

## **PROMISES! PROMISES!** **Acts 1:1-11**

### **(Read Acts 1:1-11)**

**Intro:** Luke, yes, the same Luke who wrote the Gospel of Luke, also wrote those words and, of course, the rest of Acts. We know that Luke was a physician and he was one of Paul's right-hand men as he went about his ministry from beginning to end. We also see right away, that he wasn't just a medical doctor, he was also a scholar and also a very good writer.

As I said, Luke was also the author of the Gospel of Luke and in both cases (Luke and Acts) he begins by addressing Theophilus. While this name means "Lover of God", and he may be writing to anyone who fits that description, it's more likely the one Luke is writing to was an actual person with a really great name.

A little aside here: I've been referring to Luke and Acts as books in a way that implies they are two separate books, but, in actuality, Acts is a continuation of Luke, making Luke and Acts two volumes of the same book. It would have been written on two scrolls made of papyrus or parchment. A normal size scroll, by that I mean, one that was manageable for a person to carry, was 32 foot long. So, the scroll, either Luke or Acts, if you rolled it out, would reach from where I'm standing here back to those of you who are sitting in the fifth row of chairs from the front (have someone there stand up to show that). Luke has 24 chapters, and Acts has 28 chapters but obviously they are about the same length. What determined the length would have been the number of words that filled roughly 32 feet of parchment since there were no chapters and verses when Luke wrote his Gospel and his book of Acts.

F. B. Meyer, in his picturesque language, gives us a good illustration of how the Gospel of Luke flows into the Acts of the Apostles with this: *"The Gospel tells of what Jesus did through a mortal body, and this book what he did through the Church, which is his body."*

As I said earlier, Luke was a physician, a scholar, and a good writer, and he was also a good historian with amazing attention to detail. One commentator pointed out that he is the only writer of a Gospel who mentions an emperor's name. He does that in the Christmas story in Luke 2:1 where it says that *In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus...* Luke 2:1a. It's still fresh in our minds since Christmas is just a little less than a month ago, but let me just remind us that this was the decree that required that Mary and Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem to register for the census. Then, throughout the Gospel, Luke mentions places and names. It's the same in Acts where he names places and names and islands and cities, and taverns. He brought it alive for the people who were reading it. It could be that they knew about these things and maybe they could even picture places or people in their mind. I remember the first book that I read by the author Tony Hillerman. The first paragraph of that book made me fall in love with Hillerman's writing from the get-go. If you are not familiar with him, he wrote about Navajos, their culture, and their land. They are mystery novels whose main characters were Navajo Tribal Policemen, Lieutenant Joe Leaphorn and Officer Jim Chee. That first book, I think it was *A THIEF OF TIME*, opened with Officer Chee and his partner sitting on a stakeout. The location of the stakeout is in the 7 to 11 parking lot just east of Shiprock, New Mexico, and they are watching the Navajo Nation Motor Pool parking lot across Highway 64 for fuel thieves. That was the first paragraph, and I was hooked immediately. Do you know why? I had been in that 7 to 11, I had bought pop there! Not only that, I could picture the Navajo Nation Motor Pool which located catty-corner across the street from the 7 to 11. It was right there in my memory and it made it real and I was transported back across the years from Lititz, PA to my beloved Navajoland. That's what a good author and historian does – they make it real.

So, as Luke wrote these words, his readers could picture in their minds the places and the names. He made the history and the activity of the early church come alive even as they spread the message of a Risen Savior, who was alive and sitting at the right hand of the Heavenly Father.

This is what we are going to study for the foreseeable future. Next week we will skip to the beginning of Acts. 2, to the account of the Day of Pentecost. The verses from verse 12 to the end of Acts 1 cover about 10 days between the ascension of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit. I felt that you could read these and study it on your own. After that, week to week, we will take a section at a time through all 28 chapters, although, in the same way I'm skipping the rest of chapter 1, it's likely I will do that from time to time as this study continues. Next week, as I said, we will cover the day of Pentecost, and then at the beginning of February, we will look at Peter's sermon and the mass conversion that happened. In the two weeks following that we will look at the

early church up to the end of chapter 2 and a little bit into chapter 3. We will then take some time off for Lent and Easter, and we will then resume with Acts on the second Sunday of April. That's as far as I know at this point. But I'm looking forward to this study. Oh, it would be good for you to read through Acts several times during this study. Certainly, you can read ahead chapter by chapter.

Now, let's look at these first 11 verses. Right away we see . . .

### **This message is for the chosen**

- In verse 2 is tells us, . . . *he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.* Acts 1:2b. So, who are the chosen? Well, certainly the ones who are there when he's speaking to him but he's speaking to you now. When you serve him day in and day out and dedicate your Sunday morning to being here and worshiping together, you are celebrating that you are chosen. You are chosen because of that truth that we looked at last week from Romans 10: that you have confessed with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believed in your heart that God raised him from the dead. (Romans 10:9) That means you are saved, and that means that you are chosen and Jesus's instructions are for you too.
- Think about it: the disciples must have wondered . . .

### **Is this really happening?!**

- Jesus had told the disciples that they were blessed for believing that he been raised from the dead and then he promised that the blessing is also there for those who have not seen him, and have still believed. (John 20:29) When he says that, he's referring to us.
- Now, just imagine what it was like for these disciples. They probably thought that they needed to pinch themselves, to see if this was really happening, even with all the times they had seen Jesus over the previous 40 days, it had to be amazing. But they believed.
- And Jesus told them . . .

### **They needed to wait**

- It appears that this was a final meeting, if not the final meeting that Jesus had with his disciples, and he tells them in verse 4 to wait for the promise of the Father – which had come through Jesus himself. Over the 40 days since the resurrection, he had reviewed everything they had heard over their 3 years with him. And now he tells them, essentially, I have told you these things, I haven't let you down yet, now wait for the next thing that God has. Wait for the Holy Spirit. Don't go back to Galilee which would have been tempting because it was their home area and they probably considered it safer. But they were to stay in Jerusalem, **and wait**.
- Isn't it hard to wait? Sheila sometimes brings her golden retriever, Milli, to our house. Now, Milli is not permitted to come into our house. Besides the fact that she's a hairy dog who leaves a wake of hair in the air, she is also a cyclone of activity. She particularly likes me, and she wants to love me up and down and all over. So, Sheila tells her "Stay! Wait for me!" and Milli sits there at the bottom of the garage steps, **and waits**. Sheila can even close the door for a number of minutes and when she opens the door Milli is still sitting there looking at the door with expectation, hoping, just hoping that maybe this one time she might be able to go into the house. Now I'm not comparing us to a golden retriever, but sometimes we are like a rambunctious 2-year-old dog who just wants to go. When God says that we're supposed to wait, we need to wait. Wait for the promise.
- Then, in this account . . .

### **We have here a clarification of what the kingdom is**

- Even after everything the disciples have seen, like the fact that Jesus didn't lift a physical finger to stop his trial and execution when he could have done it so easily. After all scripture says that he could call legions of angels for his protection – but he didn't. They had have noticed that, right? But they still ask the question that is always simmering in the mind of these people who were the descendants of the Kingdom of Israel. So they ask him: *Lord, will you now at this time restore the Kingdom of Israel?* Acts 1:6 After all this time, they still thought that the Kingdom of God, which is what Jesus has spent his entire ministry preaching about, was a political Kingdom of Israel. They were not thinking of the kingdom of God. But Jesus sets them straight, it's not a political Kingdom. It's still true Christians must be Christ Followers first, any

allegiance to a nation is down their priority list. They are Christ Followers first, proclaiming the Kingdom of God to the entire world because the Gospel is not contained by national borders.

- So it's this way . . .

### **Not so fast!**

- Once Jesus sets them straight on what the true mission is he tells them, not so fast! It's not for you to know times or seasons that the father has fixed by his own authority. The implication is that Jesus didn't even know. And certainly his followers are not to be confused by a timetable.
- Here was the plan: For right now they are to wait to receive the Holy Spirit, and then **GO!** In response to the disciples being worried about the Kingdom of Israel, Jesus challenges them with the Great Commission. Their job isn't to stay in the homeland. Instead, they are to take the message around Jerusalem, and into Judea and Samaria, and into the uttermost parts of the Earth. Commentator Albert Winn, asks, "*Can a church which sits on its corner and is content to minister merely to those who come to it claim to be faithful to this command?*"
- He goes on to say that "*The power of the Holy Spirit is given for a definite task: the mission of the Church. God does not give the Spirit for the selfish, glory, or ease of a church or an individual. The power of the Spirit is no magic, which we may control for our own purposes. It is a power which controls us. In answer to our prayers for a new outpouring of the Spirit's power, God may well respond: "What do you intend to do with it?"*" Ask yourself that: "What am I doing with power of the Holy Spirit in my life?"
- Finally . . .

**Conclusion:** Let's stop looking up into the clouds. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit we must not be found looking up into the clouds. Too much time is spent trying to figure out when Jesus is going to return, when Jesus says, very plainly, that we do not know the times and the places. Our job is to go and make disciples. Well, actually, Matthew 28:19 says "Go and make disciples", but that's what we're doing when we do what it says here in Acts 1, being God's witnesses, in Jerusalem, and Judea and Samaria, and everywhere around the world. How are you doing with being a witness? Are you worried too much about what's happening in our world? Are you looking up into the clouds waiting for Jesus to come back. Remember what he said and while you're waiting for him to come back, get to work and hang on to his promises. Amen.