

Wait!

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[0:00] Amen. So turn with me then to this first chapter of Acts. The second one finishes rather abruptly.

We sometimes wonder whether he intended to write volume three, but in the providence of God and the Holy Spirit, that never happened. We've only got Luke's two volumes. And these first, well, he tells us that in verse one.

And these first 11 verses, which is actually what I'm going to focus on, actually provide a kind of agenda for the rest of the book. And as we look at that, we'll see he tells the apostles four important things about the kingdom.

And then he tells them to wait. What does he tell them to wait for? Well, the Holy Spirit. And it's actually the third of those topics that I want to focus on today and indeed throughout this series. But we need to look at the others first just to get the context right and to see what is going on. So let's say a bit, first of all, about Luke's writings.

[1:35] John's gospel, for instance, is absolutely full of commentary. His own comments on whatever happened and interpreting them for us. You get almost none of that in the writings of Luke.

Luke. John refers to himself, as you may know, in the third person, as the disciple Jesus loved, at least in the gospel.

In Revelation, he does say, I. But Luke is always very direct. And he does say, we, on a few occasions, in the later chapters of Acts, when he was personally involved in the action.

But he just uses we. He doesn't use any fancy title for himself or anything like that. And that's always part of a group. As far as I can see, he only uses I, the first person singular, twice in all his writings.

Which I can't find anywhere else. And that's in Luke 1, chapter 3, and here in Acts 1, chapter 1, where he, you don't really need to look up the Luke one, because he says pretty much the same thing.

[2:42] He says, I've investigated all this carefully, and Theophilus, and I'm going to explain it, and tell it all, no, not explain it, just tell it all to you.

Tell you the facts, so that you can see clearly, understand clearly what's happened. That's what Luke sees his own contribution as, basically, as a careful and investigator, and observer, and historian.

He says, I'll tell you, Theophilus, exactly what happened, what people said, and what they did. And that's exactly what he does in his writings. So he writes history.

Accurate history, and most even secular historians think that, you know, the historical references in Acts are correct, and indeed in Luke's gospel, except there is some dispute over the date of Jesus' birth, and the, but other than that, secular historians have looked at the secular records of the time, say that, yes, Luke writes remarkably accurately, as a historian.

But history can be just dry history, can't it? It can be very dry. And so, often our historians write drama, historical dramas, like the White Queen or Wolf Hall.

[4:07] I always rather like things like that. But you do need to remember, of course, when you see one of those, read the book, or see the TV program, that they're there to get us into the heads of the historical characters, but they're largely, of course, works of fiction.

They're only the historian's imagination of what might have happened, what people might have thought. And, of course, they could be wrong, whether there are a list of facts that we know

happened, but we actually read in histories of the time very little of what people actually said and what they thought about.

But Luke pulls off a remarkable trick. In reporting hard history, he makes his characters really come alive. So, most of you are probably familiar with Luke's description of Jesus' birth, and as we read that, we actually feel what Mary and Joseph and Elizabeth are feeling.

We actually get some insight into their characters. Even the minor characters, like Simeon and Anna, which you only really get just a couple of lines each, and yet you feel that just in those couple of lines, you know something about them.

That, you know, you know why they were there and what they were thinking at the time. And, of course, as we read through Acts, we're going to get to know Peter and John and Stephen and Philip and Barnabas and Paul and the other characters that we come across.

[5:37] Who are the books addressed to? Is another question that scholars have puzzled over. They're addressed, probably, to Theophilus, and Theophilus, of course, is a Greek name which means lover of God.

So, who is Theophilus? Well, it could be the name of an actual person, although the name appears nowhere else in the New Testament. You think if it was an actual person, we would meet him elsewhere in the records somewhere and we don't.

It could, perhaps, be a pseudonym for someone who was going to be politically embarrassed if his real name was used. That's a possibility. Or it could just be a trick that Luke uses to address everyone personally.

So, if you're a lover of God, if you want to know about God, then I'm addressing you. Now, whether that's what Luke actually meant by Theophilus, we can't be certain, but it can at least have that meaning for us because Luke certainly is writing to anyone who wants to know the facts.

And so, we can be Theophilus in that sense at least. But besides the apostles and the deacons and the elders and all these other characters that we learn so much about, there is another character in this drama that Luke really wants us to get to know.

[7:14] And the reason I read through to, or Julia read through to verse 17, is that in these verse, verse 17 verses, we actually meet him four times.

So, once every four and a bit verses. And in fact, he appears a lot in Luke's gospel as well. And that person is the Holy Spirit.

Now, clearly the Holy Spirit is a person, an impersonal force, can't speak. That's, in verse 16, he says that the Spirit spoke through his servant David.

So, I'm not going to go into that in more detail. I'm going to take that almost as read. But the, the Holy Spirit is presented in the scriptures as a real person, an actual person, not like the force in Star Wars.

You never, the force in Star Wars doesn't speak. But the Holy Spirit is a person. And from the scriptures we find out very early on that he is also divine.

[8:24] He is also God. Because, right back in Genesis, chapter 1, verses 2 to 4, we read the following. Genesis chapter 1, the earth was formless formless and empty and darkness was over the surface of the deep and the Spirit of God was hovering or brooding like a bird over the waters.

And God said, let there be light and there was light. God saw that the light was good and he separated the light from the darkness. darkness.

You cannot separate the Holy Spirit from here, from God here. He is the Spirit of God. And, it's through him that God brings forth light and order.

And through the Spirit hovering, what we see is that he separates the light from the darkness. And we might go a bit further and say he separates knowledge from ignorance, from order, brings order out of chaos.

So that's the Holy Spirit divine, Holy Spirit of God. I'm not going to go anymore into those arguments that the Holy Spirit is a person and the Holy Spirit is part of, is God.

[9:46] There is one God but three in one. So we sung in that first hymn. If anybody wants to know more about that we can take it up afterwards.

I'm tempted to say go and ask Phil not me but I'm sure we can do it actually and many of us here will be prepared to go into that in more detail.

But I'm assuming that most of us gathered here actually do believe that and what I want to look more about is more about what the Holy Spirit does and how the Holy Spirit works.

And that's what Luke wants to tell us in Acts I think. And what it means when we come across terms like being filled with the Spirit or baptized in the Spirit what sort of thing he actually means by those. And we can see that by looking at how he uses these terms and what he talks about as we go through Acts. how do we experience the Holy Spirit in our lives.

And he starts his lesson in these first twelve verses which actually set the agenda for the book. And Jesus starts by telling us four things about the kingdom and then he tells the apostles to wait.

[11:03] So what are the four things we can see about the kingdom of heaven the kingdom of God that he tells us. First of all he tells us in verse seven that we shouldn't expect a timetable.

That has to be the case doesn't it? I don't know whether you've noticed this but whenever you go and watch Romeo and Juliet it always ends the same way with the two lovers dead.

Strange that isn't it? Well of course it's not strange because these are not real people. They're just acting out characters that Shakespeare wrote about.

They're just following their lines and we're not just actors in a play. We're not just robots acting out a program that's been put into us.

We don't have a timetable because our actions matter. What we do has significance and in that sense things are uncertain but at the same time Jesus doesn't want us to get the wrong idea about that because he reminds us that nonetheless these things are set by his own authority.

[12:21] He says that in verse, by the father's authority. He says that in verse 7 and we are told the ascension in verse 11 that the king will return.

It doesn't say the king will return maybe if the conditions are right and if you get it all right. No, we are told that the king will return but we're not given a timetable for that.

There's no openness of God theology here, no sort of idea that God somehow plays chess with the word world. We are told unequivocally that the father has these times and seasons in his own authority and that the king, will return.

But still, we're not given a timetable. What else are we told? Well, we're told that it's a worldwide kingdom. This vision is much bigger than anything that David or Solomon imagined.

Solomon's kingdom actually physically wasn't really that big, 100 miles or so. but this kingdom has a much wider vision than that.

[13:37] And in verse 8, we see that it starts, yes, it starts in Jerusalem. Well, where else could it start but the city of David? This is the king who sits on David's throne.

And so the kingdom starts here in Jerusalem. kingdom. But it will encompass Judea and Samaria, which is pretty much the territory of the ancient kingdom.

So that was as far probably as the apostles had envisaged it going. But don't stop there. Don't think you have to stop there. This kingdom is worldwide.

And it's a kingdom with a worldwide vision to the uttermost parts of the earth. to mythical, semi-mythical places like India and China that they'd probably heard of but didn't know much about. To barbarian Britannia right up there in the north. Even to places that they'd never heard of. But they are sent to the ends of the world.

[14:42] And that's perhaps the most remarkable thing at all that Jesus says. He says, well actually it's not me that's going to restore the kingdom in that sense, at least not in person.

You're going to do it. You hundred and twenty disciples. And he must be including in that those who will preach the message after you because there's no way that those hundred and twenty disciples could have got to the ends of the earth.

So he must be saying it's you, my people, my body on earth, that are going to take over the world if you want to use that phrase.

It's not me in person, it's you are going to do it. Well gosh, that's a bit of a challenge then. Perhaps we better get on with it.

But Jesus says, no, wait, it's not all in place yet. there's still something missing. If you're planning world domination, it's probably a good idea to be prepared.

[15:52] Let's face it, you're going to need some kind of super weapon, aren't you? If you were just going to throw the Romans out of the ancient kingdom, then probably a medium-sized army would do the job.

But not even all the legions of Rome were sufficient to conquer the whole planet. Various people have tried at one time or another to conquer the whole world.

No one's even come close. You're going to need some sort of super weapon. How would the disciples be empowered to undertake this task?

Well, fortunately, it doesn't leave us to guess. Jesus tells us. He says you're going to do this by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And there are two Greek words, I believe, that some have translated power. One of them means authority, but it's not this word. This word is *dunamis*, which is the word, Greek word, from which we get our things, words like *dynamic* and *dynamite*.

[17:06] power. And it means the strength, the ability. It can mean military strength, but it's that sort of strength, energizing strength, power to get something done.

And Jesus also points out that actually he'd already told them this. He says that in verse 4. So they've already spoken about this. Well, he had indeed. so it's worth looking back then to see where this idea has actually come from.

And I'm going to look actually a bit further back than just the promise. I want to look back into the Old Testament and see where, just briefly, to see where these ideas came from and how they are developed in Jesus' teaching.

Again, just very briefly, just to give you some idea. Any kingdom needs its constitution, doesn't it? Its covenant, its Magna Carta, its founding principle. And right back, even before the Jews went into exile, Jeremiah had described a new kind of kingdom.

[18:22] The ancient kingdom was its founding principle, was the law of Moses. but Jeremiah describes a new kind of kingdom which is going to be based on a new kind of covenant, a new document, a new founding principle.

And he says this, it says Jeremiah 31, 31, a nice easy reference to remember. The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them, declares the Lord.

This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, know the Lord, because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord.

[19:35] For I will forgive their wickedness and I will remember their sins no more. Now you might say, well hang on a minute, what are you doing standing up here teaching them, because it says no one will teach his neighbor, but I don't think that's what Jeremiah meant there.

and I don't think by knowing he means knowing about. For instance, I know quite a lot, I guess, about the Duchess of Cambridge, we all do, because it's all over our newspapers.

We know pretty much what she looks like, how she dresses, we know that she's got two children, but I certainly don't know her. We have no personal relationship, and as far as I know, nobody else here knows so either.

We don't have any sort of personal relationship, but it's that sort of knowing that Jeremiah is talking about here. He's saying, you will have, no, in that personal sense, you will have a direct relationship with God, and although Jeremiah doesn't explicitly mention the Holy Spirit here, surely that must be what he had in mind, that relationship is through the Holy Spirit.

And if you're going to have a new kind of kingdom, then you're going to need a new kind of king. I mean, David's job basically was to administer the law of Moses.

[21:05] That was the founding principle of the kingdom, and David was subject to that law, as was everybody in the kingdom, and it's when

Solomon and the later king started to disobey that law that it all went wrong.

So we're fighting out this morning, of course. So if you're going to have a new kind of kingdom, you're going to need a new kind of king. And Isaiah tells us that, and he tells us that in chapter 11, verses 1 to 5.

Isaiah talks about the stump of Jesse. Jesse, of course, was David's father. Isaiah 11, 1 to 5 says the following, a shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse, from his roots a branch will bear fruit. So what he's saying is that even though the kingdom seem to have been cut off, as we were thinking about to some extent this morning, the stump will still be there, and a new branch will spring up and bear fruit.

And if it's a stump of Jesse, it must mean a new king, a new king in the line of David. And what does he say about this king? Verse 2, the spirit of the Lord will rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the spirit of counsel and of power, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.

[22:39] He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes or decide by what he hears with his ears, but with righteousness he will judge the needy. With justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.

He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth. With the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

Well, who was he talking about then? Who is this new king, this branch of Jesse? Well, John the Baptist tells us that. We have it recorded in John 1, John's Gospel 1, chapter 1 verses 32 to 34. And it's interesting, well, you know the answer, of course, you know that the answer is Jesus, but even though Jesus was the Son of God, his ministry actually couldn't start until the Spirit came. and so John the Baptist tells us, John, this is John the Apostle writing, but he's talking about John the Baptist. Then John gave this testimony, I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.

[23:57] Notice it says remain on him. I would not have known him except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, a man on who you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God. How was it that John the Baptist knew that this was the king in the line of David that Isaiah had prophesied?

Well, because he saw the Spirit come down and remain on him. I'm sure he knew much more about Jesus than that.

In fact, we know he did from what he said. But to him, to John the Baptist, that was the thing that set the seal. I know now that this is the promised king, the king in the line of David as Isaiah had prophesied because the Holy Spirit came down and remained on him.

And then we could look at the promise that Jesus himself made and which he refers to. Remember in Acts 1 verse 4, he says, I told you about this before.

[25:14] And we find that again in John's Gospel in chapter 16 now. Now John 16 starting at verse 7.

I tell you the truth, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the counsellor will not come to you.

But if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.

In regard to sin, because men do not believe in me. In regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father where you can see me no longer.

And in regard to judgment, because of the prince of this world, now stands condemned. So when the Holy Spirit comes, he's going to convince the world of sin and righteousness, the righteousness found in Jesus Christ, and judgment because they would not listen.

[26:37] We see again, of course, that this is a counsellor, a person, not an impersonal force. But what Jesus didn't tell us at that time was how this was going to work.

how is the Holy Spirit going to convict the world? Is he going to write some great words in the sky perhaps?

Writing on the wall like in Babylon. How is he going to do it? Well, at that time, Jesus only hints. He says, well, he's going to come as a counsellor.

God, but now, in Acts 1 verse 4, he expands that a bit and says, well, this is actually, this is how it's going to work. The Spirit is going to come to you, not to the world directly, but to you disciples, you apostles and you disciples, you 120 huddling there in that room in Jerusalem.

and the Spirit will enable them to testify about all those things they've seen. So, the Spirit goes about his work of convicting the world of sin and righteousness and judgment through the testimony of the people of God.

[27:58] That's what Jesus is saying there, isn't it? Their super weapon that they're going to use to take over the world is a Spirit-filled witness.

A Spirit-fueled witness. So, without the Spirit, they're powerless. And that's why they can't go yet, because that's what they're still missing.

That's why they have to wait. The Spirit has not yet come upon them. Nothing in the New Covenant in the Church, in the Christian life, really makes any sense without the Holy Spirit.

Because the Holy Spirit comes as the counsellor. And that's what is different about when we gather here. I mean, many of the things we do and say, or the way we do things as we gather here, could be any sort of club or organisation in a sense.

We could, you know, we use a PA system like any speaker or lecturer might do. We sit on reasonably comfortable chairs in rows, as you might do if you were listening to some talk or presentation.

[29:15] You know, we use the same presentation technology as you'd find if you went to a lecture at the university. And yet, when we gather here, we are doing something fundamentally different from that.

because we are gathered here by and in the Spirit. And if we don't, if we're not conscious of that, if we don't understand that, then we can't really have any understanding of anything else.

We can't have any understanding of mission. Because Jesus says, the Holy Spirit is your power, is your dynamite, your dynamite, your dynamic of mission.

and we can't have any understanding of the church community. Because the community is those who have that personal relationship with God that Jeremiah talked about.

And that comes through the Holy Spirit. And that's why the apostles have to wait. Because without the Holy Spirit, the gospel couldn't be preached. They were never going to get out of their huddle in Jerusalem, let alone go to the ends of the world.

[30:29] But when the Spirit's at work, the gospel is proclaimed with power. And in the rest of Acts, Luke's going to go on to show how that works out.

But let's just remind ourselves of the key fact here. Whatever else he may do, the Spirit's first priorities are to witness in word and life to the righteous covenant, we find under King Jesus, and to convince the world of its disobedience and coming judgment.

And those have to be the central priorities of our church, of any church, of any church that wants to be a biblical gospel church. Mission and demonstrating the kingdom of God, in miniature as it were. any church, any preacher that doesn't have those priorities at the center is way off message. You start preaching some prosperity gospel or even some gospel of experience, it's not that gospel. It's not, as John reminds us in his letter, not every spirit is the Holy Spirit. if we don't have those priorities, which are the priorities of the Holy Spirit himself, then we're way off message.

[31:53] So we'll go on, as I say, now it's time to go because the Holy Spirit has now come to the church and we'll read next week as we look in Acts 2, how that started and what happened when the Holy Spirit came to the church.