefly into the water, but that is symbolic of a lasting change, the new birth and an ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ.

I brought along some water and a sponge as an example. Here is an old dried out sponge. What will happen if I dip it in the water? (I dip the sponge.) Well, now it has a little water in it, but it is still mostly hard and dry. Now, what happens if I put it in the water and let it soak for a few minutes? Let's put it in to soak and go on, we will get back to it in a few minutes.



In Acts 2, we will see how God pours out His Spirit dramatically on the disciples and we will talk about these things some more. As a matter of fact, as we go through the Book of Acts, we will have many opportunities to talk about the baptism, or filling of the Holy Spirit. As I mentioned earlier, we could call Acts the, "Acts of the Holy Spirit," because the Holy Spirit is the hero of the Book of Acts.

In the incarnation, Jesus set aside His glory as God and became a true human being, so He could be with the people of His creation and so that He could die on the cross to provide for our salvation. While Jesus was with the disciples, they were blessed by His constant presence and He was able to teach them and lead them in a way that was easy for them to understand since He was in human form. But, as a man, Jesus could not be in the disciples' hearts as a constant and permanent presence. That constant and permanent presence of God in the disciples' hearts is the work of the Holy Spirit.

In the Book of Acts, we will see how the disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit for ministry and how they go out and turn the world upside down with their preaching and ministry. They will begin in

Jerusalem, with Peter preaching to the Jews and to all of those who had travelled to Jerusalem for the Jewish feast. And, as we go further into Acts, we will see the change as the disciples, and especially Paul, preach the Good News of Jesus throughout the Roman Empire and beyond.



IV. Conclusion

And, again and again, we will see that the disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit for the work of the ministry. Whenever God is going to use someone for His work in a very powerful and special way; God gives them the baptism or filling of the Holy Spirit to make them ready.

How is our sponge doing? Maybe it has soaked long enough to see some change. (Lifting the sponge out of the water.) Yes, now it is soft and full of water; it is dripping everywhere, overflowing onto everything around it. That is what it is like when the believer is baptized with the Holy Spirit. Our hearts become soft and our hearts overflow with the Spirit of God, with His love and power.

When we studied the Gospel of Luke, our focus was mostly on Jesus, because the gospels are the story of Jesus, our Lord and Savior. But as we continue in the Book of Acts, we will see that to a large extent, Acts is the story of how the Holy Spirit worked through the disciples to establish the church. So, we will be talking a lot about the Holy Spirit. Of course, we will learn a lot about Jesus in Acts as well, because the Holy Spirit constantly points us to Jesus.

We will talk more about these things in the weeks to come. But for today, I want you to remember that you have two Advocates interceding for you, our Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit. And, if you have trusted in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, then the Holy Spirit is already in your heart, and through the presence of the Spirit, Jesus is in your heart as well.

However, if we want to be powerful witnesses for Jesus so that others will be drawn to Jesus when they see us, then a little bit of the Spirit is not enough. We need more. We need the baptism of the Spirit; we need to be so soaked in the Spirit that we are overflowing with the love of Jesus. May I encourage you to begin praying daily of the filling of the Holy Spirit? Whether for the first time, or again many times, we all need to be filled with God's Spirit. And if we ask, then we will receive.

Let's close for today with **Luke 11:9-13**. **"9 'So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. 11 'Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!'"**

V. Prayer