



Truth Matters

A Publication Discussing Matters Related To Truth Because Truth Matters

Scripture Reading

Week of
June 5th - June 11th



Monday

- ❖ 1 Kings 15, 16
- ❖ Psalm 111
- ❖ Acts 22

Tuesday

- ❖ 1 Kings 17, 18
- ❖ Psalm 112
- ❖ Acts 23

Wednesday

- ❖ 1 Kings 19, 20
- ❖ Psalm 113
- ❖ Act 24

Thursday

- ❖ 1 Kings 21, 22
- ❖ Psalm 114
- ❖ Acts 25

Friday

- ❖ 2 Kings 1, 2
- ❖ Psalm 115
- ❖ Acts 26

Saturday

- ❖ 2 Kings 3, 4

Sunday

- ❖ 2 Kings 5, 6

Acts: Taking the Gospel to the Ends of the Earth

Forty days after the Lord's resurrection, the disciples find themselves with the Lord on the Mount of Olives. I cannot begin to fathom the emotions as they all stood dumbfounded, with jaws dropped and eyes glued watching Jesus ascend upward into the clouds. Can you imagine that? I remember as a teenager having the privilege of visiting Cape Canaveral Space Center in Florida on the day in which a rocket was being launched by NASA. As I remember my emotions and fascination as a teen, so I picture Peter, James and John striking a similar pose.

But the burning question on everyone's mind had to do with whether or not the desire of the ages was going to be fulfilled. Every Jew alive knew the promises to their fathers that one day a Messiah would come to restore the kingdom to Israel. Thus, the disciples ask the question in Acts 1:6, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" At the first reading, it may seem that Jesus gives a kind of non-answer, "It is not for you to know times and seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive authority 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 makes for an interesting point of fact is that Luke, believing that the promise was fulfilled in the early church, writes to tell about it in the book of Acts in such a way that he uses v. 8 as his outline.

The narrative begins as the newly abandoned disciples hover, as it were, in an upper room in Jerusalem (1:12-14) until the day of Pentecost "came in its fullness" (2:1). The result of the Holy Spirit's arrival was a breath-taking beginning to the church. You know the story well. Peter preached a remarkable sermon and some 3,000 souls were added to the church in Jerusalem (2:14-41). Signs and wonders were performed throughout the city (3:1-10). Peter addressed with great boldness, mobs, councils, and the Sanhedrin as he unfolded the plan of God in bringing salvation to the Jews (3:14-4:12). The news of a resurrected Jesus was troublesome to the Jewish leaders, which landed Peter in jail (4:3). But nonetheless, the church was flourishing spiritually (4:23-30) and they enjoyed great strength of unity as they had all things in common and were vibrant (4:32-37). The summary statement comes

from Luke's pen in 6:7:

Acts 6:7 (ESV)

⁷ And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

The church flourished in Jerusalem. But all of a sudden, the drama takes an ugly turn as Luke describes the story of a powerful preacher named Stephen (6:8). It was testified against Stephen that he was preaching an anti-Semitic message that Jesus would destroy the temple and "change the customs that Moses delivered to us" (6:14). When asked if these charges were true, Stephen waxes eloquent and strong. His conclusion is forthright and suicidal: "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you" (6:51). You can imagine. His words filled the Jewish leaders with rage and they rose up and killed Stephen. An all-out persecution had erupted against the church.

This brings Luke to see the hand of God in moving His plan forward. Look at what

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Luke records in chapter 8.

Acts 8:1-4 (ESV)

¹And Saul approved of [Stephen's] execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles...⁴Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

As a result of the persecution, they scattered. But where did they go and what did they do? They went to the regions of Judea and Samaria preaching the word. Do you see what this implies about the plan of God? God's plan was to use persecution in order to move the gospel forward from Jerusalem and into the regions of Judea and Samaria. Such was the plan as Jesus described it in 1:8, right?

Well, you can imagine that the gospel flourished in these regions too. Philip preached in Samaria (8:4) winning converts like Simon, the sorcerer (8:9-13). The Apostles heard of this amazing spread of the gospel and sent Peter and John to check it out. Sure enough, it was official: God was reaching Samaritans (8:14-25). But even in the regions of Judea, in Gaza, the gospel was working in men like the "Ethiopian Eunuch" (8:26-40). Listen how Luke records the progress of this part of the narrative:

Acts 9:31 (ESV)

³¹ So the church throughout **all Judea and Galilee and Samaria** had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

The church flourished **in Judea and Samaria**. Luke uses a very similar formula here to describe this part of the ministry as he had used earlier when describing the Jerusalem ministry (cf. 6:7). And you guessed it; the story takes a new twist as Luke describes the events surrounding another key figure, a man named, Cornelius (cf. ch.10).

When the news of the conversion of uncircumcised Gentiles reached the church in Judea, they were astonished beyond belief. In fact, word had to be sent by Peter himself as he had done earlier with the Samaritans. It was official, Gentiles were being converted to Christ as were Samaritans and Jews (cf. 11:18, esp. v.18).

Of course, in my brief overview of the book of Acts, I have covered every chapter but chapter 9, the conversion of Saul. Saul was miraculously captured by Christ on the road to Damascus and was reluctantly received into the church, thanks, in part, to men like Ananias (cf. 9:17f.) and Baranabas (cf. 9:26f).

Some time passed, obviously, when we read of Paul and Barnabas being commissioned by the church on a mission journey (13:2-3). They preached the gospel in Salamis on the island of Cyprus (13:4-12) with good success and though not without some competition. But we want to focus our attention on something Paul said at the next stop, Antioch in Pisidia (13:14). The people of Antioch loved what they heard coming from Paul and begged him to speak again the following Sabbath (13:42). So Paul and Barnabas agreed to stay on and found that the next Sabbath brought nearly the entire city out to hear them (13:44). You can imagine that this evoked the jealousy of the Jews. As they tried to contradict Paul, he spoke very powerful words:

Acts 13:46-47 (ESV)

⁴⁶ And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, **we are turning to the Gentiles**. ⁴⁷ For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, " 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation **to the ends of the earth**.' "

Here is what he said: "It was necessary for the gospel to be preached to the Jews first and to eventually make its way to the

Gentiles. Only notice the way the verse quoted from Isaiah 49:6 ends: "to the ends of the earth". This is the exact way Jesus' words in Acts 1:8 ended. And Luke saw it as the third step of that "Acts 1:8 Plan." Notice Luke's words in the very next verse:

Acts 13:48-49 (ESV)

⁴⁸ And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. ⁴⁹ And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region.

The church was flourishing now even among the Gentiles - the ends of the earth. Christ had a mission and a plan that was fulfilled. His plan was to gather a people for himself from every language, tribe and tongue throughout the entire earth. He is still gathering in from the nations and will continue to do so until they are gathered in.

But, do you remember the question the disciples asked of Jesus in 1:6? "Will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" His answer was, "Yes, but not in the way you think."

You can imagine that having uncircumcised Gentiles trusting in Christ, the Jewish Messiah, created no small stir among the Christian Jews. We know it did because in chapter 15 the first historical church council had to be convened to answer the question, should we make Gentile converts into Jewish proselytes? In settling this issue, both Peter and James hit home-runs in their speeches before the council of elders.

Peter, going first makes the fundamental observation:

Acts 15:7-10 (ESV)

⁷ And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of

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the gospel and believe. ⁸And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, ⁹and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. ¹⁰Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a **yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?**

The unbearable yoke laid around the Jew's neck was not just circumcision but the entire Mosaic Law. Peter saw that the time had come to lay aside the Law. But more to my point is James' speech.

Acts 15:13-17 (ESV)

¹³ After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴ Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. ¹⁵ And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, ¹⁶ " 'After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and **I will restore it,** ¹⁷ that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things

The words of the prophets agree with Peter's description. Amos promised a rebuilding, a restoring of the kingdom to Israel and with the inclusion of the Gentiles, God is doing just that. He is building a people for himself and he is doing the building apart from the Jewish nation and the Mosaic system. He is doing the building by the cross and grace of Jesus Christ.

I find Jesus' answer to the disciples in Acts 1:6 being answered by James in Acts 15. He restored the kingdom by giving the disciples authority to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. Christ is gathering in his people from the ends of the earth. Amazing plan!

Corporate Arsenal Passages

God is Faithful to All His Promises

Promise 11: Promise to fight for you

Hebrews 13:6

So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"



Psalms 46:1

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Isaiah 64:4

From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him.