

Acts of the Apostles – Acts of the Holy Spirit

New Testament Survey – Lesson 14 (Part 3)

In the first week while teaching Part One of this lesson, I accidentally used the impersonal pronoun “it” when referencing the Holy Spirit at least twice (which probably means it happened 10 or more times). I am not worried about offending the Lord, for he knows my heart. I am, after all, the fellow who still calls Jonah “Noah” more times than not. But I am offended. The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal “it.”

Class reader Rob McRay recently reminded me of Gordon Fee’s comment that for many, the Holy Spirit is a “grey, oblong blur.” Errors like mine feed this concept, when our efforts should go toward dismantling it. Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit in personal terms, not simply as a force or power. As we discussed in Part One of this lesson, Jesus explained the Holy Spirit as a *paraklete* or “helper.” In this way, Jesus clearly stated the Spirit would be in the same role as Jesus. He was a personal resource, a personal teacher, a comforter, and guide. The Spirit is powerful, but that power does not exist in the sense of electricity or some other impersonal energy. He exists as God, in the full sense of an infinite, personal, and moral being.

So with a pledge to do better at teaching the Spirit as God, not an “it,” we continue our study comparing the checklist of teaching from John with the reality of history in Acts.

Our approach is thorough. It is our goal to take every reference to the Holy Spirit in Acts and demonstrate the precision of Jesus’ teachings with the reality of experience.

THE CHECKLIST

Our lesson begins with the checklist we have made from the Gospel of John. We saw in the first lesson that this checklist is consistent with the passages referencing the Spirit in the synoptic gospels. It is also consistent with the passages we read about in the Old Testament in the second part of this lesson. We choose to use a checklist from John because John has delivered to us the core message of Jesus’ last discourse with his apostles before his death at Calvary. In that message, Jesus promised to send the Spirit with an assurance of what the Spirit would do. This direct information is what makes a checklist so easy to compile.

www.Biblical-literacy.com

1. The Father will give (future tense) the Holy Spirit (14:16).
2. The Spirit will be a Helper like Christ (14:16).
3. The Spirit will not be temporary, but will stay permanently (14:16).
4. He is the Spirit of truth (14:17).
5. He is unique to the believer (14:17).
6. The world neither sees or knows him (14:17).
7. He was with them (in Christ), but would (future tense) indwell them (14:17).
8. The Father will send the Spirit because of, or on behalf of, Jesus (“in the name of Jesus”) (14:26).
9. The Holy Spirit would teach the apostles (14:26).
10. The Spirit will remind the apostles of Jesus’ teaching and other important events (14:26).
11. The Spirit will bear witness about Jesus (15:26).
12. The Spirit will use the apostles to witness to the truth about Jesus (15:27).
13. The Spirit’s work requires Jesus first to die and ascend to the Father before coming (16:7).
14. Jesus will also send the Spirit (16:7).
15. The Spirit will convict the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment (16:8).
16. The Spirit will “guide” the apostles into truth (16:13).
17. The Spirit is speaking the message of God (16:13).
18. The Spirit will glorify Christ (16:14).

THE SPIRIT IN ACTS

We have the Spirit referenced in 64 verses throughout the book of Acts. Most often, the references occur at times in stories that entail a narrative for their context. We will consider each reference to the Spirit and compare them to the various points in the checklist on page 2.

In the first chapter of Acts, Luke makes four references to the Spirit that are similar to what we have in the teachings of Jesus in John. In these references we do not yet have the fulfillment of Jesus' teachings because these predate Pentecost. These four set the stage for the Spirit's movement on Pentecost (Acts 1:2, 5, 8) underscoring what the Spirit would do much like John's explanation in John 14-16.

As we get to Acts 2, we read about the experience of Pentecost. Its immediate context speaks to its significance. Acts 1 ends with the selection of Matthias to replace Judas as the twelfth apostle. The selection process brought out two men qualified, and after prayer for God to show the right choice, the apostles cast lots and the lot fell on Matthias. This approach stands in stark contrast to how the apostles made decisions after the descent of the Spirit in Acts 2. In Acts 2, while all the apostles are in one room,

Suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance (2:2-4).

The story enlightens the reader to what was happening in the following verses. The message of the apostles was a startling one. The apostles were testifying to "mighty works of God" that were amazing and perplexing to the listeners. What is more, the listeners were all hearing this testimony of God's deeds in their own tongues! The message was so unbelievable, as was the method of delivery, that the crowd thought the apostles were drunk.

Peter explained they were not drunk, but instead were experiencing the prophetic promise from Joel, that God was pouring out his Spirit on all flesh. Peter then testified to the truth of who Jesus was, how the people sinned against him in disbelief, crucifying and killing him, and how Jesus was then raised from the dead. Peter then explained that God had poured out his Holy Spirit and that was what the people were seeing and hearing. The reaction of the people to the Holy Spirit working was immediate. They were convicted of their sin, and pleaded with Peter to tell them what to do. Peter told them to repent and be baptized for the

forgiveness of their sins with the assurance that they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. About 3,000 did so that day.

Compare the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost to the promises of Jesus in our list on page 2. The Spirit came “from heaven,” both in sound and in actuality. The “mighty wind” sound from heaven is a play off the word “spirit” both in Hebrew and in Greek. In both languages the root for “wind” and for “spirit” is the same. There was a “spirit” or “wind” sound from heaven, which Peter later specifies as “God” pouring out his Spirit. This fulfills Jesus’ teaching in our points 1 and 14. The Spirit did not simply rest on them as a tongue of fire, but he indwelt them (point 7). The Spirit spoke with the apostles testifying to the truths of Jesus, as we see clearly from Peter’s speech (points 4, 8, 11, and 12). Of course this testimony about the death and resurrection of Jesus could never have occurred without Jesus first dying (point 13). The reaction of the people also speaks to the work of the Spirit. They were cut to the quick over their earlier disbelief and were convicted of their sin, of the righteousness of Christ, and of the judgment rightfully resting upon them (point 15). They turned with the promise as believers that they would likewise receive the Spirit in a way the world would not (point 5 and 6).

In this account, we read events where the Spirit was at work glorifying Christ (point 18) as Peter proclaimed the message of God (point 17). What is more, if we read about the pre-Pentecost days and weeks, we read of the apostles not really understanding what was happening and what God’s plan was. They were casting lots to fill up Judas’s spot, but without any real message for the lost people. With the Spirit’s presence, however, Peter is able to quote the Old Testament Scriptures clearly and concisely as he related exactly what God had done in Christ. The Spirit fulfilled his role as “teacher” and “guide” (points 9 and 16).

In this one account alone, we read of the Spirit fulfilling 15 of 18 of the promises on our checklist. The three I am not including are consistent with what happened, but are not so clearly indicated by the text (points 2, 3, and 10). We will see those unfold more clearly as we consider the next chapter. Still full of the Spirit days later, Peter and John healed a lame man while they were going up to the temple to pray. They did not do it out of their own power or to their own credit or glory. They did it in the name of Jesus. Peter then used the miraculous event to preach of Jesus, reminding the people of what had occurred and proclaiming the truth of Jesus and his role in God’s plans (point 10). Peter referenced prophetic writings, quoted Moses, and Abraham’s interactions with God.

Because of this the temple guard arrested Peter and John. This did not prevent the numbers of believers from growing to about 5,000 men. This constancy of the Spirit (point 3) will continue to manifest itself throughout the book of Acts. We

will also continue to see the Spirit working in the words and deeds of the apostles in the same fashion as Jesus himself worked (point 2).

As the arrest unfolds into Acts 4, Peter stands before the high priest, Caiaphas, and other high and noteworthy among the Jewish power structure. While the last time Peter was near these people, he hid around a fire, cursing in denial that he even knew Christ, now Peter's actions were very different. Luke carefully notes that Peter was now "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts. 4:8) as he stood and proclaimed to the high priest, to Caiaphas and others,

Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:10-12).

This "astonished" the ruling elite because Peter and John were boldly and lucidly proclaiming Jesus in spite of being "uneducated, common men." This is another clear demonstration of the Spirit doing exactly what Jesus promised. One can go right down the checklist and see the fulfilled promises. The contrast between the educated demonstrating point 6 ("the world neither sees nor knows the Spirit") and the uneducated apostles demonstrating points 11 and 12 (the Spirit testifying to Christ using the apostles) is stark. Peter and John lived and exemplified points 17 and 18 as the Spirit spoke the message of God and glorified Christ. The uneducated men spoke eruditely and profoundly as the Spirit taught and guided them (points 9 and 16).

After being released, Peter and John returned to their believing friends and were quick to credit David's prophetic words about Christ also as words "said by the Holy Spirit" (Acts 4:25). Much like we discussed in part two of this lesson, they saw the Holy Spirit bearing witness to Christ even in the Old Testament. Before closing chapter 4, we read of the Holy Spirit continuing to indwell all the believers, enabling them to "speak the word of God with boldness" (points 1-5, 7, 9-12, 17 and 18).

Chapter 5 begins with the startling story of Ananias and Sapphira. The believers had agreed to hold all things in common, and Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property under this agreement. Rather than give it all, however, the couple just pretended to give it all, while lying and keeping some of the proceeds. Peter saw through it, and challenged Ananias for lying, not to him and the church, but "to the Holy Spirit...to God" (Acts 5:3-4). Sapphira later told the same lie, and both

husband and wife died after being caught in their lie. This story shows the Holy Spirit not simply to be a power or force, but a being that is personal, subject to being lied to and betrayed. It also emphasized the Spirit was the “Spirit of Truth!” (point 4).

Before chapter 5 ends, Peter and the apostles found themselves again in front of the high priest and Jewish council being reprimanded for continuing to teach about Jesus. Rather than be silent, Peter spoke up again affirming,

The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins (Acts 5:30-31).

Then Peter adds something that almost mirrors a promise of Jesus word for word. John recorded Jesus’ teaching that,

When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, ***he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness*** (Jn. 15:26-27).

Peter’s words before the High priest and council expressed the truth plainly:

We are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him (Acts. 5:32).

In light of these experiences with the Spirit, it is not surprising that when the apostles needed seven men to oversee ministry to certain widows, they no longer rolled the dice! They simply sought men “full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts 6:3). Among those was Stephen, “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5). Stephen boldly proclaimed the word of Christ and even those opposed to him could not refute his teaching for,

They could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking (Acts. 6:10).

Again we read of the Spirit clearly fulfilling the promises of Jesus (points 9, 11, 12).

At the end of Acts 6, Stephen is seized by the Jewish rulers and in Acts 7 we read of Stephen’s confession before the high priest. It gives us insight into how the Spirit taught him and gave him insight into matters pertaining to Christ. The speech is mighty in scope and power. It begins with the God of Glory appearing to Abraham. The promises and history leading up to Christ are then traced through the patriarchs into Egypt, through Moses and the Exodus, to David and

Solomon and the prophets. The refusal of the people to see Jesus as God's fulfillment of his promises is seen by Stephen as resisting the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51), consistent with our checklist points 4, 6, 11, 12, 15, 17, and 18.

The rulers decide Stephen must be stoned for blasphemy and he is taken out to face death. As he stood, about to receive the punishment, we read he was "full of the Holy Spirit" as he

...gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55-56).

This is again, the Spirit doing the very things Jesus said in exact detail.

We next read of the Holy Spirit in Acts 8. The Acts passage is troublesome to many who try to build a theology of the Holy Spirit off of the experiences detailed in Scripture. We always need to be cautious using examples in Scripture to build theology. Many times we will see "one offs" or unusual occurrences that are outside the norm in Scripture. These do not make the basis of sound theology if they are treated as normative.

In Acts 8, the gospel is taken outside Jerusalem to the area of Samaria. Samaria was a taboo region filled with taboo people for the Jews. Yet the gospel went there under the witness of the apostle Philip, and a number put their faith in Jesus and were baptized. Included in this group was a magician named Simon. These people in Samaria had not yet "received" the Holy Spirit. The church in Jerusalem heard that Samaritans were now numbered among the believers and they sent Peter and John to Samaria to check things out. There had not yet been any evident manifestation of the Spirit there, and Peter and John laid hands on the people. At that time, the Spirit fell on them, and the context makes it apparent that Samaria enjoyed their own Pentecost experience. Before finishing the story, we should note two important facts that mark this as a "one off" event. First, the Samaritans were despised people. Peter and John's physical act of laying on hands was an important showing that the Jewish church in Jerusalem was in solidarity with other believers in Christ, even those in Samaria that were not "touchable" by a devout Jew. Second, the Samaritan area was the residual part of the Northern Kingdom or Nation of Israel. Not since the division after the death of Solomon had the Northern and Southern Kingdoms been united. Yet in a brief time, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the kingdom of his church reunited these two areas and their people.

There is likely greater significance to this unifying of Israel than we might think, at least when we are thinking in 21st century culture rather than that of the first century. As a result, many people build a theology from this story that is not

necessarily valid. This comes from the problem of building theology from examples. Consider: by laying on hands, the apostles did something no pious Jew would ever do – they touched a Samaritan. A pious Jew would not even talk to a Samaritan, much less touch one. Yet this is that “one off” or unique situation of needing to show a unity between people who for centuries despised each other. Paul would later write about the “unity of the Spirit” (Eph. 4:3), but it is one and the same with Jesus’ instructions about the Holy Spirit teaching the message of God (point 17). It is a message Jesus made clear in his High Priestly Prayer following his teaching on the Holy Spirit. In John 17, Jesus prayed,

The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me (Jn. 17:22-23).

It is all wound up with the glory that is Jesus’ (point 18) and the witness to who Jesus is and what he did, uniting all in his body.

The story ends with Simon the magician seeking to have the power to lay hands on people and produce a manifestation of the Spirit. He offers to buy the “power” from the apostles. They reject him and expose his impure motives, causing him to repent. This is fair warning to any who read the chapter as well. The Spirit is not invoked by our formulas or at our direction. He is not some power to be bought and sold. He comes from the Father (point 1) and Christ (point 14). He does not come to empower a human or for show. He comes to glorify Christ (point 18).

Chapter 8 continues with the story of Philip helping a traveling Ethiopian eunuch discover the truth of Jesus. The eunuch was Jewish, and was returning from Jerusalem to Ethiopia. During the journey, he was seated on his chariot reading Isaiah 53,

Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth (Acts 8:32-33).

Philip asked the eunuch whether he understood what he was reading, and the eunuch answered he could not for he had no “guide.” Importantly, the Greek word for “guide” used by Luke is *hodegeo* (ὁδηγέω). This is the same word John used when setting out the promised work of the Spirit. (Jn. 16:13 – “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide (*hodegeo* - ὁδηγέω) you into all the truth.”) We have this as point 16 on the checklist. The eunuch needed the Spirit’s help; he just did not know it. Then lo and behold, Philip enters the picture. We are remiss if we do

not note that Philip did not just happen to wander by. This was not simply a “right place – right time” event. The Spirit sent Philip!

And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and join this chariot.” (Acts 8:29).

The Spirit worked through Philip to teach and instruct the Ethiopian who came to faith and was baptized on the spot! The Spirit then led Philip to his next task while the Ethiopian took the Gospel home.

In the following chapter, we read about a pinnacle moment in the development and growth of the church – the conversion of Paul (Saul). (As a Roman Jew he held both names. His Jewish name was Saul, but part of his Roman name was Paul.) He was on the road to Damascus to persecute the church there when he encountered Jesus. Jesus clarified that Paul was wrong in persecuting the church. The event left Paul blinded and stunned.

For three days Paul neither ate nor drank. Ananias, a godly believer, was told by the Lord to find Paul and lay hands on him to restore his sight. Ananias is hesitant because of Paul’s reputation as a persecutor, but God insists that Paul is God’s instrument and has his own road of ministry and suffering that God has laid out.

Ananias does as God instructed and laid hands on Paul for Paul to both regain his sight and to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Both happened, and Paul, infused with faith, went first to be baptized and then finally ate. Luke says that after Paul received the Holy Spirit and ate, he “immediately” began proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues saying, “He is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20).

Following this was a time of peace for the church. Luke records,

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 (Acts 9:31).

Even in these passing verses, those apart from the stories, we see consistency between the understanding of the Spirit’s work in Acts and the promises of Jesus. The church walked in the “comfort” of the Holy Spirit. Luke’s word for comfort (*paraklesis* – παράκλησις) is a form of the same word John used when he wrote of Jesus’ assurance that the Holy Spirit would be another “comforter” or helper” (*parakletos* – παράκλητος) (Jn. 14:26; point 2).

In Acts 10, we read of the first Gentile conversion. A centurion named Cornelius lived in Caesarea, a seaside town about 50 miles northwest of Jerusalem.

Cornelius, a God-fearing man, had a vision where an angel told him to send men to get a certain “Simon Peter.” Peter, on the other hand, had his own vision, which was followed by the Spirit telling him to go with those men “without hesitation.” Peter did so, and once there preached the gospel to Cornelius and his entire household. While doing so, “the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word” (Acts 10:44). Peter was amazed, and the faithful were all then baptized. Here again the Spirit not only directed Peter where to go to witness to Jesus, but came in power during that witnessing to convict the Gentiles of their sin, the righteousness of Christ, and the coming judgment. The Spirit fulfilled the promises of Jesus very clearly and to great effect.

In Acts 11, we read of Peter’s return to Jerusalem where he filled the church in on the events. The Acts narrative then shifts to the spread of the church into Antioch, a city several hundred miles north of Israel in Syria. The Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to the Antiochians to exhort and aid them. Barnabas was chosen because he was “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 11:24). As such he was able to teach the people, a clear work of the Spirit.

It was in Antioch that Barnabas began working with Paul on the mission field. Acts 13 provides the narrative. A number of Christians (the term was first used of the believers in Antioch – Acts 11:26) were worshipping when the Holy Spirit told them to,

Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them (Acts 13:2).

The mission trip began as an outreach of the Spirit. Luke added that Paul and Barnabas were “sent out by the Holy Spirit” in verse 4. At their first stop on Cyprus, Paul, “filled with the Holy Spirit,” pronounced a curse on an aggravator who opposed their gospel message. As Paul did so, the man fell blind. This act of the Spirit resulted in the conversion of the proconsul hearing Paul’s teaching, to the glory of Christ!

Paul and Barnabas continued their mission work, and as they did so, we see that the disciples all received the Holy Spirit who filled them with the joy that can only come from knowledge of the Holy One (Acts 13:52).

Once Paul and Barnabas returned from their mission trip, they went to Jerusalem. The church there held a very important conference about what to do with the Gentile churches. The question was basically whether or not the Gentiles must become Jews as part of becoming Christians. The way the church handled the issue is most instructive. The church met and heard testimony from Peter, Paul, and others. Peter was able to point to the Holy Spirit’s role in the conversion of Gentiles. The group sought the counsel of Scripture, and debated the issue

carefully and thoroughly. Once finished, the church agreed upon the right course of action and set to put it to pen and paper. In the letter they composed, the church wrote the instructive language,

It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements... (Acts 15:28).

The church then detailed the instructions for the Gentile churches and believers. We note that the Holy Spirit was seen as the guide for the church in this entire episode. The church recognized that the decisions reached, although reached through debate, discussion, and study, were decisions of the Holy Spirit. This is another clear example of the Holy Spirit fulfilling Jesus' assurance that "he will guide you into all the truth" (Jn. 16:13; point 16).

CONCLUSION

We have more to cover next week to finish this Holy Spirit review of Acts, but we can already see clearly how the Holy Spirit came according to the promises of Jesus, and went about his work precisely as promised.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. *"Suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting" (Acts 2:2).*

Bob Dylan sings, "God don't make promises that he don't keep." Bob is right. Jesus told the disciples he would not leave them alone. They were to stay in Jerusalem and wait. He was sending another helper, the Holy Spirit. It did not happen on the apostles' schedule; it happened on God's. When it happened, it was sudden; there was no doubt about it.

The hand of God and the promises of God may not move and happen as we want or in our timing, but they will happen. 100 percent! "God don't make promises that he don't keep." On that I rest my life, my family, my future. On that I rest all that I have and ever might be. In God I trust.

2. *"It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements" (Acts 15:28).*

There are times where I list this verse as one of the five most important in the Bible. Countless people, believer and unbeliever alike, frequently come to me either frustrated that God does not "speak clearly" (the believers) or disbelieving because God does not speak loudly. These disbelievers think that if there is a God, he would write things in the sky, would communicate

in trances, or something similar. Both miss a major point of Scripture. God did not make us as puppets. He is not the ventriloquist, and we are not the dummies. The very first Biblical story of man, before the creation of Eve, has *man* naming the animals. We are to use our minds and wills in this world. He gave them to us and expects us to use them. The fall has degraded our abilities and purity of mind, but God is at work and Paul has charged us to the “renewal” of our minds to better discern God and his will (Rom. 12:2). My prayer is not to become a robot programmed and commanded by God. My prayer is to become his instrument, with a renewed mind and a dedicated heart, making myself available even as I seek to determine his will for me in my life. I pray that through this, he might minister to this broken world in ways that increase his glory!

3. *“Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind” (Acts 13:9-10).*

At first blush, some might look at this passage and story and say, “Aha! This is certainly not on the checklist! Jesus never said the Spirit would blind accursed people!” Yet that is not a fair way to see this. This story actually fits in perfectly with the promises of Jesus. The Spirit took Paul to this mission field, and through Paul, the Spirit was delivering the gospel message and exalting Jesus. These are exactly what Jesus sent the Spirit to do. It is precisely the core promise made by Jesus. The man was an obstacle to the delivery and acceptance of the Spirit’s message and mission. The blinding not only removed the impediment, but also met the Spirit’s objective, for after the man was blinded, the man to whom Paul had been witnessing “believed.”

This is a marvelous example of how we need to be careful dictating to God (or to others) about *how* God will work in his Spirit. The Scriptures clearly teach us *what* the Spirit will do, and of that we can be confident. But it does not teach us lines and boxes we can construct about *how* the Spirit will do his work!

My prayer for me and those on my prayer list is constant: “Lord, may your Spirit work to teach, to enlighten, to convict, and to glorify Christ. And may the Spirit use me as he will to further his ministry!”